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Title	What makes teachers tick? Sustaining events in new teachers lives.
Author(s)	Clarke, Aleisha M.
Publication Date	2009-05-07
Publication Information	Morgan, M., Ludlow, L.H., Kitching, K., O'Leary, M. & Clarke, A. (2009). What makes teachers tick? Sustaining events in new teachers lives. British Educational Research Journal, iFirst Article, 1-18.
Publisher	Taylor & Francis
Link to publisher's version	http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01411920902780972
Item record	http://hdl.handle.net/10379/2882
DOI	http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01411920902780972

Downloaded 2024-05-24T09:30:18Z

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What makes teachers tick? Sustaining events in new teachers' lives

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(Received 1 November 2008; revised 15 December 2008; accepted 17 December 2008)

To investigate what keeps teachers motivated on a day-to-day basis, we traced the importance of routinely encountered *affective episodes*. Significant research on emotions already highlights the relative importance of positive versus negative episodes, the importance of perceived origins of events and the need to differentiate between the frequency and affective intensity of episodes. Survey reports from 749 recently qualified primary teachers in Ireland strongly suggest the *absence* of positive experiences undermines commitment and efficacy rather than the *occurrence* of negative events. Furthermore, while remote structural factors may heavily influence teaching, it is the perception of events at micro-level that impinge most strongly on motivation. Finally, the importance of particular experiences was, crucially, more related to their frequency than intensity. A major implication for teachers' job satisfaction is the suggestion that while adverse episodes may be inevitably experienced, positive events (that occur independently of negative ones) fortify motivation and resilience.

Introduction

Children showed greater understanding of the concepts involved in recycling and composting...some told how they got their parents to recycle...I felt that their learning was worthwhile and how teaching can really make a difference.

A child completed a sentence scrambling exercise, recalling words learned since last September, completely and independently. I felt the work was paying off.

In the staff-room, a teacher made a remark that some of my previous class cannot read...I feel so worried that I didn't do enough for them...was my teaching good enough? Is it good enough at the moment? Are children losing out by being in my class?

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An earlier version of this paper was presented at the AERA annual meeting, Chicago, April 2007.

We did some standardised tests to identify children needing learning support. I did play down the importance of the tests but...one child got really upset as she couldn't do it all. I felt terrible that I would put a child in a situation where they felt stressed or inadequate. (extracts from diary of teacher satisfaction/dissatisfaction of SP, a 2nd grade teacher, for a week in late January 2006)

The extant literature goes to great lengths to document the reasons why people enter teaching—as well as on the important factors influencing teacher retention—but gives very little information on the influences that sustain teachers on a daily basis. There is considerable evidence from the US that teachers enter teaching for reasons to do with the intrinsic nature of the work: including 'making a difference', 'doing work they will enjoy' and 'enhancing lives of children' (Shipp, 1999; Farkas *et al.*, 2000). With regard to teacher retention, US data indicate that the absence of support structures (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003), low influence on their work and poor leadership (Stockhard & Lehman, 2004) and low earnings (Guarino *et al.*, 2006) are important factors in attrition. Findings from other countries support the picture of contrasting influences that are pertinent to entering and leaving teaching. A review of studies carried out in the UK (Spear *et al.*, 2000) found that job satisfaction and working with children were among the most important reasons for entering teaching while the least important were holidays, working hours, salaries and security. In addition, an Australian study (Sinclair *et al.*, 2006) found that working with children, intellectual challenge and helping others were major motivating factors for entering teaching. On the other hand, the disappointments experienced by UK and Australian teachers resulting from the low status and image of teaching, as well as job dissatisfaction (Scott *et al.*, 1999; Kyriacou & Kunc, 2007) echo the American findings.

However, we know little about what sustains teachers between these choice points. Even people who were initially committed to teaching experience so many challenges and changes (inside and outside school) that they constantly need to ask themselves whether 'teaching is worth it to them' (Hammerness, 2006, p. 431). While recognising that many have entered teaching 'to make a difference...to change the world or...improve the human condition' (Cochran-Smith, 2003, p. 374), over the long-haul, teachers need other sustaining factors including 'school conditions where they are successful and supported, opportunities to work with other educators in professional communities, differentiated leadership and advancement prospects and good pay for what they do' (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 391).

