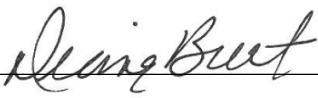


**Keeping the Fires Burning: Cultivating an Ongoing Passion for Teaching**

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### Abstract

It has been well documented that having passion for one's work is closely related to feelings of job satisfaction, happiness, and well-being. In this inquiry, I examine how passion in teaching is sometimes lost over time and how teachers can rekindle it. A qualitative research design was used, and a constructivist approach serves as the theoretical framework. A comprehensive literature review guided the methodology for the study, employing the methods of inductive reasoning, rich description, and reflexivity. I examined various current literature related to teacher passion, reflectively explored my relationship to passion in my teaching, a process which allowed me to better understand ways that I can create enduring passion and enthusiasm for my teaching practice over time. On my journey I made three discoveries: (a) the experience of having passion for my teaching practice ebbs and flows; (b) passion for teaching is heart-based more than skills-based; and (c) passion for teaching is a *way of being* that can be cultivated, but not explicitly taught. This study also has broader relevance because it exemplifies that a teacher's inner life, as investigated and voiced through their subjective experience, is a legitimate topic in education and educational development. It is my hope that the theory, knowledge, and personal reflections presented in this comprehensive literature review will assist other classroom teachers who similarly seek to take ownership of their relationship to their teaching and develop skills that will help them cultivate and maintain an ongoing passion for their teaching career.

*Keywords:* teacher passion, teacher engagement, reflexivity, reflection on practice, self-improvement

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### **Keeping the Fires Burning: Cultivating an Ongoing Passion for Teaching**

There is a lot of attention in education given to fostering students' engagement in their learning. Much less attention, however, is given to fostering teachers' engagement in their teaching. This surprises me since it is generally agreed that teachers "set the tone" for the student learning experience. Accordingly, it seems logical that more importance should be placed on investigating and understanding what makes a teacher feel engaged in their teaching practice. My belief is that engagement stems first from a sense of passion. Day (2004) believed "Passion is not a luxury, a frill, or a quality possessed by just a few teachers. It is essential to all good teaching" (p. 11). Furthermore, when a teacher is passionate about their teaching practice, they are perceived as more engaging educators by their students, and this has a positive outcome on student achievement (Bullough et al., 2002; Fried, 2001). However, some teachers lose their passion for teaching over time for various reasons, such as the curriculum, the students, institutional pressures, feeling devalued by society, a lack of work-life balance, personal challenges that result in disengagement from their practice, or even boredom.

Throughout my almost 30-year career, I have experienced feelings of disconnection and a diminished passion for my teaching practice numerous times for many of the reasons listed above. Although I consider myself a teacher at heart, at times I have even contemplated leaving the profession to explore what I considered *less emotionally taxing occupations*, like real estate agent or home stager. However, I have discovered that my passion for teaching ebbs and flows: when it is flowing, I can hardly contain the joy; when it is ebbing, I feel ineffectual and inadequate at best. I suspect I am not alone here. The teaching profession is challenging! Palmer (2007) described it this way: "teaching tugs at the heart, opens the heart, even breaks the heart — and the more one loves teaching, the more heartbreaking it can be" (p. 11). Accordingly, my

motivation for undertaking this research topic stems from my desire to keep my heart open and to better understand and learn to foster an ongoing passion and enthusiasm for my classroom teaching practice over time. Ultimately, when teaching passion wanes, like it periodically does for many educators, it is important to find ways to rekindle it.

### **Research Questions**

This, then, is the context in which I frame my research question: “How can teachers cultivate ongoing passion for their teaching practice?” The following four sub-questions were used to guide my qualitative study:

- What is the role of passion in teaching?
- What underlying factors influence a teacher’s passion for teaching?
- What are some barriers to feeling passionate about teaching?
- How can teachers nurture their ongoing passion for teaching?

### **Theoretical Framework**

To help me achieve my goal, the theoretical framework I applied to my literature review combined constructivism and reflexivity. Constructivists seek to understand the world of human experience and believe that “research can never be objectively observed from the outside rather it must be observed from inside through the direct experience of the people” (Mack, 2010, p. 8). Knowledge, then, is gained through personal experience and the goal of the researcher is to seek to understand rather than explain. In a classroom setting, teachers and learners construct their own meaning from events, so it is accepted that reality is subjective and a worthy, significant topic. For me, this means that the knowledge I gain about cultivating teacher passion through the interpretation of my own teaching experience is a valuable and credible source in and of itself, full of sincerity and resonance.

Reflexivity has been defined by scholars many ways. Bruno et al. (2011) proposed that it is “a conversation with the situation, which includes a dialogue with one’s own and others’ minds” (p. 528). Cunliffe (2016) described it as a kind of knowledge that is constructed through dialogue and negotiation. Gray (2004) stated that reflexivity allows both insight into our experiences and an understanding of how that insight has been constructed. What all these definitions have in common is that reflexivity is rooted in self-examination that leads to self-awareness. When applied to a research study, reflexivity allows the researcher to cultivate an awareness and understanding of their thinking and meaning making process as they research so they can then find the words to describe their learning to others. Ultimately, applying the research lens of constructivism and reflexivity emphasized my intentionally subjective experience through personal reflection as a legitimate way to construct meaning in the research. Moreover, the inclusion of personal reflections on my teaching practice (primarily through long periods of quiet, thoughtful contemplation—a meditation of sorts) allowed me to explore and discover how my personal values, attitudes, interests, habits, and experiences relate to my passion for teaching.

