

## What constrains passionate teaching? A heuristic exploration

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Passion for teaching, considered essential to quality learning, in scholarly literature as well as popular imaginaries, may be difficult to sustain in a political climate in which performativity, compliance and managerialism dominate educational agendas. This study gathered evidence from Australian teachers who were identified by others as passionate, transformative teachers. In seeking to learn what sustains their pedagogical practice the study revealed that even passionate teachers are vulnerable to draining influences from school and sector, necessitating conscientious effort to protect themselves from burnout. This significant finding highlights the need to ameliorate forces that erode passion, commitment and resilience and to actively promote teacher wellbeing, so quality teaching practice can be sustained.

### Introduction

This article presents empirical evidence from a heuristic inquiry seeking to learn about the lived experience of passionate teachers who manage to sustain their practice and hold tenaciously to what they believe is meaningful and important in education, despite the ‘terrors of performativity’ (Ball, 2003). Interviews with teachers recorded their experiences, views and feelings about how they sustained passionate practice. These teachers’ collective experiences provide insight into what sustains and threatens passionate teaching commitment. Even the most passionate, expert teachers may struggle with de-energising threats including burn-out, cognitive dissonance, unsupportive leadership and administrative overload.

The increasing complexities of teaching in contemporary, neoliberal contexts have been well documented (Hult & Edström, 2016; Mockler, 2013; Perryman & Calvert, 2019). Many factors have been recognised as causes of teacher burnout and related attrition rates, including quitting teaching due to lack of support, school and leadership culture and work-load (Weldon, 2018). Teachers are at risk of becoming demoralised by perceived negligible input into decision-making; inequitable distribution of resources; relatively low salaries; inadequate mentoring and support; and increased attrition rates which deplete workplaces of collegial inspiration and solidarity (Ashiedu & Scott-Ladd, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2010a; Le Maistre & Paré, 2010; Sutcher et al., 2019).

Teachers in neoliberal education systems are required to formally demonstrate evidence of student growth in learning; teach inclusively for an increasingly diverse and cyber-distracted student body; manage challenging behaviour; undertake time-consuming administrative duties and often provide pastoral care in addition to specialised academic support (Connell, 2009; Perryman & Calvert, 2019). This herculean undertaking must be

accomplished in a contemporary political culture of performativity (Connell, 2013; Sachs, 2016), where an obsession with statistics, testing, grades, and measurable outcomes stigmatises being wrong and discourages creativity, and in which teachers ‘spend increasing amounts of our time in making ourselves accountable, reporting on what we do, rather than doing it’ (Ball, 2016, p. 1053).

It is unsurprising that in such ‘regimes of performativity... many teachers feel a growing sense of ontological insecurity; both a loss of a sense of meaning in what we do and of what is important in what we do’ (Ball, 2016, p. 1054). The sustainable service of teachers who care deeply about preparing the next generation to be holistically healthy, confident and competent citizens is potentially at risk in an era where the status of the teaching profession is questioned by a largely ignorant public (ACDE, 2019). With teacher shortages projected, an 8.9% decline in offers for initial teacher education courses in Australia in 2018 (ACDE, 2019, p. 14)—where this study was conducted—does not auger well for schools that struggle to attract and retain competent, committed teachers.

## **Theoretical framing**

Passion in teaching has been identified as fundamental to professional motivation and as a motivator for learners (Altun, 2017; Davies & Brighouse, 2008; Ruiz-Alfonso & León, 2016). To be passionate, in this understanding, is commonly argued as entailing a commitment to the joy of discovery, the welfare and learning of students and belief in the benefit that education brings to students’ lives and families (van Manen, 1991). Thus in this discussion teacher effectiveness is understood quite differently to neoliberal notions of performativity.

Teaching is affective work and students appreciate teachers who they believe care about them (Fried, 2007; Metcalfe & Game, 2006; Noddings, 2015). Despite being demanded by today’s policy aspirations, teacher caring is not recognised, however, in neoliberal metrics. In fact, caring too much may even be deemed irresponsible if it interferes with performing the routines favoured to meet performance management targets:

Performativity... reorient[s] pedagogical and scholarly activities towards those... likely to have a positive impact on measurable performance outcomes and [deflects] attention away from aspects of social, emotional or moral development that have no immediate measurable performative value (Ball, 2016, p. 1054).

