

Research Note

The Purpose of Teaching and Teaching Experience: A Preliminary Analysis of a Qualitative Research in Progress

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This research examines the negative feelings of teachers in Hong Kong toward teaching in order to provide recommendations to improve teachers' emotional experience in professional settings. Many teachers in Hong Kong have been reported as being stressed, anxious, and depressed while teaching (Chan, 2011). These emotional experiences significantly affect both the teachers' well-being and quality of teaching (Sutton, 2005). Drawing on sociological perspectives of emotions (Turner & Stets, 2005), teachers' emotional experience is regarded as socially constructed, meaning that teachers' emotional experiences are shaped by how the teachers think they can accomplish their career goals of teaching (Saunders, 2013). Research shows that if teachers perceive that they successfully accomplish their career goals they have positive feelings, conversely, they report negative feelings when they do not reach their career goals (Santoro, 2011). Moreover, teachers may have different career goals and different degrees of the accomplishment of the career goals in different career stages (Goodson, 2008). In other words, understanding why teachers in Hong Kong feel negative about teaching requires explorations of their values, their perceptions of how successfully they accomplish their career goals in different career stages. Since the research is still in progress, this paper only presents a preliminary data analysis in order to inform the future direction of the study. In particular, this article only presents the findings about the participants' career goals of teaching in different career stages.

This study adopted a qualitative interview method since the method empowers the researcher to explore the meanings and social process. This was achieved through an in-depth investigation of participants' perspectives, feelings, and social interactions, with reference to social contexts (Seidman, 2006). By using maximum variation sampling and snowballing sampling strategies, the study interviewed 21 Hong Kong secondary schoolteachers who had different teaching experiences and taught different subjects and grades in 10 different Hong Kong secondary schools. The interviews were conducted between February and June 2012.

According to the findings, the career goals of teaching among the participants could be categorized into intrinsic, including subject-matter, working with children, and making a difference, and extrinsic, including job security, salary, and safe haven. Most of the participants taught because of the intrinsic career goals rather than the extrinsic ones, although some of them aimed at both types of career goals (see Table 1).

The analysis explored whether the career goals differed between the participants who had different amounts of teaching experience. Table 1 illustrates the teachers having 9-12 years of

Table 1:

Comparison between participant teachers' purpose of work, teaching experiences and other working experiences before teaching

Teaching experience (years)	Purpose of work		
	Intrinsic	Extrinsic	Both types
< 8	7	0	2
9-12	1	5	0
13-20	1	0	0
>20	2	1	2
Total	11	6	4

teaching experience tended to have extrinsic rather than intrinsic career goals. From the interview data, it was identified that the reason might be related to the economic environment that the participants faced when they graduated. In general, these participants graduated during 2000-2003, which was a period of economic depression in Hong Kong. At that time, the unemployment rate was high, around 6.9 to 8.6 % (Hong Kong Economy, 2012). These participants said it was hard for them to find jobs when they graduated. Although some of them found a job, they did not enjoy it because of low salary or stressful and unstable working conditions. Many of them said that teaching was a good choice, because teaching was a high-paying job with stable work conditions. Moreover, there were opportunities for them to enter into teaching profession at the time, because the Hong Kong government provided the Capacity Enhancement Grant to schools to employ temporary teaching staff to relieve regular teachers of their workload (Education Bureau, 2012). Many of these respondents were possibly extrinsically motivated to teach and this motivation might have influenced their expectations with regards to salary. Nevertheless, it is noted that some of the participants may have changed their career goals from extrinsic to intrinsic type because of prolonged interaction with students. These participants said that they had learned that the meaning of teaching was to help students to learn and to grow from teacher-student interactions and found that teaching was a meaningful occupation. Thus, they committed to make a difference in students' lives.

On the other hand, Table 1 shows that the participants with less than eight years of teaching experiences may have the intrinsic career goals rather than extrinsic career goals. This group of teachers graduated in the period of 2004-2010. During this time, the Hong Kong economy was not doing as poorly. The unemployment rate was not as high as it was between 2000 and 2003. Therefore, it may have been easier for these respondents to find other opportunities in the job market. In such a situation, those who still chose teaching may value something more than extrinsic rewards like salary. According to these participants, they chose teaching because they really wanted to devote themselves to make a difference in students' lives or to keep connected to the subject they loved.

Summary

The preliminary analysis suggests that the participants may hold different kinds of career goals in teaching and that the relationship between the career goals and teaching experience may be mediated by the economic environment. However, the analysis raises some questions which

require further study. In addition to the mediating effect of the economic environment, was there any direct relationship between amount of teaching experience and the career goals of teaching? To what extent did the teachers successfully accomplish their career goals of teaching? Did teaching experience empower or disempower them to accomplish the career goals? If so, why? What other factors affected (e.g. the teacher's gender, subjects taught, school administration) the teachers' career goals of teaching, perception, power, and emotional experiences? Was there any relationship between teachers' emotional experiences and the career goals of teaching? If there was, what was it? Did the teachers in different career stages feel differently towards teaching? This study continues to explore these issues.

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