TEACHER MOTIVATION

(Article by Diana Stirling, Associate Researcher, Learning Development Institute)

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Teacher Motivation

by Diana Stirling

Introduction

> *Since the start of mass schooling and with its spread across the world, public education has been repeatedly burdened with the expectation that it can save society. Schools and their teachers have been expected to save children from poverty and destitution; to rebuild nationhood in the aftermath of war; to develop universal literacy as a platform for economic survival; to create skilled workers even when there is little demand for them; to develop tolerance amongst children in nations where adults are divided by religious and ethnic conflict; to cultivate democratic sentiments in societies that bear the scars of totalitarianism; to keep developed nations economically competitive and help developing ones to become so; and, as the United States' **Goals 2000** for education proclaimed, the way educators prepare the generations of the future should eliminate drug dependency, end violence in schools and seemingly make restitution for all the sins of the present generation.*
>
> *The Paradoxical Profession*

The topic of teacher motivation deserves particular study because the role of the teacher is paramount both in the lives of individual students and in the greater society. As reflected in the quote above, teachers are in a position of high expectations but often work in environments that are not conducive to meeting their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This paper will explore some of the reasons individuals choose to become teachers, theories and research concerning motivation in general, factors affecting motivation in the workplace, the condition of burnout, and how to maintain motivation at work and in one's personal life.

Why Choose Teaching?

> *As a graduate assistant, I taught for-credit study skills courses individually and in groups. I saw students go from low grades to excelling. One of them got a Hispanic scholarship to medical school. I felt a calling to teach at a community college.[1]*
> *Maren Wilson*
> *Professor, Anthropology/Social Sciences*

Research suggests that although teachers enter the profession for a variety of reasons, those reasons tend to be intrinsic and/or altruistic. An Australian study surveyed more than 1,600 students enrolled in teacher training programs to try to identify common themes in the motivation to pursue teaching as a career (Richardson and Watt). The study included participants in both undergraduate and graduate programs, and those enrolled in early childhood, elementary and secondary strands. Interestingly, the "highest rated motivations for choosing teaching included perceived teaching abilities, the intrinsic value of teaching, and the desire to make a social contribution, shape the future, and work with children/adolescents" (44).

In another Australian study, 98 first-year students enrolled in teacher training were surveyed about their reasons for choosing teaching as a career (Sinclair, Dowson & McInerney). "Participants reported strong motivations for teaching related to working with children, worth of teaching, intellectual stimulation, and helping others" (1149). Barmby's survey of 246 teachers in England and Wales also revealed that "altruistic, intrinsic and children-oriented motivations . . . were identified as more important for entering teaching. This was as opposed to extrinsic reasons such as 'Job security', 'Promotion prospects' and 'Salary' ((Barmby 253).

Teachers who are already engaged in the teaching profession seem to be similarly motivated. For example, a study of 107 EFL/ESL teachers in Egypt and Hawai'i (USA) "ranked 'Really helping my students to learn English,' [and] 'Having a job in which I can perform to the best of my ability,' . . . among the top five in importance" in value (Kassabgy and Schmidt 217-18). What keeps teachers teaching will be discussed at greater length later in this article.

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[1]

Private correspondence.

Professor Wilson's motivation for becoming a teacher (and remaining in the profession) reflects a common theme, then. The combined elements of helping others and perceived teaching ability, with the resulting effectiveness of instruction, are highly motivating factors for many teachers.

These tend to be intrinsic motivations—the desire to help others, the desire to make a difference in the world, the love of the subject matter—rather than extrinsic. Money and status are not strong motivators to become a teacher in most well-developed educational systems. However, these extrinsic factors can come into play when the realities of teaching become apparent and the intrinsic motivations are not enough to keep some teachers going.

Motivation Theory

Much of the research on teacher motivation relies on self-efficacy and expectancy value theory or on self determination theory. Although these constructs have different theoretical backgrounds (Wigfield and Eccles, "Expectancy-Value Theory of Achievement Motivation" 73), they are by no means mutually exclusive, and Wigfield and Eccles have incorporated aspects of self determination theory into their expectancy value studies (The Development of Achievement Task Values: A Theoretical Analysis, 280).