Research about affective dimensions of teaching and the importance of enthusiasm, relationship and passion began appearing some two decades ago (Altun, 2017; Day, 2007; Fried, 2001; Metcalfe & Game, 2006; Neumann, 2009; Ruiz-Alfonso et al., 2018). Inspired by the work of these scholars, researchers have begun to qualitatively explore how and why passion makes a positive critical difference to teaching and learning. Research studies in this relatively new field include narrative inquiries into the lives of passionate teachers (Aimar, 2006; Lambert, 1998; McGregor, 2003), qualitative studies of teachers’ experiences of renewal (Strayton, 2009), the relationship between passionate teaching and effective character education (Jones, 2006), student perceptions of teacher passion

(Roeger, 2012), teachers' use of passion as a teaching tool (Palmer, 2017) and heuristic inquiry into the role passion and compassion play in teaching characterised by caring (Baker, 2006). It must be noted, however, that whilst validating and celebrating the practice of passionate pedagogy, these studies do not focus on what nurtures and sustains or threatens passionate, pedagogically effective practice.

Passion for pedagogy is considered essential to high quality learning (Alfonzo et al., 2018; Day, 2004, 2007; Fried, 2001). Passion for teaching and learning has been delineated as one of sixteen prototypic attributes of teaching expertise (Hattie, 2003). Synthesising the findings of thousands of studies led Hattie to conclude that, 'to be cognitively aware of the pedagogical means to enable the student to learn requires dedicated, passionate people'. Empirical research regarding how and why passion impacts teaching and learning has however been limited (Carbonneau et al., 2008). This is likely because passion for teaching and learning is difficult to define and measure.

How does the rich depth and diversity of passionately committed teachers survive in a neo-liberalised sector? Passion for teaching maintains a low profile in a political climate in which 'crude measures' such as performativity, accountability, compliance and managerialism dominate educational agendas (Day, 2007, p. 19). Performativity regimes discourage teachers from individual moral and pedagogical discretion for fear of being judged unfavourably with progressively more rigid 'audit society' logics (Stark & Watson, 1999). Teachers fear they must be seen as being good (a performative objective), rather than as simply doing good (a substantive objective) in their classrooms (Blackmore, 2004). This fear quashes passion for many teachers and cripples passionately driven creativity in many school contexts. Particularly for teachers who entered the profession feeling passionate about making a difference, remaining passionate in a context of professional and cultural ambiguity is a formidable challenge at every career stage, perhaps most particularly for those new to the profession (Fernet et al., 2014; Ruiz-Alfonzo & Leon, 2016). It needs to be acknowledged, however, that for some teachers, passion and performativity may not be in conflict.

### **Methodology: Heuristic inquiry**

The research approach used here involves perspectival positioning that selects elements from other qualitative research approaches. The heuristic approach adopted in this study is described by Sultan (2018) as broadly aligned with other phenomenological approaches, but having its own distinct emphases (Heinonen, 2015; Neubauer et al. 2019) and ongoing debates (Mihalache, 2019). Douglass and Moustakas' (1985) foundational work developing heuristic inquiry adopted certain positions overlapping but distinct from Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Schutz and others (Finlay, 2011; Seamon, 2019). The present study applies heuristic inquiry to the experiences of passionate teachers by deciding a series of methodological tensions as follows.

- First, the focus on a phenomenon, following Moustakas, is the phenomenon of *human experience*.
- Second, the bracketing or epoché was treated as less philosophical and more about the *researcher focusing* in the first place more single-mindedly on the subject of social inquiry.
- This is because, third, for Moustakas (1990) objectively useful information requires an *empathetic* engagement with participants.
- Fourth, a reflexive and *interpretive* mode of making sense of what people say and do is a necessary bridge between the researcher and in this case passionate teachers (Smith et al., 2009; Clancy, 2013; van Manen, 2014).
- Finally, the exploration of tacit elements within or driving human experience cannot be fully explicated consciously and objectively, so *creative interaction* or opportunity produces richer data and quality of research.

