



The Motivation to Teach
A development program for schools



#2 What Makes Teachers Tick



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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. The study identified three distinct identity profiles. The study authors referred to these identity profiles as

- 1) unsatisfied and demotivated,
- 2) motivated and affectively committed, and
- 3) doubting competence.

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. 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)

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

A survey of 749 new primary school teachers in Ireland examined the relative effect of positive and negative experiences on teacher motivation. 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”. Also significant was the indication that the frequency of events was more crucial than their intensity. 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.

Research conducted with primary and secondary school teachers in Manchester (U.K.) seems to support this notion. 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. 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". Pupil behaviour 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.

Barmby's survey 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 behaviour and workload, followed by the financial considerations of salary and cost of training. 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. The top reason given was workload, followed by having a family, stress/exhaustion, and pupil behaviour. 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.

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.





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