### **Philosophical Underpinnings**

To further clarify my positionality, I identify myself as a qualitative researcher situated in the constructivist paradigm. Accordingly, I believe meaning is created by individuals within social settings and knowledge is gained through personal experience. Therefore, there is no single reality or truth; rather, reality needs to be interpreted. For my study, I interpreted my reality through the lens of my social identity and social location (using an intersectional framework), which looks something like this: white, woman, heterosexual, cisgender, mother, divorced, middle class, middle-aged, university educated, financially secure, able bodied,

emotionally adept. Additionally, I consider myself a student-centred teacher who believes that subject matter is important, but the inner landscape of students' lives is equally important. My role as a researcher and lone participant in my qualitative study was to seek to understand and find meaning in my topic and my experience rather than explain it (Mack, 2010).

### **Relationship to Research**

Researchers who adopt a qualitative perspective are more concerned with understanding an individual's experiences and perceptions of the world than imposing a scientific method and collecting facts. To compare, a positivist stance did not suit my study because my topic is not trying to disprove a hypothesis; rather, it emphasizes how I construct meaning regarding my research question: "How can teachers cultivate ongoing passion for their teaching practice?" Scientific methodologies and methods, therefore, were not an appropriate choice for me because my ontological assumption is that reality is subjective, that meaning is constructed based on an individual's interpretation of their experiences, and that knowledge is gained through personal experience (Mack, 2010). Ultimately, my data was not intended to produce objective, scientifically measurable, or quantifiable outcomes, like positivism does. Instead, my study was more subjective in nature and focused on my analysis, perceptions, personal experiences, and insights as they related to my investigation of the scholarly literature regarding my topic.

### **Methodology**

This qualitative comprehensive literature review is based in constructivism and reflexivity. I incorporated my subjective experience through personal reflection to create meaning in the research. Greene (2006) contends that there are four domains that shape the framework of all methodologies in both the quantitative and qualitative research traditions: (a) philosophical assumptions and stances; (b) logical inquiry; (c) guidelines for research practice;



and (d) sociopolitical commitments. Additionally, Greene (2006) explained how the four domains interact to support persuasive research:

A methodology for social inquiry gains credibility and persuasiveness when all of these domains act in concert with one another, when their interlocking connections are smooth and well oiled, when the overall presentation is strong, coherent, well articulated and thus persuasive. (p. 94)

Onwuegbuzi and Frels (2016, Chapter 3) cited Greene's (2006) influential article to support their view that in addition to being a research tool and method, a comprehensive literature review (CLR) is a valid "stand-alone" methodology that represents a broad approach to research and can be rooted in several philosophical frameworks, including that of this paper, constructivism.

Accordingly, they developed a seven-step model for conducting a CLR that they sub-divided into the exploration phase, the interpretation phase, and the communication phase (see Appendix A).

My literature review process included all of seven steps outlined by Onwuegbuzi and Frels:

1. exploring my beliefs and topic;
2. initiating my search;
3. organizing my information;
4. selecting /deselecting my information;
5. expanding my search to include documents and secondary data;
6. analyzing and synthesizing my findings; and finally,
7. writing my Major Academic Report.

## **Methods**

Constructivist philosophers believe that multiple realities of the same phenomenon can coexist. Accordingly, literature reviewers who employ a constructivist approach will place high

value on meaning-making as it relates to the human experience (Onwuegbuzi & Frels, 2016, Chapter 3). Therefore, the research methods that I used to gather data for my CLR included: (a) applying inductive reasoning to the analysis of the common themes and unique ideas that emerged from the books and articles I explored about my topic; (b) using rich description to establish a contextual understanding with my reader; and (c) sharing reflexive insights about the relationship of the literature to my life, teaching practice and teaching experiences. I used italics to highlight and distinguish my insights throughout the paper. Together, these methods helped me achieve my goal: to explore how teachers (like me) can cultivate an ongoing passion for their teaching practice and to share my findings with others who may seek to do the same.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Since I am both the researcher and the sole participant in my study, it did not require REB approval. Accordingly, my ethical considerations focused on limiting the bias in my writing by ensuring that I included notable, credible, relevant, peer-reviewed sources in my literature review and that I employed bracketing techniques to my analysis and reflections on my practice. Bracketing methods are used to decrease the influence of a researcher's preconceptions and assumptions on the research being performed (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Four ways I employed reflexive bracketing in this literature review included: (a) keeping a reflexive journal prior to defining my research question, (b) keeping reflective notes throughout the data collection process, (c) dialoguing with my supervisor about my research before, during, and after data collection, and (d) disclosing all biases within the research itself as much as I was able to (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Ultimately, bracketing techniques helped make my research findings more transparent and trustworthy by revealing my personal experiences and my epistemological and ontological leanings.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The limitations and criticisms of constructivism voiced by many traditional researchers is that it is not scientific enough, not generalizable, and entirely subjective (Mack, 2010). Furthermore, reflection as a data collection method is criticized by the same group for having the following limitations: it is overly subjective, it is impossible to be impartial, it relies on the limitations of memory, it is self-indulgent, and it is not “real” scientific research (Gray, 2017). However, it can also be argued that *all* research is subjective since one can never fully divorce themselves from their perspective as the researcher (Mack, 2010). Moreover, even though constructivist findings cannot be scientifically generalized to other situations using measurable data, the research can still resonate with others and inform their practice, so it has value and significance in its own right (Mack, 2010). As previously mentioned, I strived to minimize these limitations in my study by employing bracketing to reveal what has influenced my assumptions about knowledge and social reality.