To attempt to map the kinds of occurrences that keep teachers motivated and to say why some kinds of events are more important than others, we focus on an effort to conceptualise the everyday recurring events that teachers experience routinely and which have an affective tone. Rather than looking at critical turning points (Galand *et al.*, 2007) we look at the *affective episodes* that happen every day and are the building blocks from which the full edifice of teachers' emotional experience is constructed. The defining features of affective episodes are: (1) they are coloured by a positive or negative feeling, (2) they are normally triggered by an interaction involving teachers' professional work and identity, (3) they have a beginning marked by the triggering of a feeling and end with the dissipation of that feeling and (4) they have the potential to recur routinely.

The rationale for the contention that affect provides a critical marker for the salience of recurring events comes from a blending of recent developments in the understanding of the sociology and social psychology of emotions and that locate affective outcomes at the core of the sense of self-identity and self-worth. The symbolic interactionist tradition in sociology links affect with confirmation of central features of self-identity (Turner & Stets, 2006). Its central thesis is that when an interaction results in verification of the self, positive emotions like satisfaction and pride will follow, while, in contrast, episodes that disconfirm that self result in any of several negative emotions including anger, guilt, shame, anxiety or distress. Recent and parallel developments in the psychology of self-esteem complement this view (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Crocker & Park, 2004) and add an important motivational proposition, *viz.*, that people have a constant need to seek self-esteem in the domain in which they have invested their self-worth. The link with emotions comes from the results of this quest; the enhancement of feelings of self-worth results in positive emotions while the loss of such feelings has negative emotional outcomes. Supportive evidence linking emotion with affirmation of the self in teaching comes from several studies including working on the impact of reform on teachers' professional lives (e.g. Kelchtermans, 2005; Van Veen & Slegers, 2008).

We do not deny the significance of the occasional breakthrough that teachers remember as exceptionally satisfying (Lortie, 1975) or the deep hurt that can be part of the experience of a school inspection (Perryman, 2007); rather we propose to 'fill in the blanks' somewhat between these highs and lows so that some indication of the *relative* importance of various kinds of events can be understood. In turn this will allow for an insight into how the great pressure of reform agendas, school re-structuring, accountability, high-stakes testing and other macro-movements translate to teachers' routine experiences. A convincing methodological argument inquiring about episodes, rather than the more common approach of describing 'typical' emotions around experiences comes from studies showing that seeking information on episodes in a way that is sensitive to the context of their occurrence, yields data that have a greater claim to validity and are less subject to bias than data from the more traditional questionnaire or open ended interview (Kahneman *et al.*, 2004).

Dimensions of affective episodes

Recent research and thinking on teacher attrition (e.g. Johnson & Birkeland, 2003) together with conceptualisations of identity salience in sociology (Turner & Stets, 2006) and self-worth in psychology (Crocker & Park, 2004), lead us to foreground three distinctions as being of particular significance in examining these episodes. These concern the relative importance of positive versus negative events, their perceived origin and the relative importance of frequency versus affective intensity of these experiences.

The mix of negative emotions like anger, desperation and fear with positive feelings of elation, pride and satisfaction among the most committed teachers has been well documented (Nieto, 2003). Furthermore, a recent study has demonstrated the

fluctuations in feelings from positive to negative and vice versa that occur within a short period, as in the extracts from the diary of SP above, describing the feelings of a teacher in a typical week (Kitching *et al.*, 2009). We cannot assume that negative feelings operate as a mirror image of positive; indeed, a major body of literature testifies to their asymmetrical effects (Taylor, 1991). Given the inevitability of the experience of negative events in teaching, this leads to the important policy question of whether teachers lose motivation because of the undermining effects of negative events *or* because of the absence of sustaining positive experiences.

Secondly, everyday events may be differentiated in terms of their *perceived* origin, specifically whether they have a proximal origin (classroom, school) or a distal origin (national/state or global). We suggest that immediate, proximal zones of experience may be relatively more salient because of the reference group involved. Specifically, events at classroom level are likely to involve just the individual teacher; those at school level focus on the school staff as a whole; national/state influences are relevant to a much wider reference group of teachers; and global factors are relevant perhaps to all teachers. In line with findings on attributions, we suggest that events that are relevant to a narrow reference group (self or school staff) will be more significant than those pertaining to all teachers in the state/country or to teachers in general. Our hypothesis derives from two related findings: teachers' meanings around educational practice centre largely on interactions with students (van den Berg, 2002) and the finding that the way major policy decisions are implemented depends heavily on the culture and leadership of organisations of schools (Spillane *et al.*, 2003; Butt *et al.*, 2005). There is evidence that any policy or programme is characterised by variability in its effects in various locations—an outcome that is a function of the schools and personnel that are the 'target' of the policy or intervention (Day *et al.*, 2007). For these reasons a particular focus is on teachers' *perceptions* of causes rather than with ultimate origins of social movements.

