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Purpose

What are teacher candidates' motivations to become teachers? A presentation at the 2009 AERA conference sparked an interest to examine students' motivations to become teachers. All applicants to the teacher education program at the authors' institution are required to write an onsite essay about why they want to teach as well as what characteristics they have that they expect to help them be successful in the profession. We decided to analyze these students' essays to determine what patterns we might identify in their motivations for choosing teaching.

The purpose of this study was to discover what motivates our teacher candidates to pursue a teaching career. We also wanted to learn if responses differed across categories of students. Our education program has both undergraduate and graduate students, elementary education and secondary education students, male and female students, and traditional and nontraditional age students.

Theoretical Framework

A plethora of studies have investigated teacher candidates' motivations to choose teaching as a career. The majority of the studies were done between the 1960's through the 1990's, before the increased accountability of NCLB. A number of current studies have been done in other countries including Australia, Great Britain, and Slovenia (Jarvis & Woodrow, 2005; Krecik & Grmek, 2005; Manuel & Hughes, 2006; Richardson & Watt, 2006; Watt & Richardson, 2008, Williams & Forgasz, 2009). One rationale for these current studies is that an understanding of the reasons individuals choose teaching can benefit the recruitment and retention of teachers.

Richardson and Watt (2006) summarized the literature from the 1960's through the 1990's on why people were motivated to become teachers. They identified the following themes: the desire for social mobility, the influence of family, the attraction of time

compatibility, the appeal of a stimulating career, the ability to influence others, the desire to work with young people, the desire to work in a people-oriented profession, and the attraction of job-related benefits.

Sinclair (2008) presented an overview of the literature on motivation to teach. The majority of the studies were done in the 1990's. She identified these 10 motivators in people who are attracted to teaching: desire to work with students, altruism, influence of others, benefits or convenience of teaching, a "calling" to teach, a love of teaching or particular content knowledge, the nature of teaching work, desire for career change, the perceived ease of the job of teaching, and the status teaching provides. Sinclair (2008) surveyed 211 primary student teachers enrolled in four-year initial teacher education courses in Sydney Australia universities. Using the Motivational Orientations to Teach Survey (MOT-S), the questionnaire was administered at the beginning of the first semester of courses and at the end of the first semester. Factors on the survey were grouped into 11 dimensions, six were intrinsic motivations and five were extrinsic motivations. Findings confirm that students have multiple motivations to teach. These students were statistically significantly more motivated by intrinsic motivations than extrinsic motivations. Students were more motivated and enthusiastic about teaching, confirming their career choice of teaching. Their motivations were affected by coursework (negatively) and practicum experiences (positively).

Based on studies done about the motivation to become school teachers, Kyriacou and Coluthard (2000) grouped reasons into three main categories: altruistic reasons – reasons focusing on benefit to society or others, intrinsic reasons – reasons focused on aspects of the job itself, and extrinsic reasons – reasons focused on aspects of the job not inherent in the work itself such as having the summer off. Manuel and Hughes (2006) concluded the desire to work with and contribute to young people's lives, the quest for personal fulfillment, and the devotion to their subject matter are the major categories. The first corresponds to Kyriacou and Coluthard's altruistic reasons, and the latter two to Kyriacou and Coluthard's intrinsic reasons. Williams and Frogasz (2009) focused more on attributes that career changers believe they bring to teaching, leading them to conclude that intrinsic motivators are a strong influence, especially for those individuals who enter teaching as a career change.

Watt and Richardson (2007) developed the FIT-Choice scale (Factors Influencing Teaching Choice) for teacher candidates. Based on expectancy-value theory, their instrument measures factors related to personal utility value, social utility value, task demand, and task return. This scale provides an integrated approach to examine motivations for choosing teaching as a career.

Richardson and Watt (2006) used their FIT-Choice scale to conduct a large-scale (N=1,653) Australian study of students choosing teaching as a career. They found that people choose teaching because they believed they will demonstrate teaching ability, it will be intrinsically rewarding, they had positive learning experiences, they will have job security, and it will influence others.

Johnson, McKeown, and McEwen (1999) studied gender differences in the perspectives of males and females choosing primary teaching (elementary). Females placed more weight on intrinsic aspects of teaching; males were more influenced by extrinsic factors.

Given that most of the extant research was conducted a generation ago or in other countries, the current study was undertaken to see if similar patterns of motivations to teach would be found among teacher candidates at a small, United States university.