### **Literature Review and Critique**

#### **Passion Defined**

Passion is a slippery word that has various definitions and understandings depending on the context. Generally, having a “passion for something” is understood in relation to an activity that people enjoy, find important, and want to invest their time and energy in (Carbonneau et al., 2008; Halonen & Lomas, 2014; Vallerand et al., 2003; Yukhymenko-Lescroart & Sharma, 2019). Many current discussions about passion as it relates to teaching, learning, and well-being begin with an explanation of Vallerand et al.’s (2003) *Dualistic Model of Passion*, a quantitative study that implemented *The Passion Scale* (see Appendix B) to explore an individual’s motivators for feeling passion (Carbonneau et al., 2008; Halonen & Lomas, 2014; Yukhymenko-

Lescroart & Sharma, 2019). It distinguished two types of passion: harmonious passion and obsessive passion. Harmonious passion is driven by choice and enjoyment for an activity and associated with positive outcomes, like feelings of well-being and personal satisfaction. Obsessive passion is driven by external pressures or compulsivity and linked to undesirable outcomes, like shame and a negative outlook on life. In an exploration of this, Carbonneau et al.'s (2008) study of 494 teacher participants based on structural equation modelling, supported Vallerand et al.'s findings that higher levels of harmonious passion for teaching had a positive correlation to increased feelings of work satisfaction and decreased teacher "burnout" over time.

The results from Halonen and Lomas's (2014) qualitative grounded theory study suggested something slightly different: that passion is more of a "way of being" found within an individual and less related to a specific activity for which one feels enthusiasm. Rather, it is *inherent* in the person, and certain people approach their entire lives with passion. They identified two central components of encompassing a passionate way of being: having purpose and being authentic. In their study, *having purpose* was related to possessing a clear sense of direction, a focus, and an active motivation to positively shape one's life. *Being authentic* was explained as living according to one's values and beliefs. Together, these attributes foster what Halonen and Lomas called "a quality of the self" (p. 21) that is central to their understanding of how passion is generated and maintained. Further, and most importantly, their findings eliminate the necessity of having to engage or "get stuck" (p. 27) in a specific activity to cultivate passion, whereby making the phenomenon of passion more accessible and dynamic.

*As I ponder the above "expert" definitions and understandings regarding passion, I find myself relating to both concepts of how passion is developed: as it correlates to having a positive (harmonious) enthusiasm toward a specific activity, and as it connects to a wider ranging "way*

*of being” in the world. At differing times throughout my adult life, I have experienced passion for many activities: running, ceramics, cooking, making beaded jewelry, gardening, yoga. Like Vallerand et al.’s (2003) concept of harmonious passion, all of them brought me enjoyment and the desire to continuously invest my time and energy doing them. Some of them I continue to be passionate about as I enter my mid-fifties (cooking and gardening, for example), but others I no longer participate in (like running). I was once very passionate about running, but now I am not. After fifteen years, the demands of workplace, parenthood, and ailing joints eclipsed my enjoyment and passion for running. This is a good example of the limitations of Vallerand et al.’s (2003) definition of passion that Halonen and Lomas (2014) addressed in their study—that attaching passion to a specific activity makes it a fleeting phenomenon because a person’s interests, circumstances, and abilities very often change over time like mine did. So, by extension, in my quest to explore ways to sustain an ongoing passion for my teaching practice, I am discovering that engaging in specific activities have often created temporary passions in my life. Further, as proposed by Halonen and Lomas (2014), cultivating a more all-encompassing passionate “way of being” by following one’s purpose and being authentic may be more likely to result in ongoing and consistent passion throughout one’s life and career. It makes sense to me that when passion comes from the inside it will naturally emanate into every facet of one’s life—like viewing life through the lens of passion. Ultimately, the older I get the more I understand passion to be like the way that Halonen and Lomas described it—as the capacity to have a loving and appreciative relationship to ALL my experiences. Accordingly, having passion for my teaching practice connects to a wider ranging passionate “way of being”.*

### **The Role of Passion in Teaching**

It is widely agreed upon that having passion is imperative to good teaching and learning (Carbonneau et al., 2008; Cruz & Herzog, 2018; Halonen & Lomas, 2014; Li & Rawal, 2018; Palmer, 1998; Prout et al., 2019; Yukhymenko-Lescroart & Sharma, 2019). Often, when students are asked what makes them successful at school, they will thank a teacher who in some way made a difference in their lives. Accordingly, passionate teachers share more than just their knowledge, time, and energy with students; they put their *hearts* into their teaching (Palmer, 2007). Li and Rawal (2018) referred to this relationship as having a kind of “love” toward one’s teaching profession. Halonen and Lomas (2014) called the connection “a passionate way of being” (p. 24). Yukhymenko-Lescroart and Sharma (2019) referred to it as possessing a “sense of life purpose” (p. 864) while Cruz and Herzog (2018) used the term “vitality” (p. 27) to describe the relationship. Although the terminology is somewhat different, each researcher similarly emphasized the deep emotional engagement that passionate teachers feel toward their practice. For them, teaching is not merely a job; it is a way of life.

Further, studies related to increased teacher passion for their work almost unanimously demonstrated a positive association to reported feelings of job satisfaction, life satisfaction, subjective happiness, and job retention (Carbonneau et al., 2008; Yukhymenko-Lescroart & Sharma, 2019). Not surprisingly, feelings of increased teacher passion were also positively correlated to sustaining a teacher’s long-term investment in both their teaching practice and their relationships with students (Cruz & Herzog, 2018; Li & Rawal, 2018; Palmer, 2007; Prout et al., 2019). Chiong et al.’s (2017) examination of the motivators for why “long-serving” teachers (defined by them as those with 10 years or more of teaching experience) stay in the teaching profession revealed that they are primarily altruistic ones: making a difference to pupils’ lives

and making a difference to society. Ultimately, it circles back to Palmer's (2007) premise that "good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; it comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher" (p. 10).

