

## What Motivates Teachers?

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In this study, 27 highly motivated primary and secondary school teachers in Singapore were subjected to an in-depth interview. The interview aimed at identifying factors which motivated these teachers. In synthesis, it was found that teachers were motivated by students, by administrators, by the nature of the job itself and for some, the motivator was their religion.

### 鼓舞教師士氣的動力

在這項研究中，我們對二十七位士氣高昂的中小學教師作了深入的訪談，訪談的主要目的是要探討推動這些教師的因素。總的來說，鼓舞教師的動力是學生，學校的行政人員及其工作素質。另一方面，宗教信仰也是推動某些教師的教學熱忱的動力之一。

Over the years the amount of work required of teachers in Singapore has increased substantially. Changes in syllabi and curriculum emphasis have brought greater demands on the teaching profession. Much is demanded of the teaching profession, yet we find many motivated teachers in the education system. We want to know what motivates teachers. This study is part of a larger project on teacher job satisfaction and motivation (Low & Mukhthar, 1992). The study used both a Motivation Questionnaire adapted from Luthans (1985) and Margerison (1979) and in-depth interviews. This paper will present that part of the study which involved the in-depth interviews.

This study attempts to identify factors which motivate teachers in Singapore. Such a study is undertaken because we strongly agree with Lawler (1973, p.289) that:

*What happens to people during the work day has profound effects both on the individual's life, and on the society, and thus these events cannot be ignored if the quality of life in a society is to be high.*

Time spent at work takes up the major part of a person's waking hours and it is important that people find fulfilment in their work. This study therefore seeks to find out why some teachers are so highly motivated, what is it that kept them going and in what ways has teaching been fulfilling for them. It is apt at this stage that explanations or definitions of the terms used in this paper be provided.

*Motivation* is derived from the Latin word "movere". It is often equated with the words "aims", "desires", "drives", "goals", "incentives", "motives", "needs", "wants" and "wishes" in research studies (Likert, 1961; Bennis, 1967; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1979; Kaiser, 1981; Ames and Ames, 1984). In this study, motivation refers to the performance investment level of teachers in their school work. The *performance investment level* is teachers' work that is above the minimum level of participation in school. *Highly motivated teachers* refer to teachers who work beyond the minimum, in contrast to *lowly motivated teachers* who do minimum work or less. Principals rate highly motivated teachers as high achievers who take pride in their work and display professionalism.

In a literature review of the definition of *job satisfaction* and its measurement, Chapman and Lowther (1982, p.3) shared the following three approaches:

1. Satisfaction is measured as the discrepancy between people's expectation of reward and their actual accomplishment;
2. Satisfaction can be measured as respondents' response to items asking about a person's overall experiences;
3. Factors contributing to job satisfaction can be identified as satisfiers or dissatisfiers, but are not assumed to be on a conceptual continuum. Some "motivator factors" or satisfiers which contribute to *job satisfaction* include achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibility, and advancement (Herzberg, 1971). They correspond to Maslow's (1968) higher order motivational needs of self-esteem and self-actualization. In this study, an attempt is made to identify the motivators that provide a sense of job satisfaction to the highly motivated teachers.

Schools are concerned about students' progress, and research has consistently shown that significant differences existed between the scores of students taught by teachers with high job satisfaction and of those taught by teachers with low job satisfaction (Brumbach, 1986). Brumbach also found a strong relationship between teachers' job recognition and students' academic performance. It is thus necessary that research identifies the motivators that spur teachers on.

Further, in view of the emphasis placed in Singapore on improving schools, it makes sense that school improvement efforts would start with the concerns and needs of teachers. If teachers were highly motivated, then their performance will also improve for research has shown that performance is tied to motivation (Maehr, 1984). Teacher motivation is thus a crucial issue facing educators today.

A study to identify factors which motivate teachers will provide rich insight into why some teachers remain excited about their work even though they may have taught for many years. It would provide knowledge about factors which motivate such teachers and this would in turn enable administrators to try to provide such motivators for other teachers.