Heuristic inquiry contrasts with conventional phenomenological framing of inquiry in that the researcher's own lived experience is both an antecedent to, and a dynamic part of, the research quest. Drawing on Polanyi's (1967) conceptualisation of 'tacit knowledge', Douglass and Moustakas contended that 'curtailing the tacit in research... truncates experiential meaning' (1985, p. 44). When the researcher has tacit knowledge of the phenomenon's experiential ambience, this demands recognition methodologically as an integral element in exploring what cannot be bracketed out of the researcher's consciousness.

Tacit knowledge also creates new possibilities. It becomes the tool for engagement with knowledge acquired during empathic interviews and intense dialogue with the data. As the inquiry evolves this previously acquired,

... self-knowledge enables one to develop the ability and skill to understand the problem more fully, and ultimately to deepen and extend the understanding [of the lived experience] through the eyes and voices of others (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 17).

## **Recruitment**

Twenty-one Australian teachers, identified by colleagues as 'transformative passionate teachers' through snowball sampling, were invited to talk about their experience as passionate educators (Noy, 2008). Snowballing involved recruits nominating other potential participants whom they believed fitted the description of transformative passionate teachers. The first participant in this study became known to the first author through work as a pre-service teacher-educator: visiting a pre-service teacher in a school placement, a serendipitous conversation with the teaching-principal about this 'passionate teacher' study resulted in him expressing a desire to participate. This principal then nominated another participant who in turn suggested the next.

Participating teachers worked in Australian government schools, independent and Catholic sectors, at both primary and secondary levels. Two-thirds of the participating teachers were between the ages of thirty and fifty and might be classified as mid-career teachers, whilst seven teachers were over fifty. Of these last seven, four were veterans

with over forty years' service, two had between thirty and forty-years' experience and one had close to twenty years' experience. Ten of the study's twenty-one teachers had between eleven and twenty years of classroom experience. Each participant provided informed consent for their data to be used in line with university ethics approval and chose pseudonyms for anonymity. All interview transcripts were member checked.

### Interviews

In heuristic research, interviewing protocols focus on 'accurate, empathic listening' and 'co-operative sharing' (Moustakas, 1990, p. 47) as dialogue and openness are important features of heuristic interviewing, encouraging disclosure pertinent to the phenomenon.

- The heuristic researcher was constantly cognisant of the driving research question so that spontaneously generated dialogic data provided as comprehensive and rich a description of the phenomenon as possible.
- In maintaining the overarching study, the focus was: 'What sustains the phenomenon of passionate pedagogy?'
  - + Two subsidiary questions guided interviews: 'What inhibits or threatens the practice of a passionate pedagogue?' and
  - + 'What nurtures the practice of a passionate pedagogue?'
- The intended outcome of semi-structured interview questions was to produce a meaningful picture of lived experience of passionate teachers.
- Although the researcher's position was not pre-supposition-less, great care was invested in framing interview questions as neutrally as possible to elicit candid, revelatory responses.
- In addition, creative poetic responses by the researcher using words from the interview transcripts and the face-to-face exchanges (not elaborated in this article) provided confirmation and affirmation of the human interaction around what Mortari (2008, p. 3) calls an ethic of delicacy 'towards the lived experience of the other'.

### Data analysis

Moustakas (1990) provided guidelines for heuristic data analysis and representation. Data analysis process involved listening to each audio file and simultaneously dictating what was heard to the *Dragon* voice recognition program (<http://www.nuance.com/dragon>). This intentional process produced a level of analytical acuity hard to attain from simply reading a transcript created by a third party. Interview transcripts were emailed to each participating teacher for validation and inviting comment or amendment. Several teachers returned edited versions. Transcripts were colour coded, illustrative quotations identified, and tables created for elements that nurture or threaten the practice of passionate pedagogy. During this data-sorting exercise, recurrent themes emerged and were noted. As Mortari (2008, pp. 4, 5) noted, this involves 'being faithful to the phenomenon' of passionate teachers, and avoiding 'the tendency to stay in a preconceived world'... engaging with the tacit dilemmas that were part of participants' accounts. Heuristic inquiry culminates in the creative, analytical representation of the integrated study of self-exploration and discovery of others' experience of the same phenomenon (Moustakas, 1990).