*My belief is that teacher passion is essential for, and inextricably linked to, good teaching. In fact, my interest in teaching was sparked by a wonderfully passionate teacher I had in Grade 7, Mrs. Jensen. She was knowledgeable, friendly, respectful, kind, and generous with her time. She loved teaching and her devotion toward her students and enthusiasm for her subject matter were obvious to anyone in her presence. I entered Mrs. Jensen's class at a difficult time in my childhood. My parents were in the process of divorcing and were very engrossed in the adult details of their own lives. Mrs. Jensen, however, always had time to extend a warm smile or hug, suggest the perfect library book, or offer encouragement for a poem I had written. She epitomized Palmer's (2007) conviction that good teaching is less about pedagogic teaching techniques and more about a teacher's ability to connect with their students and connect their students to the subject. Mrs. Jensen loved teaching English and loved her students, and I will forever treasure how her passion, kindness, and generosity positively shaped my life. I suspect that my story is like that of many other teachers who were similarly inspired to teach because of teachers they had growing up.*

*Essentially, I have always wanted to be just like Mrs. Jensen. Through my 12-year-old girl's lens, she was the perfect teacher personified: she knew everything, she was devoted to her students, and her students worshipped her. So, after I became a teacher, imagine my surprise to discover that the kind of passion and enthusiasm I idolized in Mrs. Jensen is not always available to me? Some days (weeks and months too, if I am being honest) I am tired, or distracted, or bored, or annoyed, or overwhelmed. At times in my career, I have questioned*

*whether I am “cut-out” for teaching and wonder if I measure up to someone like Mrs. Jensen. Then, some time passes, and my wise adult self remembers that my version of Mrs. Jensen only exists in the remembrances of a lonely young girl in her formative years. Further, as I reflect through the lens of a middle-aged woman, I feel certain that Mrs. Jensen surely experienced the same ebb and flow moments throughout her teaching career as I do. Like me, she was a wife, a mother, and a teacher—with surely many more intersecting roles that my grade seven self would never have known about or understood. Ultimately, good days and bad days are not just part of the teaching experience; they are part of the HUMAN experience. Being a teacher is integral to my identity, as it was Mrs. Jensen’s, and my quest in this paper to explore ways to nurture my ongoing passion for my teaching practice is a testament to this.*

### **Underlying Factors That Influence a Teacher’s Passion for Teaching**

There are several studies published regarding what influences a teacher’s passion for their teaching practice. Li and Rawal’s (2018) research focused on teacher emotions and maintained that teachers fall in and out of “love” with their teaching practice throughout the course of their career. This love is either enhanced or diminished by work-related sociopolitical factors like their relationship with students, institutions, and social contexts. When the love is enhanced, teacher passion and positivity bloom; when it is diminished, it can contribute to teacher burn-out, stress, and career change. By its nature, the teaching profession encompasses long periods of engagement and interactions with students and staff and a demanding workload, which can be emotionally draining and discouraging. This can lead to “burnout.” The *Maslach Burnout Inventory* manual (Maslach et al., 1996) describes burnout as “a syndrome of emotional exhaustion (emotional overextension and exhaustion), depersonalization (uncaring attitude towards others), and reduced personal accomplishment (low levels self competence and



satisfaction with own work)” (p. 167). Kim et al.’s (2019) meta-analysis of the literature regarding the “Big Five” personality traits (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability) and their relationship to teacher effectiveness and burnout revealed that, of the five traits, teacher emotional stability, extraversion, and conscientiousness were most negatively associated with burnout.

This segues nicely into Barnes et al.’s (2019) autoethnography study that suggested teacher passion and its outcome, *resilience* (which I understand to be a by-product of emotional stability), is closely associated with having one’s values align with their work-life, developing friendships (extraversion), and having opportunities to be creative. In a strictly teaching context, Gu and Day (2013) defined resilience as “the capacity to maintain equilibrium and a sense of commitment and agency in the everyday worlds in which teachers teach” (p. 26). Further, their investigation of teacher resilience included the results of their 2001–2006 VITAE project that measured the associations between teachers’ perceived commitment and resilience and their professional life stage (Day et al., 2006). The study revealed that early career teachers (0–7 years) and middle career teachers (8–23 years) were more likely to retain their sense of resilience than late career teachers (24–31+ years). The result for each group’s perceived sense of resilience were as follows: early career teachers, 78%; middle career teachers, 76%; and later career teachers, 56%.