Methods and Methodology

Data were collected using qualitative methodology. As part of the application process to our College of Education, students are required to complete an onsite essay about why they want to become a teacher. In addition to providing insights into the stated motivations, the essay also provides information about candidates' writing and thinking abilities. We examined these essays written by 53 candidates to identify motivations for becoming a teacher that might be revealed in the writing. These application essays were from candidates who were at the student teaching phase of the program. Those nearing completion were chosen in order to reduce the influence of any possible non-persistent applicants. The authors examined each essay to identify the motivations apparent in the writing. Initial analysis was conducted independently, with joint analysis occurring as we moved into the identification of themes.

Analysis approaches from grounded theory were applied (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Onsite essays were read for key words that described students' motivation for choosing teaching. Statements were collected and categorized. No attempt was made to use pre-established categories from the extant research. Recurrent categories emerged from the data. As we continued to read the essays, these categories were refined. As we examined the data, we identified tentative themes that explained the students' motivations for pursuing a program in teacher education. We began to associate statements in student's writing to those themes.

We re-examined the essays to continue the analysis to determine what patterns may exist of differential motivations for elementary and secondary students. (That is the only sub-grouping for which we felt we had sufficient numbers of responses to establish patterns.) From these analyses, we expect to develop a tentative theory of how the motivations may be related to the life situations of the applicants.

Data Sources

We analyzed the onsite essays from program admission applications of students who were student teaching in the Spring of 2010 to determine their motivations for becoming teachers. Approximately 90% of students who apply are admitted. In our pool were undergraduate students, graduate students pursuing an MIT (Masters in Teaching), and certification only students. Within these groups were elementary education majors and secondary education students. There also was a group of alternative route students who take an accelerated course of study. Students typically complete the program in two years, taking a mix of core education courses, either elementary or secondary methods courses, and courses in their endorsement (subject) areas. We require two endorsements in our program.

The make-up of our students is a mix of traditional college age and non-traditional aged students, and many are first-generation college students. Because we have an extension program at the nearby military bases, we also have a number of students who are military personnel or who are spouses of military personnel.

Results

The following seven categories of response were identified from the candidates' essays: Developing the student, Making a difference, Sharing knowledge and experience, Utilitarian, Dispositional motivators, Destiny to teach, and Serving as a role model. The categories are ordered roughly from the more frequently mentioned to the less frequently mentioned aspects of motivation. The categories of statements give insight to motivations, but do not necessarily

reflect motivators directly. The categories developed tend to be fairly discreet, although some overlap may exist. We will report the type of statements identified for each of the categories along with illustrative statements representing each of the categories. Individuals who made each statement will be identified with an alphanumerical code – for example: (P-2).

Developing the student

Statements that fell into the category of *developing the student* tended to focus on helping students to achieve their potential in some way. This included helping students to learn, being able to motivate students to do well, getting students excited about learning, and inspiring them.

We found candidates were motivated by the belief that they would be able to further the development of their future students. They expressed their interest in making the contribution to students' development in a variety of ways. One candidate explained her intent to support her students by "helping them to be the best people they can be. . . . I will assist them in reaching academic and personal goals. . . . I enjoy watching the students succeed" (P-5). The motivations include both academic development and the more personal aspects of development. On the academic side, one candidate, a former engineer, mentioned students' infatuation with technology and spoke of his desire to make a connection between academics and interests. "I can help the students 'connect the dots' between the technology they love and the underlying math and science they study" (P-20).

Another strong aspect of this motivation was the interest in expanding or broadening the development of the students. From the belief in the potential of students to achieve "I have confidence in every student's ability to perform well" (P-13), through an acknowledgement of the teacher role in that development, "educators must steward our students' belief in themselves" (P-2), our teacher education candidates showed an interest in helping students to aspire to greater development. Whether it was to "Inspire learners to go beyond their expectations" (P-21) as one applicant put it or to further development, many of the candidates shared this sentiment, "It is my desire to infuse the same love of learning into each and every one of my students" (E-4).

Making a difference

Statements that fell into the category of *making a difference* tended to include ideas about making an impact either on the student or more broadly on society. Some specific ideas were the desire to help people, to contribute to student success, to promote the value of education, to develop lifelong learners, or to improve society.

It was interesting to observe the way that candidates expressed this concept. Although it appeared in many statements, it took on a number of forms. In some cases it appeared as a rather limited focus on the individual student as seen in the following two candidates' statements: "I have a passion to see young people succeed. . . One of the joys of my life has been helping teens reach the goals they have for their life [sic]" (P-6) and "I want to light a fire in children's minds" (E-1).