## Findings

A series of themes elucidate observations made by these passionate teachers about ambiguous connections between their deep personal commitment as professional teachers, and how their career trajectories intersected with contemporary educational milieu. The study anticipated there would be things identifiable as positively enhancing or supporting passionate teachers and their teaching. The study was also open to identifying factors and influences working negatively for passionate educators—discussed earlier in the context of neoliberal metrics and target-driven logics prevalent in the education sector. However, the balance of these opposing forces was increasingly shocking as the interviews and later analysis progressed. This balance, despite participants' joy in high quality teaching and learning, is reflected in the present article summarising their views and feelings about adverse pressures to their passionate pedagogy as reflected in the findings below. Thus, the next section presents that part of the research findings relating to 'that which drains us' rather than the findings about the internally driven characteristics of these passionate teachers, 'that which sustains us'.

### 'That which drains us'

Even the most passionate teachers were vulnerable in their exposure to draining elements which abound 'out there', necessitating conscientious effort to protect themselves from burnout. There was deep consideration and pondering by participants across this group of teachers about how to express their perceptions of the pressures of compliance and performativity that have been increasing. This itself adds weight to the broad question about how the resilience and volitional fortitude of teachers who *do* manage to sustain their effective passionate practice, in fact do so. Participants' needs to ameliorate the forces that erode resilience, commitment and wellbeing came through the conversations in multiple ways as critical.

The dominant, recurrent concerns of this study's participating teachers included: unresponsive school management; crowded curriculum; systemic compliance; societal negativity; threats to teacher wellbeing and negative collegial impacts. These elements were perceived to negatively influence their capacity to achieve effective, passionate teaching practice. These concerns are explored below using actual statements or paraphrasing of participating teacher voices. Participating teachers chose their own pseudonyms, these appearing in brackets after quotations, and shared a co-interpretive process in reflecting on their commitment to passionate teaching.

#### 1. Unresponsive school managements

Participating teachers observed that the way many schools are managed—as opposed to being dynamically led—does not conduce to the flourishing of passionate teaching and learning.

Sometimes you feel frustrated that those above you don't necessarily know what you are doing... they get so caught up in all the administration that they forget about the teachers. (Wazza)

Participants repeatedly complained of too many (managerial) meetings, too many (unfiltered) priorities, the layering of responsibilities (not directly related to their classrooms) ineffectively supported; unrealistic expectations of staff and ineffectual professional development (most of which was deemed not relevant or not effectively followed through).

Participants were particularly concerned about poor leadership. Most teachers in this study did not feel that the people who hold the positions of authority in their schools qualify as school leaders and referred to them (often disparagingly) as ‘Admin’:

I’ve seen many heads of department spending less and less time in the classroom until they get into upper positions of authority and leave it behind altogether. Now that’s tragic—the leaders of the school need to be passionate about what the school is about.  
(David)

The prevailing perception of senior management by these participants was lack of support, ‘management not coming in to see me’ (Karen), ‘distrust, misguided priorities and disinterest in teaching and learning’ (Wazza), and ‘Administration makes my life a misery... I don’t think I get enough positive feedback from the admin’ (Miriam).

One of the participating teachers has specialised in in-service mentoring. Having worked in a range of schools, she lamented that visionary, transformational educational leadership seemed to be missing in (transactional) action.