As the name suggests, expectancy value theory is concerned with expectancies for success and values, but also with beliefs about one's abilities (Wigfield, Tonks and Eccles, Expectancy Value Theory In Cross-Cultural Perspective). Bandura's work on self-efficacy serves as an important foundation (Bandura 257-58). Bandura argues that beliefs about one's efficacy influence choices, aspirations, effort, perseverance, and affective responses to stress.

The expectancy value model is complex and much of the research has involved students rather than teachers. The basic tenets relevant to this discussion are that one's ability beliefs influence both expectations and the values attributed to tasks, and that these expectations and values, in turn, influence choice, performance, effort, persistence, and achievement (Wigfield and Eccles, Expectancy-Value Theory of Achievement Motivation). The connection with Bandura's work is clear. But expectancy value theory more deeply explores attainment values and assesses the relationship between values and self-efficacy beliefs. The Richardson and Watt study of education students, as well as their FIT-Choice (Factors Influencing Teaching Choice) instrument were constructed based on the expectancy-value model (31).

The self determination theory of motivation, pioneered by Richard Ryan and Edward Deci and widely researched around the world, posits three motivational states: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation.

Amotivation refers to an unwillingness to engage in a particular task or behavior (Ryan and Deci 61). Intrinsic motivation is inspired by personal interests or deeply held values (Ryan and Deci 56, Deci). In contrast, extrinsic motivation refers to motivation for behavior that is not necessarily interesting or perceived as relevant to one's values, that is, the behavior is related to some particular, separable outcome (Ryan and Deci 60). Thus, the impetus for such behavior typically comes from some external source or sources. Self determination theory further distinguishes between types or degrees of extrinsic motivation (Ryan and Deci 61). This concept is expressed as a continuum, although the motivation process need not necessarily proceed linearly through all of the phases nor even include them all (Ryan and Deci 62-3). These degrees of extrinsic motivation are labeled external regulation, introjection, identification, and integration.

External regulation is the least autonomous form of external motivation and refers to behaviors performed in response to an external demand or to avoid punishment or receive a reward. This level of motivation reflects a perception of control outside of the individual (Ryan and Deci 62). In the introjected state, actions are performed in order to avoid guilt or anxiety or to preserve self-esteem (Ryan and Deci 62). Introjected motivation is also perceived as having an external locus of control. Identification refers to motivation based on an understanding of the importance or value of a behavior, in spite of its lack of immediate interest. Ryan and Deci offer the example of a student who memorizes spelling lists because he recognizes the importance of spelling in writing when writing is an activity he values (62). The most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation described by the theory is integrated regulation. In this case, the importance of a behavior or task has been fully integrated and incorporated into an individual's values and needs. Integration is very close to intrinsic motivation, but they differ with respect to the fact that integration still refers to behavior for a separable outcome in contrast to behavior for the sake of enjoyment or for its inherent value.

From their research on ways to promote the autonomous regulation of extrinsically motivated behaviors, Ryan and Deci have identified three basic motivational needs. These are *autonomy* (the freedom and ability to choose), *competence* (the ability to develop the skills to succeed), and a sense of *relatedness* (a feeling of connection to the community that supports or encourages the behavior) (Ryan and Deci 64). They argue that regulation may become introjected even in controlling situations if competence and relatedness are supported, but that "to fully internalize a regulation, and thus to become autonomous with respect to it, people must inwardly grasp its meaning and worth. It is these meanings that become internalized and integrated in

environments that provide supports for the needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy" (64). Thus, Deci emphasizes the importance of providing a meaningful rationale for extrinsically motivated behaviors.

The concepts of ability beliefs in expectancy value theory and competence in self determination theory, while not identical, can be viewed as similar ideas from slightly different perspectives. Expectancy value theory says that one's beliefs about one's competence and ability to succeed influence the perceived value of a behavior or activity, while self determination theory posits that competence is a necessary component for identification--extrinsic motivation which is, to some extent, self-determined and autonomous. Expectancy value theory predicts greater effort and persistence in those with greater competency beliefs.

Factors Affecting Motivation

> *It is the recurring experiences of positive events emanating from the intrinsic rewards of teaching that help maintain teachers' motivation.*
>
> *What Makes Teachers Tick?*

We have considered some of the research on the motivation to choose a teaching career and enter a teacher education program. But what about those who are currently practicing the profession? What are the factors involved in the decision to remain teaching or to change to another career?