To Lortie (1975) teachers are motivated when they see students achieving desirable results. Menlo and Low (1988) studied teacher job satisfaction across five countries and found that teachers were most excited when students do well and when they understand what was taught. When students achieve good results, the esteem needs of teachers could be met for it reflects well on their teaching. And studies by Sergiovanni and Starrat (1979) suggest that esteem need is an important motivator.

Other studies (e.g., Wilby, 1989) found that teachers were motivated when they were involved in the formulation of school goals, given autonomy, provided with good working conditions and were valued as professionals.

Miskel (1974, 1979) noted the finding that principal leadership behaviours and organisational variables affect teacher job satisfaction. Studies by Holdaway (1978), Friesen, Holdaway and Rice (1984) and Johnston (1985) revealed that there were external factors within the control of principals that could motivate teachers. These include principals' supportiveness, principals' recognition of teachers' work and supervision and professional development. Jones (1979) held that the way subordinates are treated is the key to motivation and high productivity.

It is imperative that school administrators know what motivate teachers so that they can motivate their staff or at least avoid de-motivating them. And, in order to be motivators, school administrators must be aware of what quintessentially spurs teachers on in their work. Once that is identified, school administrators can then employ strategies, and even change their behaviours if it is required so as to motivate the teachers to higher levels of performance. "Motivation is (thus) a topic whose centrality to education can hardly be challenged" (Ball, 1984).

The present study attempts to isolate or determine factors which are associated with high teacher motivation, and the researchers agree with Lawler and Hackman (1975) that there are various ways of finding out what motivates people. Researchers could use pencil and paper tests, observation techniques and of course the simple act of asking those concerned what motivate/s them.

Accordingly, the next section will focus on the method used in the present study to find out what motivates the 27 teachers.

## **Methodology**

In this study, the principals who were approached to nominate highly motivated teachers in their schools were involved in the one-year Diploma in Educational Administration (DEA) Programme which prepares school administrators. To keep the participants in this study more homogeneous, the principals were also requested to exclude expatriate teachers, relief teachers, cadet teachers, and teachers holding positions as Heads of Department.

Two primary school principals and four secondary school principals were involved. Each of the six principals were requested to identify four of their most motivated teachers in the school. Three of the principals gave us five names, thus a total of 27 teachers were interviewed. Ten of the teachers were primary school teachers while the other 17 were from secondary schools. Table I shows a profile of the teachers.

INSERT TABLE I ABOUT HERE

We conducted face to face interviews with teachers, i.e., we used the "fairly simple act of asking them" what motivated them. Teachers were interviewed individually and each was given as much time as was required. Questions were fairly open-ended, the aim being to provide them with an opportunity to talk. With the permission of the teachers, all the interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed verbatim so that analysis of the data could be carried out.

Interviews were conducted in schools. Teachers were asked three main questions and where necessary, the interviewers were to probe for further information. The minimally unstructured, in-depth, qualitative interview as it is used in the present study is characterised as a "flexible strategy of discovery...Its object is to carry on a guided conversation and to elicit rich, detailed materials that can be used for qualitative analysis" (Lofland & Lofland, 1971, p.76). The role of the interviewer is to listen, to be sensitive to non-verbal cues and to probe where necessary. The following questions were asked:

- 1 How long have you been teaching?
- 2 Was teaching a profession of your choice? If so, why? If not, why did you join teaching?
- 3 Your principal has considered you to be a very motivated teacher, can you tell me what motivates you? What turns you on?

Teachers were given as much time as they required to answer the questions. All transcribed notes were then analysed. It was earlier decided that teachers would be given the opportunity to say as much as they wanted, but in the analysis of the data, the first three responses of Question 3 were coded based on the assumption that the earlier responses are good indicators of a teacher's reactions to a question and are generally the ones which the teacher feels more identified with. If a teacher gave more than three "motivators" the "extras" were not coded.

### **Limitations of the Study**

For the purpose of greater homogeneity in the group of motivated teachers who were nominated by their principals, this study omits teachers belonging to the following categories on cultural and service grounds: expatriate teachers, relief teachers, cadet teachers, and teachers holding middle management positions. It also excludes school climate as a significant factor affecting teacher motivation (Anderson, 1982; Hoy and Miskel, 1996). This study works within the naturalistic paradigm in a qualitative enquiry into teacher motivation. It is by no means exhaustive because a multitude of situational and personal variables combine or interact to produce a continuum of motivation among teachers (Low and Mukhthar, 1992).