I think there’s a real vacuum in schools as far as education goes. It is really... scary... but the educational, or the deep philosophical/ educational component is really missing in a lot of schools... the teaching and learning, mentoring and coaching... There’s no one there that actually [understands and has the authority over] that holistic overarching pedagogical policy which says ‘this is what we really need to do to support our teachers through all of this.’ (Erma)

A dominant focus of the teachers in this study was trust, which they believed underpins all healthy relationships. They trusted their students, yet they did not feel trusted by senior management. This can be emotionally debilitating for teachers who expect to be trusted for their professional expertise and personal integrity. ‘Teachers need to feel trusted’ (Gran-Nan) by the individuals invested with the authority to make crucial decisions regarding staff and student welfare. Teachers feel ‘disempowered and not trusted... you felt that they didn’t even care what you might say’ (Erma). Participants said they feel the teaching profession as a whole is not trusted. They felt that whereas people trust their lawyer or their accountant and acknowledge their professional knowledge and expertise, teachers are not accorded equivalent respect or trust. The prevailing feeling was that their students’ parents feel that teachers do not have any particular, respectable, professional knowledge (Fogelgarn, Burns & Billett, 2019).

## 2. Crowded curriculum

Effective, holistic learning was core to the passion for teaching for teachers in this study. Dissatisfaction with curriculum, for example, was an ongoing source of significant frustration. Overloaded curriculum was a common woe:

Layering on new initiatives... continually adding new things like swimming – because 40 per cent of kids can't swim – that just takes away from our core subjects of numeracy and literacy undermin[ing] the opportunity to give kids the best grounding in the basics. (Mattie)

Many participating teachers felt encumbered by prescriptive curriculum which they claimed did not promote in-depth learning.

One of the problems I have with the new curriculum and the way it is being taught... is that a lot of the science stuff is being dumbed down so that some of the deeper questions about scientific methodology are being put aside for content driven things like a slide show of the greenhouse effect. (Johannes)

Participants felt that school authorities generally did not support going beyond the curriculum in pursuit of authentic learning and the development of meta-cognition.

Why aren't we engaging our students in actually learning? We used to do science across the curriculum... we would do science in art, we would do science in food... I don't think school allows us to be expansive. We don't see beyond teaching surds to year 10. We are so curriculum driven and so subject orientated that we forget what's really important... Often in the staffroom people are talking about the curriculum and they're not talking about learning. (Gran-Nan)

Crowded teaching programs are more tightly formatted than ever. Part of the targeting, metricised supposed efficiency measurements and top-down control that is part of the previous theme, is reflected in how school managers go about their work. It is also part of a more widespread educational sector logic of compliance rather than initiative and innovation, despite claims to the contrary.

## 3. Systemic compliance pressures in education sector

The general feeling amongst this study's teachers is that the audit culture which valorises performativity threatens passionate pedagogical practice, because many teachers are too afraid to do anything 'out of the box.' They felt there was not enough time, freedom or autonomy to address students' real issues in more innovative and less conventional ways.

Bureaucratic requirements mean that I don't have the opportunity to have deep reflective discussions with students. It cramps my creativity, shackles my thinking and I think it can overwhelm my opportunities for being innovative, it limits my opportunities. (Johannes)



Participants felt frustrated that students and teachers were expected to conform to systemic expectations and processes. This led to a disturbing reality where system needs appeared to supplant student needs.

None of that [systemic compliance] is about trying to be your best... it's all about fitting in... ticking the boxes and about replicating system. (Tom)

Compliance had become a millstone for these passionate educators. They disclosed that endless paperwork, bureaucratic imposition and time-wasting managerial demands quashed creativity and sapped energy: 'Bureaucracy de-energises me' (Stewart), or:

The bureaucracy is very hard on teachers. They have to waste precious energy filling in paperwork. They have to do it this way or that way whether they believe in it or not. Schools need more autonomy. (Lorraine)

These were not disorganised teachers. Being well-organised for most of them is a key part of how they are able to deliver quality teaching for their students. For them it is rather the sense of endless compliance with rules that are remotely relevant to the classroom and unlikely to make a difference.

#### **4. General societal negativity**

The passionate educators in this study believe that teachers suffer due to negative societal perception of teaching and teachers.

People don't value the educational person. They don't value this idea that you are putting the focus on students. (Stewart)

Media is viewed as a source of disparaging stereotyping of teaching and learning.

One of the biggest issues we've got is the media, television, etc. that portray learning as not important. You know, the nerd who likes learning... we don't like those who are curious and who wonder about things. We [as a society] don't value education (Gran-Nan).