Finally, a fuller understanding of everyday events might be gleaned from taking into account both the *frequency* and *affective intensity* of experiences. Significant progress has been made to indicate the kinds of experiences that cause highs and lows in the teaching career (e.g. Hargreaves, 2000; Lasky, 2005), but rather less attention has been given to less dramatic but frequently occurring experiences. Studies of stress have underlined the negative impact of minor but recurring events (hassles) as opposed to major but infrequent traumatic events (Lazarus, 1991), while studies of affect in organisational psychology have demonstrated the contribution to job satisfaction of repeated but ordinary events (Brief & Weiss, 2002). We propose therefore to quantify the *affective significance* of events in terms of two components in a multiplicative way: affective intensity (negative, neutral or positive) by frequency.

What is the importance of affective significance?

The measurement of affective events in terms of their frequency x intensity can give a more comprehensive and balanced picture than a focus on a single emotional state arising from a new initiative or a specific feature of teachers' lives. In addition to the

intrinsic importance of affect, we will examine the value of the three conceptual distinctions outlined above in relation to teacher *efficacy* and *commitment*. We have selected these concepts on the grounds that they are most likely to provide a valuable snapshot of the motivation that sustains teachers on a daily basis.

Teacher efficacy has been shown to influence teachers' persistence, resilience when things go wrong and enthusiasm for teaching, as well as the likelihood of staying in teaching (Tschannen-Moran *et al.*, 1998). Because the genesis of feelings of efficacy has been thought to lie primarily in direct experiences of success (Bandura, 1997), there should be a direct relationship between the proximity of influences and teacher efficacy. Specifically focusing on positive experiences, classroom events should be more influential than school events, which in turn should be more closely linked with efficacy than national or global events. We expect a quite similar pattern with regard to the *commitment to remain in teaching*. Major factors in the decision to stay in teaching, to move to another school or to quit entirely are experiences of success at classroom level and also the supportive structures that the school provides (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). For these reasons, we propose that positive events that are perceived to have their origin at classroom and school levels are likely to be more influential than those emanating from national or global factors.

Survey overview: historical, cultural and career cycle

This study forms part of a wider mixed methods project on teachers' lives in Irish primary education. The study is run by the Colleges of Education Research Consortium in Ireland. The main goal of the project was to develop further understanding around what sustains, motivates and creates obstacles for early career primary teachers. In a survey of over 700 beginning teachers in Ireland, we sought to: (1) develop a measure of the affective significance of recurring events (positive and negative) on teachers' lives, in terms of frequency and intensity, (2) examine the extent to which events perceived to have a proximal origin are more affectively significant than those perceived to have a remote origin, as well as the relative strength of positive and negative occurrences and (3) establish the association of the affective significance of events with self-efficacy and commitment. The fact that the study is situated in the Irish context is of relevance to some of the central questions being examined particularly the perceived importance of global versus national influences in teachers' lives.

The decision to focus on the first five years is influenced by the frequently cited finding of teachers leaving during this time (e.g. Ingersoll, 2001); Ireland however, has a relatively low overall attrition rate (OECD, 2005). We accept the argument made recently by Margolis (2008) that factors influencing job satisfaction are likely to be dependent on the point in the career cycle and also by historical and societal conditions. Nevertheless, the methodology of studying affective episodes and the effort to conceptualise the dimensions on which they vary is likely to be instructive in studying teachers in a variety of settings even if the precise outcomes differ from the apparently benign conditions under which many Irish teachers begin (or in changing times, began) their careers.

Methods

Target population and sample

The target population consists of primary teachers who entered the Irish school system over a five-year period from 2002 to 2006. The sampling frame was the graduation list from each of four colleges of education from which 85% of these had graduated and a questionnaire was sent to a random sample of 30% of these (proportionate to the number graduating in each college) in December 2006. Of the 1300 who were found to have addresses that were still current, 749 returned completed questionnaires (response rate, 57.6%). Table 1 shows the demographic features of the sample. The available information on the population of young teachers derived from national data indicates that the sample is representative of teachers who qualified in the last five years (Department of Education and Science, 2005).