*In my identification as a “late career teacher,” Gu and Day’s (2013) findings affirm the importance of my quest to explore ways to cultivate an ongoing passion for my teaching practice over time. I fall in and out of love with teaching—an ebbing and flowing that I have learned to become accustomed to over the years. Interestingly, I now actually find comfort in the predictability of the cycle and understand it more as my dynamic, ever-evolving relationship to*

*teaching rather than as an indication that I am no longer resilient enough for the demands of teaching life. I have also come to realize that whenever I have entertained the idea of a career change, it has been primarily related to the combination of three factors: a demanding workload, demanding students, and a demanding home life. I think that every teacher ultimately discovers for themselves what their personal “kryptonite” is based on their own limits and potentials, and these three are mine. Further, I have discovered that separately, these factors are manageable for me, but together they create a “perfect storm” that can cause me to temporarily fall out of love with my teaching practice. However, like a treasured longstanding friendship, I have thus far always been able to eventually find my way back to embracing my teaching practice with affection and sweet familiarity despite the inner and outer conflicts that periodically arise in me. I think this demonstrates a good example of Gu and Day’s definition of resilience: “the capacity to maintain equilibrium and a sense of commitment and agency in the everyday worlds in which teachers teach” (p. 26). Resilience then, is an important ingredient to maintaining passion because it helps create the conditions that allow teachers to not lose heart during difficult times.*

### **Some Barriers to Feeling Passionate about Teaching**

Maintaining teaching passion over time, and especially during difficult circumstances, is challenging. Barnes et al., (2013), Cruz and Herzog (2018), Li and Rawal (2018), and Prout et al. (2019) all noted similar lists of barriers to fostering passion/enthusiasm/vitality/resilience in the teaching profession: heavy workload, insufficient recognition, lack of social connections, poor work-life balance, and personal life stressors. Carbonneau et al. (2008) added insufficient support from school administration, student discipline problems, and low salaries to the list. Palmer (2007) further added that it is a lack of identity that causes teachers to lose heart after years of teaching because “unlike many professions, teaching is always done at the dangerous

intersection of personal and public life” (p. 18) and requires being vulnerable each day to the possibility of indifference, judgement, and ridicule. Accordingly, Palmer (2007) imparted that teachers often “play-act the teacher’s part” (p. 18) to protect their feelings of vulnerability; this, in turn, isolates them from both their truth (i.e., authenticity and identity) and their students. Like Palmer’s (2007), Halonen and Lomas’s (2014) concept of a *passionate way of being* also centred around possessing a strong sense of identity. In their study’s semi-structured interview process, teachers who lacked a clear sense of purpose and/or felt they were not living authentically according to their values and beliefs reported more feelings of depression, hopelessness, and the desire to escape their situation compared to those who identified as having them.

*I imagine that teachers with even a limited amount of teaching experience can relate to at least some of the barriers to passionate teaching identified above; as a late career teacher, I certainly can. Palmer’s (2007) iconic exploration focused on the “inner landscape” of a teacher’s life (as opposed to the outer) and asked the question “Who are you as a person and how does that affect who you are as a teacher?” Like Palmer’s two landscapes, I similarly understand the barriers to feeling passionate about teaching as comprising of two realms: the outer barriers and the inner barriers. The “outer” barriers are the challenges listed above that are imposed upon teachers and that they have limited control over like heavy workload, lack of recognition, insufficient support from school administration, student discipline problems, and low salary. When I reflect on my own teaching experience, the “outer” barrier that has consistently had the most impact on decreasing my feelings of passion for my job has been related to heavy workload. Accordingly, during teaching terms where my class sizes have been particularly large, or I was given a new course (or multiple ones!) to develop and teach for the first time, or I was allocated several particularly demanding courses in terms of assignments and*

*grading load all at once, I felt like I was functioning from “survival mode” rather than from a place of passion, enjoyment, and creativity. I liken it to feeling like I am teaching from the lowest rungs of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, with passion, which I understand as part of self-actualization, simply out of reach—at least temporarily. As I sit here and attempt to recall the frequency (and with all the limitations of my memory), it seems to me that my “passion funk” occurs approximately one academic term (semester) every five years—sometimes for part of the term, and sometimes for the full term. Fortunately, once the heavy workload cloud lifts and I feel less overwhelmed, I have thus far always been able to find my way back to my passion for my teaching practice.*

*In comparison, the “inner” barriers to feeling passionate about teaching (limited social connections, poor work-life balance, personal life stressors, a lack of identity and purpose) are the ones that teachers have more ability to influence with their life choices and habits. In my relationship to my teaching practice, the inner barriers are a consistent presence and an ongoing reason for the “inner work” I do (yoga, meditation, breathwork, nature walks, self-improvement reading) that has become a part of my daily practice, and even further, a part of ME (or my “way of being”). I will elaborate on my understanding of what “inner work” means: it revolves around consciously developing my self-awareness through self-exploration, self-understanding, healing, and ultimately, transformation. Although my definition may sound quite “spiritual” or “new age” to those who have never been compelled to ask the existential “Who am I?” question, the desire to know oneself is as old as humanity itself. The Buddha’s sage advice is well known today in both books and the internet: “Don’t believe anything you see, read, or hear from others, whether of authority, religious teachers or texts. Find out for yourself*

*what is truth, what is real.” Ultimately, I understand this message to be an invitation for people to take radical responsibility for their lives and their happiness.*

### **How Teachers Can Nurture Their Ongoing Passion for Teaching**

Based on research findings, Palmer (2007) candidly disclosed that many teachers “lose heart as the years of teaching go by” (p. 17). Several researchers have investigated this phenomenon in an attempt to offer strategies and to exemplify the characteristics that passionate teachers share. Cruz and Herzog (2018) surveyed 61 senior university faculty members (see Appendix C) about their job satisfaction and enthusiasm for work and based on their results, proposed that the following conditions foster teaching vitality and ongoing passion: (a) having sustained relationships with students and colleagues; (b) participating in scholarly life; and (c) undertaking meaningful activities. Prout et al.’s (2019) qualitative narrative inquiry study (based on the findings of principle investigator George Vaillant’s 1977 *Grant Study*) included 15 open-ended interview questions (Appendix D) to 11 veteran teachers who identified as having ‘positive’ teaching attitudes. In their findings, they prescribed “an elixir” of four key ways to stay passionate: (a) cultivate social connections in the school; (b) cultivate social connections outside of the school; (c) foster fewer, but deeper social relationships over many shallow ones; and (c) nurture long-term supportive relationships with family and friends. Palmer’s (2007) narrative inquiry exploration of a teacher’s inner life found that interacting with mentors, engaging in one’s subject area, and discovering one’s vocational calling, cultivates both teaching passion and teaching effectiveness. Halonen and Lomas (2014) advocated that educators cultivate a *passionate way of being* by following their sense of purpose and living authentically according to their values and beliefs. Ultimately, the commonality among all four studies were the positive correlations among (a) developing self-awareness and authenticity, (b) regularly

participating in social interactions with others (both in and out of the workplace), and (c) having a love of one's vocation and subject area.