These teachers frequently encountered the prevalent attitude, 'you work from nine to three and have all these holidays' (Wazza). Participants felt that potentially capable teachers are dissuaded from entering teaching because society does not view teaching as a legitimate profession.

The greatest tragedy is that people who are bright are told 'don't waste your time going into education'. (Andy Barker)

Complaints regarding workload extend to management expectations and community expectations of teachers. Participants felt that even their students' parents were unaware of how hard they worked, the responsibility they carried or the emotional drain inherent in engaging with twenty-five youngsters, or up to one hundred teenagers each day.

What exhausts me is that they forget that we are human, and that people have feelings and emotions and I think sometimes as teachers we don't push that enough because we are so tired (Wazza).

Sometimes particular schools or administrators are able to bring a positive culture and manage expectations to some extent, but the default setting of children and parents having rights and neoliberal regimes telling teachers they must comply 'or else', feed off a broad societal negativity towards the role of teachers. These passionate teachers, committed as they are to outstanding effort for and with students at whatever level they are operating, feel the judgement and lack of acknowledgement sharply.

## **5. Undermining of teacher wellbeing**

This theme cluster tells a cautionary tale about the hidden risks inherent in teaching today for caring teachers who give their all without feeling adequately supported.

Passion is often drummed out of us because teachers are overworked... they just lurch from one classroom to another. They try to put heart and soul into their work, but they are not respected. Their need to be recharged isn't respected. A lot of people keep a bit of distance or a bit of reserve to stop them being emotionally worn and bruised... to protect themselves. And after a while, you get hammered into submission and just follow the curriculum. (Gran-Nan)

This inquiry's passionate participants concurred that teaching passionately demands more time than teaching functionally.

Aside from spending recess and lunchtime speaking to students regarding behaviour, work requirements or social problems, there is yard duty, extras and managerial tasks which often need to be done during breaks (not to mention staff meetings, preparation and marking). It's fatigue that undermines my passion. More than anything, fatigue is the absolute corrosion factor in quality teaching because when you are fatigued, you're not on the ball, you're not reading the class; you're not connecting. (Mary)

Passionate teachers exerted a great deal of energy in classrooms. Even if they were not jumping around (which some claim they do), engaging, focusing and channelling interactive energy is draining (especially when there is little time to eat, drink or meditate). They felt there never seemed to be enough time for preparation, quality marking, critical self-reflection and anecdotal recording. Inevitably, schoolwork – whether physical or mental – 'comes home with you'. (Dale)

You've got that responsibility at the back of your mind all the time that you are responsible for the wellbeing of kids and that's a huge pressure. I've worked in factories and stuff like that and it's nothing compared to teaching. (D2)

Teacher wellbeing has become a common theme in education today (McCallum & Price, 2016). It contains important messages, but can be co-opted by neoliberal agendas to blame, withdraw support, or ignore adverse behaviour against teachers from students,

colleagues or administrators. Nurturing passionate professional work with a limited sense of wellbeing is for the participants in this study a substantial constraint.

## 6. Negative impacts from colleagues

This theme cluster emerged as the most data-laden and hence, potentially threatening element to teachers whose inner drive, conviction and courage may not be as robust as that of the teachers in this study. By far the greatest source of frustration and energy drain for the passionate teachers in this study appeared to be the impact of those colleagues who they saw as being resentful, disenchanted, bitter, change-averse or occupationally misaligned.

I have actually sat in staffrooms... keeping to myself and hearing some extreme bullying [and] nastiness going on. (Susan)

A frequently expressed source of anguish is the toxicity which pervades staffrooms populated by a vocal group of bitter teachers.

So many toxic environments in schools... so many burnt out and depleted teachers. People are judged and they know it. (Mary)

Exercising volitional fortitude to resist becoming cynical, overly frustrated and embroiled in staff politics exacted a formidable toll on participants' personal energy. 'Fighting not to be disillusioned and thinking it's all too hard' (Mary), was not something every teacher can do if they felt unsupported and drained. Several teachers expressed concern regarding apparently resistant, 'change-averse' colleagues.