A study conducted in the Netherlands surveyed 1214 secondary teachers with the aim of detecting and categorizing teacher identity profiles (Canrinusa, Helms-Lorenz and Beijaard). The study identified three distinct identity profiles (599). The study authors referred to these identity profiles as 1) unsatisfied and demotivated, 2) motivated and affectively committed, and 3) doubting competence (599-600). What is interesting for our discussion is that those in the first category, the unsatisfied and demotivated identity profile, had the greatest change in their level of motivation for teaching from when they began and showed a strong negative score in this area. In contrast, those in the second group, the motivated and affectively committed identity profile, showed a positive change in their motivation to teach as compared to when they first began in the profession, although this positive change was about half as great in degree as the negative change in the first group. The third group, those with the doubting competence identity profile, showed only a slight negative change in motivation.

While the study did not explore the reasons for the changes in motivation exhibited by the first and second groups, it is sobering to note that almost 20% of those surveyed were categorized as having the unsatisfied and demotivated identity profile (605). Also notable is the fact that the four highest ranking reasons for becoming a teacher for all three profiles were

- Working with children/adolescents
- Love for subject matter
- Transfer of knowledge and skills
- Intrinsic career value (interest in teaching and long-term desire to become a teacher) (602)

The ranking order of these reasons was not identical for each profile, but was similar. This supports the findings reported earlier in this paper that people tend to choose teaching as a career for primarily altruistic and intrinsic reasons.

Interesting to note is that the profiles identified in this study were not associated with the number of years of teaching experience (604); however, there was a strong relationship between the type of appointment and the identity profile (603). Those with the motivated and affectively committed profile were much more likely to have permanent appointments than those in the other two profiles, while those in both the demotivated and motivated categories had larger contracts than those in the competence doubting category. It is impossible to tell whether there is a causal relationship between these characteristics, but it is interesting nonetheless.

A survey of 749 new primary school teachers in Ireland examined the relative effect of positive and negative experiences on teacher motivation (Morgan, Ludlow and Kitching). Their research revealed an interesting finding. In their words, results of the survey "strongly suggest the *absence* of positive experiences undermines commitment and efficacy rather than the *occurrence* of negative events" [italics in the original] (1). Also significant was the indication that the frequency of events was more crucial than their intensity (10). They found that frequent, positively framed events that supported the intrinsic rewards which had inspired these teachers to enter the profession had a greater impact on motivation than less frequent negatively framed experiences of greater intensity (11).

Research conducted with primary and secondary school teachers in Manchester (U.K.) seems to support this notion (Brown, Ralph and Brember). Using an 'illuminative' approach, the authors conducted a series of focused

interviews with teachers in order to describe some of the complexities involved in teacher stress (3-4). Again, the frequency of events was seen to be more influential than their intensity, although in this study it was the frequency of negatively framed events that was identified as a source of stress. "It would seem to be the insidious day-to-day classroom interactions as a source of stress with their cumulative effect and not the occasional intense sources of stress that teachers are most concerned about" (5). Pupil behavior was dealing with the personal problems of pupils were identified as stressors for these teachers—a common theme in the research on teacher motivation.

 The teachers in the Manchester study also expressed frustration at the increasing workload and non-teaching demands on their time which have diminished their ability to do their job well. This combined with higher and higher expectations from the greater society has resulted in a situation in which these teachers find it difficult to cope (11).

 Barmby's survey, referred to in the previous section about why teachers enter the profession, also asked an open-ended question about what extrinsic factors could have dissuaded the respondent from becoming a teacher. The two highest ranking responses were related to pupil behavior and workload, followed by the financial considerations of salary and cost of training (255). These factors were echoed in the responses to the question about whether the teachers were considering leaving the profession within the next ten years. Of the 246 teachers in the sample, 66 said they were considering leaving and 5 said they weren't sure (256). The top reason given was workload, followed by having a family, stress/exhaustion, and pupil behavior (256). However, some of these respondents indicated that they might consider a return to teaching later.