A number of the candidates took a broader view of the how they could make a difference for their students that reflected some influence that extended beyond the individual students. Statements from candidates such as "to contribute an experience to my students of intellectual enrichment that is truly empowering . . . but also how to become better teachers to themselves" (P-12), "My goal as an educator is to encourage, excite, motivate and inspire students to continue learning long after their formal instructional years" (P-22), "Education is the key to freedom and

opportunity" (E-7), and "It is the responsibility of the teacher to guide that learning and achieve the goals of the family and school. . . [I] believe in education as a key to success" (P-7) illustrate this broader view.

For many of the candidates, the influence was seen as even broader and was articulated as a chance to contribute to the community or society. That more global view can be discerned in the following: "From early in my life, I wanted to be a teacher; I believe in service to one's community" (P-10), "Professional educators perform a great service to society. They pass on knowledge and values to children and make the world a better place" (P-19), and "Teaching is the most important way to have a positive impact on society's future members. . . I feel I have an obligation to make this world a better place" (S-1). Although a bit trite, the sentiment is well illustrated in this statement, "I truly believe that teachers are the backbones to society. They are the ones who educate the future generations of our world" (E-8). There is a clear recognition and valuing of the chance to have an impact on society.

Sharing knowledge and experience

Statements that fell into the category of *sharing knowledge and experience* reflected two major concepts: to share content knowledge or to share knowledge and experience in general. The idea that they had enthusiasm for their content area and wanted to share that, or that they believed they could make their content area meaningful to the students was a part of this as was the notion that they had had experiences which would be beneficial to share with students.

There is a long-term perception that many individuals go into teaching because of a love of the subject matter. This idea does appear in our data; "I have loved science and reading since I was very young" (P-17) and "My technical knowledge, my eagerness to share that knowledge and my adaptive communication skills . . ." (P-20) reflect this idea. However our candidates more frequently cited a broader interest in sharing as their motivator. It may be in part a result of the fact that our program includes a significant number of older, new career candidates. As a result, statements like [my ability to contribute is] "grounded in many years of richly adventurous life experiences" (P-12), "Relating book knowledge to real world situations will help many students understand the need to learn" (P-16), or "I can share my job experience, work ethic, and lesson that I have learned in life" (S-1).

Many of the comments integrated that interest in sharing knowledge with an interest in making their content accessible to the students in a meaningful and motivating way. One candidate wrote "Knowing that a concept in my mind was successfully translated into words, filtered through my students' sense and individual perceptions, and arrived intact in their minds is a true feat indeed - and something too easy to take for granted" (P-15), while another simply stated "One mark of a great teacher is to show the practical application in life of not only the subject content, but of the learning process in general" (P-22). Both comments capture the bigger picture.

Utilitarian

Statements that fell into the category of *utilitarian* motivators generally reflected one of two concepts. First were responses that teaching was a "family friendly" profession, and second was the idea that the candidate recognized personal characteristics that made them well suited to be a teacher.

The utilitarian motivations tended to be things that showed a benefit to the candidate. Statements illustrating this included, "I chose teaching as my preferred profession because it is a respectable job to have" (E-20), "Another draw for becoming a teacher is the family friendly schedule" (E-10), "It is not the salary that motivates me to teach, although there are good health benefits and vacation time, which adds to the reason why I have chosen this profession" (E17), and "With this profession I will be able to give 100% in the classroom as well as at home," (E-8) a statement made by a candidate referring to summers off. While this last statement illustrates this simple benefit motivation it may represent a naïve view of the demands of teaching.

A somewhat less self-interest type of utilitarian motivation came from those candidates who had reflected on their characteristics and the requirements of the profession and had made a logical determination that they are well-suited to be teachers. Their statements reflected this view in an almost detached voice: "Being an educator is not an easy profession. I do best when I am challenged" (P-19), "I also seek the stimulation and challenges that will come with the job. I have spent years watching how hard teachers work" (P-25), and "I have many strengths that would make me a great asset to the students I work with. My characteristics include intelligence, being organized/analytical/problem solving, appreciating/embracing different perspectives/alternative ways of doing things, creativity, kindness/compassion/sensitivity mixed with the enforcement of rules/boundaries" (P-10). Each of these statements supports the idea that the candidate recognized personal traits that are matched to the demands of the profession.