### **Results and Discussion**

In this section results will be presented. No attempt is made to subject the data to any statistical test, instead discussion of the data will focus on frequency counts and teachers' verbatim statements. Of the 27 highly motivated teachers, 22 were females and the remaining five were males. Lortie (1975) and Chapman and Lowther (1982) reported that female teachers were more motivated than male teachers. These researchers pointed out that female teachers found that teaching accommodates their role better than other jobs. One has to note that females dominate the teaching profession, thus the unbalanced sample (22 females and 5 males) appears to be quite acceptable.

Of the five male teachers, three had taught for less than 10 years while two for less than 15 years. No older male teachers were identified by principals. On the other hand, the teaching experience of female teachers was evenly spread out (see Table I).

Data showed that the 27 motivated teachers gave a total of 77 responses to Question 3. Some teachers only gave two motivators while others listed more than three, but only three were coded as had been discussed earlier. Some teachers spent the entire interview elaborating and giving instances of their motivators. For instance, one teacher said:

*I'm motivated because I see the needs of the students. When kids have problems and they come to us and we are able to give them some advice, that's a challenge and it's a real turn on for me. Many of them don't have people to turn to.*

This teacher then went on to tell stories of how she interacted with two of her students who were abused children. She talked excitedly about the students' progress both academically and socially. This elaboration took up the bulk of the interview time.

The 77 coded responses fell into 14 categories which centred around four clusters of motivators, namely:

- 1 Teachers who were motivated by their students;
- 2 Teachers who were motivated by teaching;
- 3 Teachers who were motivated by school administrators;
- 4 Teachers who were motivated because of their religious belief.

INSERT TABLE II ABOUT HERE

Table II shows that teachers were most motivated by students (N=35). In this cluster, data showed that teachers were most motivated when:

1	students showed progress in their work	N=15
2	they had good rapport with students	N=7
3	students responded to them	N=7
4	former students showed their appreciation	N=6

The relationship between teachers' motivation and students' academic performance deserves special attention. The data gathered in this study reveals that students' academic progress or achievement is the prime motivator. The teachers felt very satisfied and were encouraged to give more to their students when they saw progress in their work. Two teachers shared:

Last year I had a particular child who gave me lots of problems. I had to work with his grandmother because both his parents were in jail. His grandmother refused to co-operate with me. I then spent a lot of time talking to him. He "woke up" just before the exams and he passed! I was so glad that he actually made it. It was so good to see him putting in effort. On my part, I did what I could.

(Female teacher, 30 years of experience)

When you see students achieving so much, from nothing in the beginning, there is a sense of pride, a sense of gratification...and when they leave, you know that you have done a job well and you know that they will continue to do well...and you have made an impression on them.

(Female teacher, 8 years of experience)

When these teachers saw their students achieving, meeting the targets/goals that they had set for them, they were enthused, and this could be because their esteem needs were met. According to Vroom (1964) and McClelland (1985), motivated teachers direct their work towards achieving goals. This motivation drive directs and excites them (Maehr, 1984). It is no wonder that for these teachers, their students made good progress for research has repeatedly shown that motivated teachers can affect student performance and achievement in a positive way (Ashton, 1984). Their attitude towards their work and work environment may affect students' achievement (Barry and Tye, 1972; Hallinger and Murphy, 1985). Motivation seems a sine qua non for them to ensure effective classroom performance.

This study supports the assertion that a positive link exists between teachers' motivation and students' academic performance (Lortie, 1975; Brumback, 1986; Menlo and Low, 1988). It is not a linear unidirectional cause-and-effect relationship, but one that interacts. A highly motivated teacher takes care to provide a conducive environment for students' academic progress. The resultant positive response from the recipients in turn serves as a motivator, in that it satisfies the teacher's higher motivational needs like self esteem. Satisfiers lead to job satisfaction. The motivated teacher proceeds to perform beyond the minimum level of work requirement. Such a cyclic perspective serves as a framework in the understanding of teachers' motivation.