*When I reflect on the ways that my research revealed how a teacher can nurture their passion for teaching, I am not surprised. To me, the list appears self-evident (though I should add that I spend a great deal of time consuming literature and media that explores topics like happiness, well-being, mindfulness, relationships, and gratitude, so this is my lens and may therefore not be self-evident to everyone). Accordingly, it makes sense to me that self-awareness, social connections with others, and loving one's work would lead to (or sustain) one's teaching passion. In fact, these are many of the same factors found in current literature, research studies, and media content that are widely accepted as true regarding general happiness, passion, and well-being. I suspect that few would disagree that achieving this kind of knowing and connection to our lives is something to aspire to. However, as I write this section, I am also hearing the maxim "easier said than done" echoing in my head. In my experience, cultivating and sustaining feelings of passion and happiness IS often easier said than done! For me, some teaching days, weeks, and months are really challenging, and during these times it is hard to connect to my feelings of passion toward my practice. Though, perhaps my sheer recognition of this phenomenon in my teaching practice exemplifies the first common strategy/characteristic commonality identified above: "developing self-awareness and authenticity." Maybe just the fact that I am curious about how my teaching passion ebbs and flows is exactly what will help me to maintain my teaching passion over time?*

*What I rarely question is the passion I feel for my subject area (writing). Even when the workload demands of my job overwhelm me, like they periodically do, I always light up when I think about or talk about topics related to the subjects I teach (essay writing and professional*

*writing). In this context, I strongly identify with Vallerand et al.'s (2003) concept of harmonious passion. I can easily lose track of time and spend hours creating or locating engaging and innovative resources for my classes. Furthermore, the excitement I sometimes feel even in anticipation of sharing my discoveries with students, brings me tremendous joy, satisfaction, and a sense of purpose in my life. For me, there is no greater compliment from students than when they smile and share in the classroom energy of my unexpected excitement and passion about a seemingly mundane topic like semicolon use; ultimately, I thoroughly identify with being an "English Geek" and embrace the title proudly!*

### **Key Findings from the Literature**

#### **Common Themes**

The first theme that presented itself in the literature I reviewed was that teacher happiness and having a passion for teaching are inseparable (Barnes et al., 2013; Cruz & Herzog, 2018; Halonen & Lomas, 2014; Li and Rawal, 2018; Palmer, 2007; Prout et al., 2019; Yukhymenko-Lescroart and Sharma, 2019). An unhappy person cannot be a truly passionate teacher and a passionate teacher is unlikely to be an unhappy person. Instead, it is an interdependent relationship. Consequently, a teacher's ability to manage the possible inner barriers (limited social connections, poor work-life balance, personal life stressors, a lack of identity and purpose) and outer barriers (heavy workload, lack of recognition, insufficient support from school administration, student discipline problems, low salary) of their professional and personal lives is essential to embodying the happiness and well-being needed to access one's passion for teaching. According to the literature, the agreed upon ways to manage the aforementioned barriers to happiness and passion included fostering meaningful social relationships and support systems,

participating in scholarly life, engaging in one's subject area, discovering one's vocational calling, and developing a solid sense of self.

Another recurring theme in the literature I reviewed was that cultivating social connections creates happier, more engaged, and more passionate teachers (Barnes et al., 2013; Cruz & Herzog, 2018; Halonen & Lomas, 2014; Palmer, 2007; Prout et al., 2019). In nearly every study I encountered, the authors noted a positive correlation between teachers who fostered meaningful relationships both inside and outside of work and higher reported levels of passion for their teaching. These findings are not surprising to me because they reflect the abundance of current research in both the applied sciences and social sciences that indicates the human need to connect socially with others is as fundamental as our need for food, water, and shelter. Prout et al.'s (2019) findings echo the conclusions found in much of the literature I reviewed:

Findings from our study indicated that veteran teachers remain passionate and enthusiastic in their work when they were actively engaged in collegial social networks. In addition, these veteran teachers employed strategic adaptive processes within their social networks which resulted in them reporting high job satisfaction and mental and physical wellbeing. (p. 2253)

Accordingly, teachers who lack meaningful social connections often also lack feelings of happiness, job satisfaction, a sense of purpose, and a passion for their teaching practice.