Dispositional

Statements that fell into the category of *dispositional* motivators included that they loved children or that they loved working with students, they wanted to make learning fun, they were excited about learning or the field, they wanted to build relationships or that they demonstrated a sense of caring.

At the simplest level dispositional motivators reflected a love of children: "I am crazy about kids" (E-6), and "I just love to be with children, and watching how they grow and learn amazes me" (E-3) convey that basic idea. Often, this was reflected in a desire to make learning fun as illustrated in these statements "I think I can show them that science is fun and interesting" (P-18), "learning can be fun and exciting" (P-16), and "despite the mask of indifference students often wear in class, they become transparent when the 'light bulb' comes on as a new piece of knowledge makes a connections with their current understanding" (P-20).

Many of the remarks in this area extended the concept, revealing a desire to share a disposition, at times to the point of developing similar dispositions in their future students. Examples of this included "I think that the greatest gifts that I have to offer as a teacher are my natural wonder of and curiosity about the world in general . . . [These] help me to meet individuals right where they are" (P-12), "I can contribute my passion for relationship building. I do not want just to teach. I want to build trust and respect with students" (P-23), and "I want to be looked up to as someone who can make a lasting impression on the life and educational future of a young child" (E-8), are all statements grounded in this concept. Another candidates shared that "3 key components that will help me to positively impact the lives of the students that I teach… a tenacious value of empathy, a resilient sense of patience, and a transparent passion for teaching the skills to allow my students to be lifelong learners and to find success" (P-13).

Destiny to teach

Statements that fell into the category of a sense of *destiny to teach* reflected the idea that the candidates felt a calling to be a teacher, they always wanted to be a teacher, they loved school, they had members of their family who were teachers, or they were influenced by a favorite teacher.

Many of the candidates showed awareness of a sense that their motivation to teach has roots that transcend their own desires. This was exemplified by the remark "Every person has a calling; mine is to be a teacher. . . I believe that being a teacher will truly make me happy" (E-1). Another candidate, a career changer, put it this way, "Now that I can choose how I spend the remainder of my career, I want to be in a classroom" (P-9). And for some candidates, there was an acknowledgement that the impetus came from outside, "The profession actually chose me" was the statement of a candidate who referred to a comment made by a HS peer she was tutoring (S-2). One candidate simply said, "I believe I also have a God given gift of the ability to relate to young people" in explaining his choice (P-23).

The influence of the family tradition of teaching often functioned as a strong motivator. "Coming from a family of educators . . . I grew up in an education rich environment. . . . My intent has always been to be an educator. . . . I have a gift for teaching" (P-21). And for some early resistance is overwhelmed by that latent family influence: "My parents, as they are both educators. . . offered up the suggestion of becoming a teacher. . . . I ardently replied no. . . . [Now] I believe I could contribute much as a high school science or mathematics teacher. . . . My parents' suggestion all those years ago was correct" (P-24).

Sometimes, along the way, a special teacher had a powerful impact. Two candidates expressed this impact well when they reflected "I want to be there for them in the same way some of my past teachers were there for me-with passion, drive, understanding and enthusiasm"(E-9), and "I knew that I wanted to teach, and after I had Ms. A----, I knew I wanted to teach third grade. . . . Years later I nominated Ms. A---- for Who's Who Among America's Teachers , and she was selected. . . . [I hope] I am able to inspire someone in the positive manner that Ms. A---- influenced my life" (E-10).

Serving as a role model

Statements that fell into the category of *serving as a role model* made explicit reference to the desire to be able to influence student through their role as a teacher.

The following statements capture this sense: "Nearly every student can relate a story as to how one teacher made a difference in their life. I want to be that teacher" (E-14); "I will be a positive role model and foster an environment where students can enjoy learning and thrive" (P-4); "I believe the personal integrity and self-respect of any teacher is of the utmost importance in providing a positive role model to children" (P-17). Clearly, these statements reveal the value of a strong role model in making a difference in students' lives and the motivation to become such a role model.

Discussion

The categories identified in the candidates' application essays seem to group into three, not always mutually exclusive, themes: Altruism (Developing the student and Making a difference), Personal Fulfillment (Making a difference, Sharing knowledge and experience,

Dispositional motivators, Destiny to teach, and Serving as a role model), and Convenience of Teaching (Utilitarian).