 When asked to rate possible suggestions to persuade teachers to remain in the profession, Bramby's respondents rated support for pupil discipline and reducing the workload most highly, followed by better salary, reduction of class sizes, less administrative work for teachers, reduced teacher stress, and improving school facilities (257).

 Researchers have also been working on an instrument called the Work Task Motivation Scale for Teachers (WTMST) (Fernet, Senecal, Guay, Marsh & Dowson). The authors propose that rather than evaluating teacher motivation in a global way with respect to teaching, more accurate and valuable information may be gathered by evaluating motivation with respect to particular work tasks associated with teaching (258-59). The study cited here was designed to test the validity of the WTMST.

 The WTMST is based on Deci and Ryan's self determination theory (257). It is intended "to assess the constructs of intrinsic motivation, identified,

introjected, and external regulations, and amotivation toward six work tasks (i.e., class preparation, teaching, evaluation of students, class management, administrative tasks, and complementary tasks)" (274). By "complementary tasks" the authors mean such tasks as tutoring, involvement in extracurricular activities, and other activities outside the classroom (259).

The authors of the WTMST instrument found that there was value in the multitask approach. In their words, "the assessment of motivation at the multitask level opens an important door to a deeper understanding of teachers' motivational processes. In fact, some teachers' motivational components do not seem to be limited to unifaceted and stable representations such as a global contextualized motivational orientation but rather represent important dynamic entities that may be operative and responsive to particular tasks" (275). This may have implications for the design of interventions in situations where teachers are struggling to stay motivated.

The next section will discuss the phenomenon of burnout, one manifestation of the lack of motivation, as it applies to the teaching profession.

Burnout

The effect of environmental demands is particularly detrimental to teachers' psychological well-being when they perceive that their self-determination and efficacy are threatened.
> *Predicting Intraindividual Changes in Teacher Burnout*

Burnout syndrome as described by Maslach and Jackson is a condition frequently seen in those who are in people-centered professions (99). It is a reaction to ongoing stress that is characterized by three dimensions: *emotional exhaustion, depersonalization,* and a feeling of a lack of *personal accomplishment.* Maslach and Jackson devised the Maslach Burnout Inventory in 1981 and it remains a standard tool for measuring burnout. As teaching is a people-centered profession, it is not uncommon for teachers to experience the characteristics of burnout.

Using an approach similar to their work with the WTMST, Fernet, Guay, and Senécal, along with Stéphanie Austin, have studied changes in burnout components over time. Their study, based on self determination theory, included 806 French-Canadian teachers in elementary and high schools. Just as their WTMST instrument seeks to enhance understanding of motivation by

breaking down global variables into tasks, this study focuses on intraindividual changes over time as well as on specific rather than global inferences about the work environment (515). In addition, they wanted to understand the dynamic nature of burnout in contrast to the view of burnout as an outcome of static predictors (515). The study focused on classroom overload (too much work and not enough time to complete it), pupil behavior, autonomy in the classroom, and the principal's leadership style (517) and considered the relationship between changes in intraindividual motivational factors as related to changes in burnout components over time (518). The assessments were done at two time points, at the beginning and the end of the school year.

      While burnout has typically been studied in relation to factors in the school environment, these authors argue that intraindividual motivational factors mediate the relationship between perceived environmental factors and burnout (523). Keeping in mind their orientation toward self determination theory, here is an example provided in their paper:

> For instance, teachers who perceive that they have insufficient time to accomplish their work may feel exhausted, not only due to the demands of their job, but also, and more particularly, due to a lack of autonomous motivation. Similarly, teachers' perceptions of students' disruptive behavior may provoke burnout, because it erodes their sense of effectiveness. (516)

      With regard to workload, this study showed that as the school year progressed, teachers who felt less able to accomplish their classroom tasks while feeling ever greater pressure to do so were more likely to feel exhaustion by the end of the year (522).

      Although the authors admit that further research would be needed to delineate this mediation process more clearly, it seems a difficult proposition in light of the interdependent relationship between environmental factors and individual motivational factors. Also, a causal relationship cannot unequivocally be inferred by these relationships (523). Still, in light of the combination of the research on burnout as related to environmental factors and the research on autonomy, competence, and relatedness in motivational studies, it seems worthwhile to consider how changes in leadership approaches, school climate and culture, and overall workload issues might affect the incidence of teacher burnout and its consequences.