### **Unique Discoveries**

Palmer's (2007) reflection that the "connections made by good teachers are held not in their methods but in their hearts" (p. 11) was a profound discovery for me. Essentially, it declared that *we teach what we are*. As individual teachers, each day we each bring our *selves* to both our students and our teaching practice—"warts and all" as Coleridge coined. Further, our



students do the same, so the classroom milieu on any given day is like Forrest Gump's box of chocolates: "You never know what you're gonna get." Accordingly, knowing (and learning about) oneself is critical, and when this self-awareness is modelled in a classroom it further has the capacity to encourage others to do the same. Thus, beyond teaching techniques and teaching strategies (the primary focus of teacher-training programmes, in my experience), investigating the question "who is the self that teaches?" invites teachers to explore their heart's connection to their teaching practice. Ultimately, having passion for teaching is not something that teachers can fake or intentionally reproduce; instead, it requires authenticity and having a work-life that is closely aligned to one's personal values (Barnes et al., 2013; Palmer, 2007). Moreover, I found no evidence in my research to support that passion can be *taught* to teachers like a kind of pedagogy. Rather, my literature review indicates that teacher passion is related to the disposition of the teacher; it comes from within. It is paramount, then, that teachers go within and seek to better understand their hearts if they wish to stay passionate about their teaching practice throughout their career.

### **Application of Findings to Identified Problem**

As part of my research inquiry, I posed the question "How can teachers cultivate ongoing passion for their teaching practice?" In addition to exploring this question for the purpose of informing teaching practice in general, I also wanted to gain a better understanding of how to foster an ongoing passion for my own classroom teaching practice. I made three discoveries in my exploration. The first was that, like all feelings, the experience of having passion for my teaching practice waxes and wanes; it is not maintainable 100% of the time, and expecting that it should be only creates feelings of self-doubt and job dissatisfaction. I liken it to the Buddhist concept of non-attachment: when we attach to (or expect) that our experiences or relationships

with others need to unfold in a *specific* way for us to be happy or comfortable, we resist the reality of what is actually occurring in our lives. I have come to understand my feelings of passion toward teaching in a similar way: as a dynamic and ever-evolving relationship that increases and decreases according to the inner and outer barriers taking place in my life in the moment. Some teaching days inspire me, while others overwhelm me. However, this is also how feelings *in general* operate: people continually respond and react to the stimuli around them. Passion for teaching operates this way too. Now, when it fades, I can take comfort in the understanding (and acceptance) that it is temporary funk and not a reflection of whether I am an effective or committed teacher: I am. I encourage other teachers who may read this to similarly frame their relationship to teaching, especially during the more challenging times when self-doubt periodically arises.

Additionally, I have come to understand that having a passion for teaching is not skills-based as much as it is heart-based. I learned from Palmer (2007) that “as I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together” (p. 2). This was a BIG revelation that will inform my future teaching. It taught me that when I attend to the needs of my heart, I am simultaneously and innately also attending to my subject area, my students, and our classroom community. This reminds me of the instructions to passengers when flying to first secure their own mask before helping others to secure theirs in the event of a crash. When I apply this flight directive to the notion of teacher passion, I understand it to mean that if I do not first know myself and what is true for me, I will be ineffective for my students and subject matter because I will only be able to engage with them in an abstract and distant way. Self-knowledge fosters engagement, and passionate teaching requires engaged teachers. Moreover, Palmer (2007) asserted that teachers’ selfhood (their inner life) is a legitimate topic in education

and in conversations about educational reform and “critical to our individual and collective survival” (p. 3). Ultimately, self-knowledge serves us, our students, and the entire field of education. Accordingly, I would encourage any teachers who desire a more passionate relationship to their teaching to begin by deepening their relationship with themselves in whatever way speaks to them.

Lastly, I have learned that having a passion for teaching cannot be explicitly taught. Rather, it is more of a disposition or *way of being* in the world (Halonen & Lomas, 2014). Accordingly, feeling passion for my (outer) teaching practice is dependent on feeling (inner) passion for *all* my relationships. This, then, is where I intend to focus my time as I move forward in my teaching career. Out of curiosity, I completed the three teacher satisfaction surveys included in my appendices (Carbonneau et al.’s (2008) *The Passion Scale—Adapted for Teaching*; Cruz and Herzog’s (2018) *Senior Faculty Job Satisfaction Survey*, and Prout et al.’s (2019) *Grant Study Interview Questions*) to loosely assess my starting point.

My (unscientific) interpretation of the results revealed that I have a generally harmoniously passionate relationship to teaching, I am largely satisfied with my profession, and I have a solid degree of work-life balance. Thus, it appears that I am not at immediate risk for either teacher burnout or teacher attrition as identified in my literature review by numerous experts (Barnes et al., 2013; Cruz & Herzog, 2018; Li & Rawal, 2018; Prout et al., 2019). However, like I have shared, although I have never “lost” my passion for teaching, I do experience a fading passion for my teaching practice at times, and I suspect many teachers do too. When I reflect (with an awareness of the limitations of memory) on how I have felt during times when my teaching passion was at a low point, I recognize a pattern; in those moments, I had a strong desire to be alone. Ultimately, I felt overwhelmed and “too busy” so avoided social

interactions with friends and colleagues. Perhaps this is a pattern that I can explore in the future when it happens again. Instead of closing my heart, to borrow Palmer's (2007) terminology, in challenging teaching times, I could try opening it and staying connected to those around me: my family, my friends, my colleagues, my mentors.

### **Conclusion**

Palmer (2007) declared that many teachers "lose heart" throughout their teaching careers. The reasons are numerous: limited social connections, poor work-life balance, personal life stressors, feeling a lack of identity and purpose, heavy workload, lack of recognition, insufficient administrative support, student discipline problems, and low salary. Few would dispute that teaching is one of the most emotionally challenging professions. However, Palmer also offered hope: "When you love your work that much—and many teachers do—the only way to get out of trouble is to go deeper in" (p. 2). My motivation for undertaking this research topic stemmed from exactly that: my desire to "go deeper in" to my teaching practice and explore my ongoing relationship with my passion for teaching so that I can "keep the fires burning" for the rest of my career. This formed the foundation for my inquiry: to identify, record, understand, make meaning of, and share my exploration of how I can foster an ongoing passion for my teaching practice.