Measurement of affective episodes

The measurement of affective events was made through a scale of ‘Experience of Recurring Affective Episodes’ designed to measure the frequency and affective intensity of everyday events in teachers’ professional lives. The teachers were asked to make two judgements with regard to each of 40 events: a frequency rating and an affective rating. These events were in four categories that correspond to the domain of the classroom, school, national/state and global realm. In turn, half in each domain were positive happenings and half were negative events. The frequency of events was measured on a 10-point scale ranging from 0 (did not happen) to 9 (constantly occurring). The affective measure for each event consisted of a 10-point scale, from 0 (feel really bad if this happened) to 9 (feel really good). But when we later calculated a ‘significance’ score based on frequency x affect strength, the scores used were necessarily 1–10 instead of 0–9.

For each question, the response was in respect to the interval between ‘the beginning of the school year’ (early September) and the time of completing the questionnaire (early December). For example, in the realm of classroom events, teachers were asked to give frequency and affective intensity ratings of ‘seeing my planning has paid off in successful teaching and learning’ and ‘noticing that children are absent at important times’. The full list of episodes is given in Appendix 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of sample

Characteristic	Percentage
Gender	91.3 (Female)
Years teaching	63.1 (Less than three years)
Entry route to teaching	79.8 (Regular route)
Qualification	81.4 (Bachelor degree)
School type	31.0 (Designated as disadvantaged)

The scale to measure these events was constructed from two sources, a search of relevant literature and a diary study involving 58 new teachers over several weeks. The literature search drew on the US, UK and Australian studies that were focused on experiences relevant to teachers' job satisfaction, commitment, stress, burnout and leaving teaching. The studies examined (several of which were literature reviews) were intended to be representative rather than exhaustive. The content analysis of these studies sought to establish the categories of attributions (Krippendorp, 2004) in the literature, specifically the constructs that were used to explain the positive or negative experiences.

The second source for identifying affective episodes was a diary of events that trigger affective reactions among beginning teachers (Kitching et al., 2009). In that study 58 teacher participants were asked: (1) to describe the incidents that had happened during the week that made them feel good in their work as teachers and (2) to indicate which incidents caused them to feel bad. The particular focus of that study was with the interaction of positive and negative emotional experiences and, from the present perspective, the data are especially relevant to the kinds of occurrences that trigger teachers' emotional reactions. We retained the themes that were found in both the literature and in the diaries and subjected these to the requirements of a structured questionnaire.

Because the nature and frequency of events in teachers' lives change not only from year to year but also from one semester/week/day to another, we considered it crucial to define the interval under consideration (Kahneman et al., 2004). Teachers were asked to make their judgement of frequency/affective intensity of events 'since the beginning of the school year', thus designating a school term as the focus interval. This is likely to be long enough for most relevant events to occur and yet is specific enough to elicit affective/frequency reactions that are accurate.

Measurement of commitment and efficacy

The measurement of 'Commitment to Teaching' focused on both commitment to a profession (vocational commitment) and commitment to a particular school (organisational commitment). Three items were designed to measure vocational commitment ('I feel that teaching is really right for me') and two targeting the wish to stay in their particular school ('I am happy to continue working in this particular school'). These statements were rated on a 10-point scale ranging from 0 (never true) to 9 (always true). A ten-point scale has been used in all of the measurements in this study, in contrast to the more conventional five- or seven-point scale. An examination of the distribution of the scores showed that all points of the scale were equally likely to be used.

The six-item 'Teacher Efficacy' scale was concerned with general teacher efficacy and focused on broad skills with applications across a range of topics and subjects. These included 'teaching all of the subjects on the curriculum' and 'helping children focus on learning tasks and avoid distractions'. In accordance with the principles suggested for constructing teacher efficacy scales (Bandura, 1997), the teachers were

asked to indicate their confidence that they succeed in each activity on a regular basis on a ten-point scale from ‘cannot do it at all’ to ‘certain I can do it’.

Results

Reliability of measures

Table 2 shows the reliability (Cronbach Alpha) for commitment to teaching and self-efficacy. For each measure, the reliability is very satisfactory.