I perceive a solid wall of resistance... partly because [change] is too threatening as it involves a shift of power away from them to the kids and what's always 'worked'. (Richard)

Or,

I think they are at the point where they're unprepared to change, to consider different learning styles. They teach the way they were taught and only feel secure when they're locked in a box with four walls and a door. (Johannes)

Refraining from judgemental disdain was a tough call for these teachers who continue to care deeply about student wellbeing. Some of the teachers in this study actually claimed to personally suffer from the arrogance and resentment of teachers who felt threatened by passionate practice.

What does exhaust me is a particular kind of teacher... who is jealous, who is irritated or who resents the success of others – mine or other people – who likes to do in others... (Andy)

Or,

A knot of negative people had power positions in school 10 or 15 years ago but who had lost those positions were now bitter and twisted and couldn't wait to get to 54/11[a

retirement package for teachers turning fifty-five] and if they had to stay here, they would make life miserable. (Richard)

According to the participants, negative collegial views regarding passionate teachers were not uncommon and can have a debilitating effect on some people. These teachers were wont to hide behind a ‘facade, of security, skilled up, coping’ (Karen). Karen and Harriet posit that the colleagues who look at passionate teachers with suspicion, disdain or disapproval are likely not being energised by their own, merely functional practice.

People think that people who are passionate are pushovers... that they are somehow suckers that end up with everything... hence my friend who calls people like that ‘tragedies’ and not surprisingly he left the teaching profession. (Harriet)

Some participants felt that students actually suffered due to non-passionate teachers who function in survival mode and who seemed more concerned for their own welfare than student learning.

What really upsets me is the lazy teacher... not differentiating curriculum... blaming everybody else when [according to them] it’s not their fault, it is the students’ fault... the principal’s fault... And this laziness, it’s the absolute opposite of passion. They actually don’t want to be there... I see the children really unhappy, sometimes even suffering in class and it upsets me because the students have to turn up every day... five days a week and... the teachers don’t get it. (Erma)

We have used phrases here like ‘teaching functionally’, ‘functional practice’, and ‘teachers who function in survival mode’ in this discussion to indicate a different mode of being as a teacher. For functional teaching, performing the role or duties of a teacher means things like teaching a class, marking assignments, preparing lessons. These functions are like doctors gathering health metrics, prescribing and following up. Function says very little about teacher motivation, determination, passion to find ways of teaching that enables students’ learning. Function does not ask ‘Why do you bother?’ or ‘Who cares?’ but passion does. Function may be efficient, competent, even clever, but it fulfils a role whereas passion expresses a commitment to a beneficial engagement with learners, offering a human spark and connection.

Another point of vulnerability shared by several participants was that poor collegial performance seriously impacts their energy. ‘When other teachers aren’t doing a good job [that] de-energises me’ (Richard). Because these teachers care so deeply about student learning and holistic wellbeing, participants also empathise with student frustration and neglect and found it difficult at times to retain requisite professional detachment from someone else’s issue.

It’s the people that just don’t seem to be committed to students’ growth and to genuine learning... who are more about we need to assess them because there is nothing in that box... (Andy Barker)

Feeling deprived, disempowered and undervalued is ‘the prevailing attitude amongst disenchanting teachers’ (Richard). This self-sorry, glass half-empty attitude could manifest in bitterness and nasty staff politics which passionate teachers had to fight or resist.

In my experience, your average teacher... doesn't feel empowered at all. It's like they have a victim mentality. They kind of resign themselves to work... Teachers who lose it mid-career, particularly in their mid-40s... feel it's too late to do anything else, they've got a mortgage, kids... a lot say 'it sucks but what else is there... I've got another 20 years until I can retire. (Wazza)

Listening to participants describe the emotional, spiritual, intellectual and relational energy they invested in their practice, often unsupported by peers or management, it was easy to understand why so many teachers choose to leave teaching in pursuit of other occupations which do not jeopardise their wellbeing to the same extent. Comprehending why many remained when they view their working life as a gruelling, soul-destroying job (as opposed to a soul-satisfying calling) was decidedly more difficult to unravel.