The Role of Institutional Leadership

> *When bosses are more autonomy supportive, their*
> *subordinates perform better at the job. They also are*
> *better adjusted in the workplace, which has important*
> *implications in terms of absenteeism, turnover, and so*
> *forth.[2]*
>
> > *Edward Deci*
> > *Ted-x Flour City*

In recent years, the literature on leadership (mostly concerned with business environments) has distinguished between two major leadership styles: transactional and transformational (Bass). These terms are sometimes used in the research literature on educational leadership as well (see Eyal and Roth, for example). The descriptive elements of the transformational style share similarities with the autonomy supported environments described by researchers of self determination theory, so this use is understandable.

The transactional style of leadership is a top-down approach that relies on rewards and punishments, or sanctions, to ensure compliance. As Bass says, this type of leadership caters to both the leader's and the employees' self-interest (9, 11). Transactional leadership results in what self determination theory calls controlled motivation (Ryan and Deci, Deci). Controlled motivation is extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation assumes and may sometimes be productive in situations that are not intrinsically motivating. However, research suggests that such a style of controlled motivation may actually undermine intrinsic motivation, reconfiguring what was once an inherently enjoyable activity such that it becomes an activity oriented toward external rewards (see Lepper's early work with children, for example). Might this have something to do with the reason that so many teachers who begin their careers with intrinsic/altruistic motivations become disillusioned and ultimately leave teaching? Could transactional leadership styles in educational settings contribute to disengagement from those early ideals? When motivation becomes extrinsic, rewards become more salient. Teachers leaving the profession often mention salary, for example, even though they typically know what to expect as a salary when they choose a teaching career. This is an area that could benefit from focused research.

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[2]

YouTube.

In contrast, the transformational leadership style relies more on inspiration, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration (Bass 11). The term *charisma* was used in early research to describe the transformational leader, but this has been updated to *idealized influence* or *inspirational leadership* (Bass, 11). Keeping in mind that these terms come from the world of business, their use may not be entirely appropriate in educational settings in this author's view. Autonomy supportive environments do not require the dramatic leadership capabilities that these descriptive terms imply; ordinary people in many different roles in schools--teachers, staff, administrators, and students--can contribute productively to creating a school culture that supports autonomy. However, researchers in the self determination theory arena have demonstrated the relationship between the transformational leadership style and support of the basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the workplace and this is relevant to our discussion of leadership roles (Hetland, Hetland and Andreassen).

Looking again at the research on work-related stress in British teachers, "school management and administration were reported as a major stressor by virtually every teacher in our sample" (Brown, Ralph and Brember, 7). The authors continue:

> They cited instances of the poor levels of communication and distance in perception between senior management teams and ordinary members of staff. Lack of support and resources, physical, technical and moral, was mentioned, and it would appear that hierarchical models of management are still very much a feature of life in many of the schools sampled, with little or no opportunity for many staff to contribute to decision making at any meaningful level. (7)

According to self determination theory, this could not be considered an autonomy supportive environment. The teachers feel they have little if any input into decisions affecting their work. Likewise, the need for competence identified by the theory is being thwarted by a lack of support. In this study, teachers reported difficult relations with colleagues, suggesting that their needs for relatedness were also going unmet in this environment (5).

So, what does it mean in daily practice to foster autonomy supportive environments that encourage relatedness and enhance competence? In an earlier paper by this author ("Motivation in Education"), an example is given from the book *Born to Rise* by Deborah Kinney. In *Born to Rise,* Kinney recounts her experience in creating the Harlem Village Academies. Motivated by a sincere desire to create a supportive learning environment for learners,

Kinney admits to her early reluctance to share leadership with the teachers (198-212). This reluctance prevented the teachers from engaging fully with the vision of the school and exercising autonomy. The affected the school culture as a whole. "When Kinney began to share leadership of the schools with the teachers, the school culture began to change and thrive; teachers took a more active role in designing the learning environment and found innovative ways to support one another in developing competence in the classroom" (Stirling).