Affective significance scores

Each of the 40 items measuring the experiences of recurring events yields three scores: an affect intensity score, a frequency score and an affective significance score (affect x frequency). Appendix 1 shows the mean score for affect, frequency and significance of each item as well as the rank order for significance. Table 3 shows the mean affective significance scores for each domain of experience (school, classroom, national/state and global), for positive and negative events experienced during the current semester. The comparison of the mean scores for positive and negative events showed a highly significant difference (paired comparison *t*-test) in each domain with positive events characterised by higher mean scores in each of the classroom, school, national and global domains.

Table 2. Reliability of motivational measures

Motivational components	Items	Alpha
Teacher commitment	8	.92
Efficacy	6	.82

Table 3. Mean affective significance values for positive and negative events in four zones

	Positive	Negative	<i>t</i>	Sig.
Classroom zone	72.9 (.47)	40.3 (.47)	45.3	< .001
School zone	63.0 (.66)	22.9 (.39)	44.5	< .001
National zone	32.1 (.49)	22.5 (.37)	16.4	< .001
Global zone	39.2 (.59)	27.2 (.50)	22.4	< .001

Notes: the calculations are made on the basis of the frequency x intensity of events in each domain (five positive, five negative events in each domain); main table entries are means and standard errors are shown in parentheses; *t*-values are for paired comparisons of positive and negative events.

A repeated measures analysis of variance was conducted on the two sets of variables consisting of the four mean positive affective significance zone scores and the four mean negative zone scores, respectively (i.e. these are the two columns of mean scores reported in Table 3). There was a significant main effect for the overall difference between the four positive zone means (Wilk's Lambda = .129, $p < .001$). A least significant difference (LSD) *post hoc* comparison showed that each zone differed significantly from each other zone and that the classroom and school zones, taken together, differed significantly from the national and globes zones. In terms of the key question of the study, the overall pattern indicates that proximal events (classroom and school levels) have a higher affective significance than more distal events (national and global levels).

In similar fashion, for the four mean negative affective significance zone scores there was a significant main effect for the overall difference between the means (Wilk's Lambda = .335, $p < .001$). The LSD *post hoc* comparison showed that each zone differed significantly from each other zone except for the comparison between the school and national means. A comparison of the classroom level with the other zones showed significant differences. The implication of these comparisons is that classroom events have a stronger affective significance than the other three domains.

Teacher efficacy and commitment

Next, a series of ordinary least squares regression analyses were conducted to test the strength of the mean positive and negative affective zone variables in predicting the teacher efficacy and teacher commitment scores, respectively. Models were checked for influential values, collinearity effects and residual distributions. None of the models appeared to be adversely affected by any anomalous data characteristics. When Teacher Efficacy was regressed on the four mean positive affective zone variables using a forced entry approach that entered them by class, school, national and global, the solution was statistically significant (adjusted R-square = .254, $p < .001$). The standardised coefficients were: class = .42 ($p < .01$), school = .10 ($p < .01$), national = .13 ($p < .01$) and global = -.05 ($p = .13$). The same form of regression for Teacher Commitment on the four mean positive affective variables produced a statistically significant solution (adjusted R-square = .292, $p < .001$). The standardised solution was: class = .25 ($p < .01$), school = .34 ($p < .01$), national = .06 ($p = .06$) and global = .06 ($p = .08$).

The regression of Teacher Efficacy on the four mean negative affective zone variables produced a less statistically significant result (adjusted R-square = .05, $p < .001$). The standardised solution was: class = -.17 ($p < .01$), school = -.09 ($p = .02$), nation = -.07 ($p = .07$) and global = .01 ($p = .88$). Similarly, the regression of Teacher Commitment on the four mean negative affective zone variables was significant but weak (adjusted R-square = .119, $p < .001$). The standardised solution was: class = -.03 ($p = .39$), school = -.34 ($p < .01$), national = -.02 ($p = .57$) and global = .06 ($p = .11$). These four sets of analyses establish that the 'positive affective' variables were stronger predictors of teacher efficacy and teacher commitment than the 'negative affective' variables for all four zones of influence.