I think the teachers who lose the passion, lose the balance between this love of teaching, that idealism... the balance moves more towards the managerial and people get overwhelmed. In survival, managerial outweighs the educational... Let's get through this day, this week... this month... and the educational component disappears down the gurgler. (Erma)

Among the surprises in this study, was the poignant way teachers who are passionately concerned, actively engaging students in exciting learning, felt let down by close colleagues. Anybody with education sector knowledge recognises descriptions of disenchanting teachers – depressed, disillusioned, disgruntled and weary due to professional and life circumstances. But the competitive, corrosive, draining effect of this on the passionate teachers opens a whole new front in understanding the phenomenon of passion pedagogy and what sustains it. Perhaps it was because other teachers were in a professional sense ‘one of us’ that their disengagement from a deeper teacher commitment seemed more of a personal confronting or rejection than more distanced policy and public criticisms.

## Conclusion

The unexpected outcome of this study into the constitution of passionate teaching was that participating passionate teachers collectively felt that their sustained practice was achieved in generally unsupportive and often demoralising micro, meso and macro contexts. The influences at each of these levels may compound or contradict the support and encouragement at the other levels. These teachers' resilience, intrinsic motivation and exercising of courageous volitional fortitude in remaining committed to their pursuit of what they believed was pedagogically best for their students, is rendered all the more noteworthy viewed in the context of the half-dozen factors described above which drain their energy and effort. Each of the participants was essentially sustained by their intrinsic love of, and for, their own and their students' learning and the learning process itself. And

yet, two-thirds of the data generated in this heuristic inquiry were about the elements which drained, rather than sustained, their energy and passionate pedagogical practice.

Even the most gifted and passionate pedagogical practitioner is not an indefatigable super-being. Outside the present study, many experienced teachers have confessed to either having lost their passion or have spoken of its protracted dormancy in consequence of routine, administrative demands and epistemological or methodological dissonance (Huberman, 1993). Teachers know that teaching is intensely emotional, yet the holistic wellbeing of teachers is not perceived by the neoliberal machine as a legitimate need, requiring significant financial, structural and spiritual investment. The community at large needs to understand that any nation's most dedicated and committed teachers, arguably its most precious resource, acutely need nurturing, spiritual nourishment and replenishment of their emotional energy and passion.

This heuristic inquiry explored the lived experience of twenty-one passionate educators interactively with the researcher in the research process. Each teacher had been included in the study because they had sustained their passionate service to the profession despite increasingly challenging conditions. They represent a small number of practising school teachers and their practice values cannot be generalised to the wider profession—most particularly to their close but disenfranchised colleagues, who they found passively resisted their efforts to be excellent teachers. Since participants were those identified as passionate teachers, there continues to be gaps in our understanding: will these teachers be passionate a decade from now? Can other previously passionate teachers relight the candle? What positive consequences would emerge if these draining influences were changed or shifted from what they are at present?

What has changed since Huberman? Day (2012, p. 7) reprised Huberman's question, maintaining today, 'a predisposition to hope, persistence in believing that I can make a difference to the lives of those who I teach'. Scholars, teachers and policy makers committed to high quality education and improvements wherever possible can genuinely ask: are neo-liberalism and the performativity mantras such a huge threat, or have creative and passionate teachers always felt this way, to some extent? We might ask, has labelling the so-called performativity and targets threat made it more formidable? Are things more formalistic, functional, less creative and less inspirational for students? More inquiry charts these questions into new territory in a new decade.

Rather than thinking of passion only as the intrinsic nature and desire of a few excellent teachers, what structural education sector changes could enliven a much larger cohort of teaching ambition to passionately engage the opportunities of lifting students to their potential? It may be that a starting place to once again ask what sustains passionate teaching, is to re-read the list of negative constraints and consider what would construct the reverse of each of them. These passionate teachers' stories might then resonate with other teachers and provide significant food for thought for those working to optimise retention, support sustained passionate commitment and nurture teacher and student wellbeing.

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