Ultimately, I discovered that my feelings of teaching passion predictably ebb and flow and always have; this awareness will allow me to be gentler with myself moving forward during times I may feel discouraged or doubt my effectiveness. Additionally, I have learned that when I attend to the needs of my heart and explore the question "Who is the self that teaches?" I open a portal to connect to my self, my students, and my subject, thus creating space for my passion to grow. Lastly, I have come to understand that passion comes from within. It is a *way of being* in the world and so I intend to continue developing the habits that (for me) feel authentic to foster a

passionate disposition like meditation, mindfulness, gratitude, time in nature, and social connections. Furthermore, I am hopeful that my study will have transferable significance and that my exploration of my understanding of teaching passion and my ongoing relationship to it will provide a model of self-examination for other classroom teachers to follow who similarly seek to take ownership of their ability to cultivate ongoing passion and engagement in their teaching practice.

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**Appendix A: The Three Phases of the Seven-Step Model**  
(from Onwuegbuzi & Frels, 2016)

The seven steps of the Comprehensive Literature Review (CLR) process are sub-divided into the following three phases: Exploration, Interpretation, and Communication.

**Exploration Phase**

Step 1: Exploring Beliefs and Topics  
Step 2: Initiating the Search  
Step 3: Storing and Organizing Information  
Step 4: Selecting/Deselecting Information  
Step 5: Expanding the Search to Include One or More MODES (Media, Observation(s), Documents, Expert(s), Secondary Data)

**Interpretation Phase**

Step 6: Analyzing and Synthesizing Information

**Communication Phase**

Step 7: Presenting the CLR Report

**Appendix B: The Passion Scale—Adapted for Teaching**  
(from Carbonneau et al., 2008)

1. I spend a lot of time doing my job as a teacher.
2. I like my job as a teacher.
3. My job as a teacher is important for me.
4. My job as a teacher is a passion for me.
5. My job as a teacher is in harmony with the other activities in my life.
6. I have difficulties controlling my urge to do my job as a teacher.
7. The new things that I discover doing my job as a teacher allow me to appreciate it even more.
8. I have almost an obsessive feeling for my job as a teacher.
9. My job as a teacher reflects the qualities I like about myself.
10. My job as a teacher allows me to live a variety of experiences.
11. My job as a teacher is the only thing that really turns me on.
12. My job as a teacher is well integrated in my life.
13. If I could, I would only do my job as a teacher.
14. My job as a teacher is in harmony with other things that are part of me.
15. My job as a teacher is so exciting that I sometimes lose control over it.
16. I have the impression that my job as a teacher controls me.

**Key for the Passion Scale**

# 1–4, Passion Criteria

# 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14, Harmonious Passion

# 6, 8, 11, 13, 15, 16, Obsessive Passion

**Appendix C: Senior Faculty Job Satisfaction Survey**  
(from Cruz & Herzog, 2018)

***Section 1: Likert-scale questions***

**Scale: Strongly Agree (1) Agree (2) No opinion or Neutral (3) Disagree (4) to Strongly Disagree (5).**

1. I am satisfied with my current work.
2. I am more satisfied with my work now than I was five years ago.
3. I am more productive in my work than I was five years ago.
4. I am more engaged with my institution than I was five years ago.
5. I am at a higher level of professional success than I was five years ago.
6. I contribute more to my institution than I did five years ago.
7. If I had to do it over again I would pick the same profession.
8. I regularly explore different disciplinary perspectives.
9. I look forward to coming to work.
10. I enjoy interacting with my students.
11. I enjoy interacting with my colleagues.
12. I am enthusiastic about my work.
13. I enjoy keeping up with current developments in my subject area.

***Section 2: Open-ended questions***

1. Please briefly describe the three aspects of your work that you find the most satisfying.
2. Please briefly describe the three aspects of your work that you find the least satisfying.
3. Please briefly describe a strategy or strategies that you use to maintain your engagement and enthusiasm for your work.

**Appendix D: *Grant Study* Interview Questions**  
(from Prout et al, 2019)

Six sections containing 15 open-ended questions were developed to guide the interviews:

**Social Connections – in and outside your school**

1. Tell me about the social group connections you have in your school.
2. Are there *specific ways* in which your social connections in schools have impinged, positively or negatively upon your teaching career?
3. What about social groups you have outside school – how important have they been to your ongoing teaching career?

**Qualities and depth of your Social Connections**

4. As you reflect upon all your social connections, do you identify specific people, or a smaller ‘close circle’ of friends and can you identify characteristics of these people that are significant to you?

**Family and Heroes**

5. How important have family/spouse/special heroes been to your success in teaching?

**Teacher Functions**

6. How comfortable are you in your role – satisfaction?
7. Would you comment upon ways in which you have experimented to improve your teaching?
8. In what ways has teaching been challenging for you?
9. How supportive of your work have leaders been over the years?

**Your Health and Social Connections**

10. If you were your own ‘health expert’ how would you describe your current physical health?
11. For the period of your teaching career how do you believe teaching has impacted upon your overall physical health?
12. Has teaching impacted upon your emotional health? If so, were there people within your social connections who were important to you then?
13. Are there tips you might have for colleagues you think may be struggling with their emotional well-being?

**Finally**

14. As you reflect upon your teaching career to date, what do you believe are the most effective coping strategies any teacher can adopt?
15. What advice would you give yourself if you were starting your teaching career this year?