Sharing leadership does not mean abdicating responsibility for one's leadership role. One important role of a leader is to provide an appropriate structure to support autonomy and growth (Dzubay 13-14). And autonomy does not mean isolated independence. Autonomy means genuinely having a voice in the interdependent culture of teaching and learning which exists in the school setting. Autonomy supportive leadership requires excellent listening skills, a willingness to try new ideas, and a responsibility to provide useful, non-threatening feedback in an environment built on trust. Just as may be within the classroom, the transactional approach may be easier in the short run, but the investment of time and care spent in creating a culture of mutual support and regard will pay long-term dividends in increased well being and enthusiasm.

Complementary to fostering autonomy supportive environments, Blase and Blase's research highlights some features of effective staff development opportunities that can be seen as autonomy supportive.

> We found that the hallmark of effective staff development is a philosophy of and support for lifelong learning about teaching and learning. We also discovered that staff development, as a key aspect of effective instructional leadership, is consistently centered on six elements: the study of teaching and learning, collaboration, coaching, action research, resources, and adult development. (3)

Their study also points to the effectiveness of staff development that addresses emergent needs, is meaningful, includes teacher input in the content and design, in which the leadership actively participates, and attendance at which is optional (3).

An excellent resource with practical, research-based ideas for supporting autonomy, competence, and relatedness is Dzubay's *Understanding Motivation and Supporting Teacher Renewal*, referenced above.

Based on their research, Eyal and Roth submit that by providing an autonomy supportive environments, school leaders can promote greater engagement and resilience in teachers (268). There will be more discussion about motivational resilience in the next section.

Motivational Resilience

This above all: to thine own self be true.
William Shakespeare, Hamlet

So, how does a teacher cultivate motivational resilience? As much as possible, engage in autonomy supportive behaviors for oneself. Develop competence, yes, but competence alone will not get you through the rough spots (Moe, Pazzaglia and Ronconi 1150). Research has shown that competence must be combined with a positive affect in order to promote job satisfaction.

If the work environment is not autonomy supportive, discover whether there are ways you can positively influence that environment. Express autonomy support for oneself and others, including coworkers and students. Develop healthy relationships to foster relatedness within the school community. Share research findings about autonomy support with colleagues and school leaders. Suggest related topics for professional development in-service activities.

Here are some other research based aspects of well being to consider:

Authenticity

Richard Ryan and his associates have explored a concept that is similar to autonomy, that of *authenticity* (Ryan, LaGuardia and Rawsthorne). "Authentic aspects of personality . . . are fully self-endorsed, volitionally enacted, and personally meaningful" (433). In their studies, increases in authenticity were associated with better mental health and lower perceived stress (444). Strive for authenticity.

Vitality

Ryan and Deci have conducted research that suggests the support of the basic psychological needs identified by self determination theory also supports vitality (From Ego Depletion to Vitality). Not only is this important in work settings, but also in other aspects of life. "The pursuit of meaningful activities, especially those associated with intrinsic goals, maintains or enhances vitality. These activities do not simply relax the self-regulatory muscle; rather, they can satisfy psychological needs and

thus rekindle the energies lost from the more depleting conditions that are so pervasive in many people's daily lives (713).

Nature

Richard Ryan and his colleagues have also conducted studies that reveal the positive effects of spending time in natural settings (Vitalizing Effects of Being Outdoors and In Nature). Even images of nature can have a vitalizing effect (163). If you have control over even a portion of your work environment, this vitalizing effect may be something to keep in mind. Also, these studies reveal that spending even twenty minutes per day outdoors, preferably in a natural environment or one with natural elements, can increase vitality. One's home space may also enhance vitality with the addition of natural elements.

Summary and Conclusions

Teachers are faced with great expectations. They typically enter the field for altruistic and intrinsic reasons, motivated by a desire to work with young people and to change the world for the better. But the realities of many school environments tend to undermine these intrinsic motivations while basic psychological needs go unmet. It is no wonder that many countries are facing teacher shortages and the idealistic teachers of yesterday often become the disillusioned career changers of today.

But there is plenty of research that demonstrates ways to change this situation for the better. We can make school environments more autonomy supportive for teachers as well as for students. We can include teachers in the conversation about how to improve not only outcomes but also well being and vitality at school. We can create an educational culture that values experimentation, genuine collaboration, relevant professional development, and authenticity. The results of such an approach can benefit not only teachers but also students today, and can affect lasting change in the greater society of tomorrow.

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