Relative effects of affect intensity versus frequency

A second series of regressions was performed to determine the relative strength of the 'frequency' and 'intensity' ratings in predicting Teacher Efficacy and Teacher Commitment. To this end, Teacher Efficacy, for the class zone, was regressed on the block of 10 'frequency' items followed by the block of ten 'intensity' items. This regression produced a significant adjusted R-square = .29 ($p < .001$). The unique variance contribution of the 'frequency' and 'intensity' blocks of items was .19 and .02, respectively. The school zone adjusted R-square = .11 ($p < .01$) with unique variance estimates of .05 and .02 for frequency and intensity, respectively. The national zone adjusted R-square = .09 ($p < .01$) with unique variance estimates of .03 and .06 for frequency and intensity, respectively. And the global zone adjusted R-square = .05 ($p < .01$) with unique variance estimates of .04 and .02 for frequency and intensity, respectively. In general, these analyses reveal that the 'frequency' block of items was a stronger predictor of teacher efficacy than the corresponding 'intensity' block.

The same analyses were conducted on the Teacher Commitment variable. To this end, Teacher Commitment, for the class zone, was regressed on the block of 10 'frequency' items followed by the block of 10 'intensity' items. This produced a significant adjusted R-square = .24 ($p < .001$) with unique variance estimates of .11 and .05 for the contribution of the 'frequency' and 'intensity' blocks of items, respectively. The school zone adjusted R-square = .31 ($p < .01$) with unique variance estimates of .17 and .02 for frequency and intensity, respectively. The nation zone adjusted R-square = .12 ($p < .01$) with unique variance estimates of .07 and .06 for frequency and intensity, respectively. Finally, the global zone adjusted R-square = .08 ($p < .01$) with unique variance estimates of .05 and .03 for frequency and intensity, respectively. In sum, in all four zones, the 'frequency' block of items was a stronger predictor of Teacher Commitment than the 'intensity' block.

Discussion

The results provide possible answers to the three main questions guiding this research into the motivational influences of events in teachers' lives. Firstly, positive and negative happenings are not a mirror image of each other; the presence or absence of positively framed events is a much stronger contributor to teachers' commitment and efficacy than is the case with negative experiences. Secondly, occurrences that are perceived to have their origin in proximal zones of influence (classroom or school) have stronger impact on these motivational influences than is the case with influences identified as being relatively remote (national or global). Finally, a major part of the reason for the differences between zones of influence and the positive versus negative events pertains to how often such events recur rather than the affective intensity of such occurrences.

A major implication is for research on negative events and how they impact on teachers' motivation and persistence. Research like that on job stressors (e.g.

Kokkinos, 2007) and school dangers (e.g. Galand *et al.*, 2007) needs not only to consider outcomes on stress and burnout but also on the extent to which rewarding features of teaching have not been enacted. The underlying assumption has been that negative emotions cannot co-exist with positive experiences. This oversimplification ignores the fluctuations and co-occurrences of positive and negative feelings that characterise a teacher's day. We accept that extremely negative events can have an undermining effect on teachers' morale and motivation. However, our argument is that the occurrence of such events has distracted us from looking at the frequently occurring minor negative events and more importantly from the *absence* of regularly occurring positive events. A study in which teachers kept weekly diaries came up with a similar result with regard to self-efficacy and self-esteem, *viz.*, the occurrence of positive experiences had a stronger impact than the absence of negative experiences (Kitching *et al.*, 2009)

An intriguing question is on the way that positive experiences interact with negative happenings in their effects on efficacy and commitment. While the mix of bad and good events occur on any given day, how does a teacher make sense of the combination of events that flow by them? One possibility is that positive events have the capacity to alleviate the impact of negative ones, so that they contribute to making teachers resilient in the face of adversity. A substantial body of literature on chronic stress (e.g. Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000) has shown that not only do positive and negative affect co-exist, but that positive affect provides a psychological respite and replenishes resources depleted by stress. In other words, positive events can be thought of as a basis for resilience when things are going wrong.

What makes for affective significance of events? In terms of content, some of the strongest affective events are those linking with the reasons that people enter teaching in the first place. It is striking that teachers' perception that they 'make a difference' is relevant at classroom level ('successful learning of my students') at national/state level ('being aware that the education system works for more children') and at global level ('being aware of the significance of teachers' work'). This suggests that the events that motivate teachers on a day-to-day basis are grounded in their reasons for becoming teachers in the first place, i.e. 'making a difference'. Thus, factors like perceived success of students, enhancing children's lives and student engagement in learning can be regarded as experiences that stem directly from the motivation to enter teaching. On the other hand, conditions of employment (like remuneration and vacations) are less important.