Altruism speaks to the importance of helping young people succeed. It is the recognition that teaching is a worthwhile career because of the impact teachers have on children and society. They have enjoyed their experiences working with children and want to continue to have those interactions in a way that contributes to those children's development. They feel a social responsibility to give back to society. They want to help others. This is consistent with Krecic and Grmek's (2005) identification of altruistic reasons as those which reflect inner motivation to gain satisfaction from the results of one's work. Similarly, the statements in the current study associated with altruism resonate with Kyriacou and Coulthard's (2000) characterization of altruistic reasons as focused on the socially worthwhile, the desire to help children succeed, and improvement of society.

Personal fulfillment is often the intrinsic motivator for our teacher candidates. They imagine teaching from their perspective as a student. They liked school; it was fun. They also played school as a child. Another aspect of this theme is their expertise in their subject matter. They love their content and are eager to share it with young people. Often they have had life experiences from which they have gained insight, and they want to share those insights. Many of our teacher candidates are interested in teaching because of strong teacher role models in their lives: coaches, family members, and other teachers who influenced them. The motivators we found are parallel to those identified by Kyriacou and Coulthard (2000) as intrinsic reasons, as seen in the satisfaction of the functions of the job activity and interest in using and sharing their subject matter knowledge. Krecic and Grmek (2005) labeled this theme as self-realization, including ideas that epitomized personal and professional growth, and the performance of useful and influential work. Manuel and Hughes (2006) found personal fulfillment to be the most frequently cited intrinsic motivator identified by pre-service teacher candidates.

The convenience of teaching theme recognizes there are pluses and minuses to the profession. Teacher candidates are cognizant of the problems teachers encounter, and low pay, and a status that may be seen as low by some while honorable by others. The element of fit is also a prominent factor – they saw their personal characteristics as equipping them to be a good teacher, lending a sense of comfort in their choice to be a teacher. These reasons include ideas that were identified by Kyriacou and Coulthard (2000) as extrinsic reasons, and as material reasons by Krecic and Grmek (2005). They focus on things external to the job, such as the vacations, hours, and job security.

As we compared the themes we identified to those reported in the literature, we see strong resemblances of these themes to the motivation factors identified in those studies.

Watt and Richardson (2008) found that teacher motivations are influential from the outset of their entry into teacher education programs, evolve through their educational studies, and influence their teaching careers. In light of this, and based upon the motivations expressed, we believe there is a need to examine our teacher education program, particularly to refine the role coursework and practicum experiences play in preparing students for the realities of the teaching profession, realities that are sometimes, but not always, reflected in their reasons cited for choosing to enter the teaching profession.

Alexander (2008) discussed the ability to profile the teaching profession: to examine who is drawn to teaching and why; who experiences success or feels personal satisfaction in teaching and who does not; what relationships may exist between teachers' motivations and pedagogical practices; and how this impacts students. Given the motivations identified in this study it would

seem important to undertake additional studies to explore the interconnections among these variables.

Hoy (2008) observed that "The motivations of teachers are as complex and evolving as the challenge of teaching itself" (p. 497). There is tension between the realities of teaching and the altruistic motivations for entering the profession. Hoy argued that teacher preparation programs need to address these tensions: between serving and surviving, between caring and control, between deep investment and protective distance. Our limited study identified motivations to become a teacher that echoed these tensions. As a result, we concur that benefits can accrue from teacher preparation programs examining ways to reconcile these tensions.

Implications

Our research adds to the growing body of recent research on student motivation. Students' motivations appear not to have changed with the complexities and demands of teaching today. In spite of the continuing challenges and demands of teaching, students displayed essentially the same motivations for entering the teaching field as their predecessors. This raises the question of whether students are aware of the challenges and demands of the teaching profession. Another concern is that although their years in the classroom as a student give them some understanding of teaching, is it a credible understanding of teaching and all that it encompasses. Do students form their conceptions of teaching based on their own memories of being a student? And are these memories realistic? As teacher educators, how do we help students separate their fantasies about teaching from the realities of being a teacher?

Motivations to teach are multifaceted and complex. Students need to consider more than just expertise in their academic subjects and pedagogy. They need to understand how their own goals and motivations for teaching affect their well-being and the well-being of their students. In response, teacher education programs must consider these complexities in designing and delivering their programs. One of the challenges for teacher education is how to structure programs to meet the needs of teacher candidates, to meet state and federal requirements, and to give students a realistic picture of teaching. To inform this design, we plan to query our students at the end of student teaching to see if their motivations for teaching have changed and how their program may have contributed to any change. We expect those data, in conjunction with the data from the current study, to be helpful in determining possible ways to better meet the needs of teacher candidates.

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