Besides being motivated when students showed progress, these teachers were also excited when they

established good rapport with their students (N=7). One female teacher with 25 years of experience said:

When I have kids who came back to school after they have graduated to visit me, it makes my day. I have an ex-student whom I met this year at a shopping centre and she came running up to me and ...asked me to loan her some money. I feel good that I have this kind of rapport or relationship with her, that she's not afraid to ask me for a loan. And she knows that I will lend it to her. When I can reach that kind of rapport with the students, I feel good.

Holdaway (1978) found that good relationship with students, teachers and principals gave teachers the highest satisfaction. For many teachers in Singapore, the reason they took up teaching was because they love to work with children, "Kids give me the zest to go on" thus it is not a surprise to find that the highest motivator for the 27 teachers is students, be it students making progress or students responding to them or students showing appreciation to them. One female teacher who has taught for more than 30 years recounted instances of her students coming back to see her. She said:

*Years later out of the blue they come out and say, "You taught me this subject and it's because of it that I took up this subject in the university." This is most gratifying.*

This recognition and appreciation for work well done is a powerful motivator. To four of the female teachers, this recognition and appreciation from students was more important than recognition from administrators. They felt responsible to their students, so when students responded and gave them the recognition they felt very rewarded. "One of my students hated Maths in the beginning and at the end of the year, she told me she loved Maths because of my teaching. That was really sweet music to my ears."

The second cluster of motivator is loosely termed "teaching itself". Teaching, according to one of the highly motivated male teachers is extremely demanding. He said, "...you need to put in lots of hours, 8 hours is not enough, sometimes it's 14 hours. Besides teaching, there's counselling, extra-curricular activities and a host of others. If you don't have 100 percent commitment, this job isn't for you." In spite of this onerous description of teaching, 23 responses fell into this cluster. In this cluster, data showed that teachers were motivated because:

- |   |  |     |
|---|--|-----|
| 1 | they like teaching   | N=8 |
| 2 | of altruistic reasons, e.g., a desire to do something for children | N=7 |
| 3 | through teaching they are able to meet their goal/s                | N=5 |
| 4 | they can teach the subject they enjoy                              | N=3 |

By identifying themselves with their work and being involved in it, teachers obtain satisfaction and reward (Nias, 1989). Two teachers shared:

*I love entertaining my students. I like to see responses. I love to share things I love with the kids ... I love the English Language.*

*Every year I have a new batch of kids and I have so much to learn from them. Each group gives me different types of feelings. It's better to work with children.*

Teaching offers them not only a chance to express themselves through the subject be it English Language or Mathematics but it also allows them to grow and to learn with and from the children. Some became teachers because they wanted to do something for children and in teaching the opportunity to work with children are plentiful. Others came with specific goals in mind, e.g., to help children, or to work with those from deprived homes and to help them to get on in life. And challenging and demanding as the goals may be, they were enthused as they achieved their goals.

A teacher said:

*Teaching gives me the opportunity to work on my goal which is to motivate students. That's the main reason why I'm working so hard. It's lives that I'm building, not results per se.*

According to McClelland (1985) motivated teachers direct their work towards achieving goals. Barbera (1980) stressed that challenging work, personal interest in the work itself, working conditions compatible with the teachers' physical needs, feeling of high esteem and rewards for performance are among the important conditions for motivation.

Teachers want to teach (Lortie 1975), in fact to many this is a need and when they are able to teach, particularly in what they have been trained to teach, they are motivated. Not to allow people to do what they have been trained to do or want to do is most de-motivating.

People are motivated in their work by a drive towards self-actualization. deCharms (1984) interpreted this drive as people's inner urge to do well. Intrinsically motivated people do not need environmental pushes as they are driven by their integrity to act positively. It is no wonder that a number of teachers said:

*My character is such that if I'm given a job to do, I will do it well and only then will I be satisfied.*

*Pride in my work motivates me. Whatever work I've been given, I feel the satisfaction when I've done my job well. It could be any job, if I feel that it's my job and I do it well, I'm happy.*

Twelve responses were coded for the third cluster of motivators termed "Motivated by Administrators". When administrators recognised the work they had done or when they were supportive, encouraging and being understanding, teachers were motivated. The teachers shared:

*The administration motivates. The positive feedback I get, their expectation of me...since I joined teaching I've had good support from the administrators and it makes me feel that I want to do my best. With the recognition they give, I'm thoroughly motivated. It was a great boost to my morale when I was recognised for my contribution to the profession.*

*I believe that in whatever school I'm placed in I can still perform but if I'm placed in a school like this, it's a bonus. In this school, the principal and the vice-principal trust us and leave us alone and we have leeway to do a lot of things and that's good.*

The important role administrators play in motivating teachers cannot be denied. Chapman and Lowther (1982) surveyed 5,764 teachers to examine their satisfaction with teaching. Their results showed that there was a strong positive correlation between recognition teachers received from administrators and career satisfaction. Research (e.g., Sergiovanni, 1967; Kaiser, 1981) has shown that when teachers' professional and personal needs and expectations are met by the schools and the profession, they will be motivated enough to work hard and to stay on the job.

Teachers in this study were motivated because principals trusted them and gave them considerable autonomy. In fact of the 12 responses in this category, only three were from teachers who said that they were motivated because of recognition from the administrators and nine talked about principal behaviours which energised them. Principal behaviours which motivated teachers include trust, support and encouragement. It would seem that to produce motivated teachers and in turn quality teaching in schools, studies could identify principal behaviours which motivate teachers.

The last cluster of motivator is teachers being "Motivated by religious beliefs". Seven responses were coded in this category. These teachers, all females, shared:

*Many of the children have very little sense of self-value and in their family, parents are so busy making ends meet they have no time for them. In school if we can give them a little more time, talk to them and help them in character building...this is not just a job for me, it's a vocation, a calling.*

*I'm a Christian, and as a Christian teacher I feel that I'm accountable to God and I must make sure that I'm worthy of my wages, make sure that I'm a good worker.*

*All people coming into contact with me are gifts to me. If I give sloppy work, if I give a bad impression--that's a very bad model.*

These three teachers were motivated by a sense of responsibility or accountability to their beliefs. They were quick to emphasise that teaching is a calling not a job. They were responsible to a higher authority and therefore they demanded the best of themselves.

## Conclusion and Implications

From the four clusters of motivators and their various categories, it can be seen that different teachers were motivated differently. It is significant to note that intrinsic factors must be present for maximum motivation to occur (Lim,1985).

This study seeks to draw the attention of administrators in particular to the fact that their practices and behaviours must work to motivate teachers. Administrators must become more sensitive and become more aware of their teachers' needs, for it is incumbent that they motivate teachers and to keep their enthusiasm and interest in work high. Motivated teachers are school assets. They are work-oriented, and centre much of their life on their work. They are characterised by the desire to go beyond themselves. The more motivated the teachers, the greater is their work commitment (Lim, 1985).

Providing a good working environment and giving teachers more resources are not quite enough, for when the higher order needs such as esteem and self actualization needs are met, the greater would be teachers' movement towards a higher stage of development (Sirgy, 1986).

Administrators can use their authority to provide the environment for teachers to interact with students, to teach and in the process enable their students to achieve. And this is possible for research (Duke, 1986; Pitner, 1986) has shown that most variables which actuated teacher motivation were within the power and control of the school administrators.

In sum, data from this study revealed that teachers were most motivated by students, in particular, when they showed progress in their work. Many teachers were also motivated by the job itself--teaching. Certain administrator behaviours also motivated teachers and a small number were motivated by their religious beliefs or a higher calling.

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Table I  
Teacher Demographics

Years of Teaching	5-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	25 >	Total
Sex						
Male	3	2	0	0	0	5
Female	5	1	3	6	7	22
Total	8	3	3	6	7	27

Table II

Motivators	No of responses (N)
Motivated by students	35
Motivated by teaching itself	23
Motivated by administrators	12
Motivated by religious beliefs	7
Total	77

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