Policy implications

One of the main implications of our findings is that it is the recurring experiences of positive events emanating from the intrinsic rewards of teaching that help maintain teachers' motivation. The problem is that so many educational reforms seem to result in a decline in such outcomes and results in negative feelings. It is remarkable that the process of implementing an apparently 'reasonable' initiative like performance-related pay in the UK found that the policy did not 'press the right

buttons in terms of professional cultures and identities of teachers' (Mahoney *et al.*, 2004, p. 444). Furthermore, the experience of inspection in the UK is reported to have effects that are substantially greater than overwork and stress and results in teachers experiencing a feeling of being under a disciplinary regime which, in turn, results in negative emotions including fear, anger and disaffection (Perryman, 2007). Similarly the delegation of responsibility and management away from central regulatory authorities to local management is frequently accompanied by new forms of surveillance that result in 'existential anxiety and dread' (Troman, 2000, p. 349).

This is the great paradox of so many initiatives that are designed to enhance teaching and learning through the definition of criteria for successful teaching and the setting up of accountability structures (Goodson & Hargreaves, 2007). The issue at stake is whether there is a fundamental flaw in the philosophy of performativity or whether the insensitive implementation of reforms and restructuring has led to unintended negative consequences, which are evident in loss of morale and job satisfaction. We suggest that restructuring and reforms do not necessarily result in negative emotional outcomes; reforms that keep a clear focus on the existing intrinsic motivation of teachers, particularly around students' engagement and learning may provide an impetus to teachers' motivation. Some recent studies of newly qualified teachers give some clues as to how this might be enacted: many of the teachers featured in Nieto's (2003) research see themselves as making a difference through 'reaching groups of students' or even a single student; the successful teachers in the work of Salas *et al.* (2004) manage to negotiate the gap between their ideals of good teaching and the reality of the bureaucratic forces that constrained them and Johnson and Birkeland (2003) found that schools that sustain new teachers provide frequent opportunities for feedback on their work. Performativity has been, in relative terms, less of a feature of teachers' work in Ireland until recently. However, it has been suggested that the recent decision to publish school-inspectors' reports 'marks a seismic shift in the Irish education system and provides further evidence of an increase in the performativity and accountability demanded of teachers' (Sugrue, 2006, p. 181). Given evidence from other contexts, it is imperative for the Irish system to pay close attention to the relationship between the dynamics of teacher motivation and the ethos of performativity.

Conceptual issues

Our theoretical base is that emotion provides a critical marker for the salience of recurring events, arising as it does from the confirmation of central features of the self. The findings here provide refinements for that central guiding notion: positive events do not automatically 'stamp in' affirmation, rather the active construction and attribution processes play an important role as evidenced by the differences between zones. Furthermore, we were unable to find any research that examined the extent to which positive and negative events have symmetrical effects—a finding of potentially great significance for understanding identity and self-esteem.

The second conceptual question is around the link between the constructs measured here (efficacy and commitment) and teacher motivation and, in turn, student learning. It is fair to say that the link of teacher efficacy with student learning is well established (Tschannen-Moran *et al.*, 1998). The study of organisations has shown that 'commitment' has a major impact on job satisfaction, productivity and team-work (Brief & Weiss, 2002). More importantly, a recent UK study has shown that teacher commitment was associated with student learning that was above what was expected regardless of the school context (Day *et al.*, 2007); based on a study of 300 teachers in over 100 primary and post-primary schools, measures of teachers' commitment were associated with higher than expected achievement at ages 7, 11 and 14 years.

Methodological issues and limitations

The advantage of our methodology is that it allowed for a comparison of diverse events, for an examination of positive versus negative happenings and for an effort to say how the perceived origin of events is reflected in its importance. The approach taken also permitted a linking of the experience of affect with concepts that are especially relevant to teachers' work, *viz.*, self-efficacy and commitment. The most significant finding, from our perspective, was that the study demonstrated that what makes teachers tick above all else are those motivations that brought them into teaching in the first place.

A crucial component of the methodology is the specification of the duration of time regarding which information was sought (in this case a school term). We suggest that the more common approach of asking about emotional reactions to events without specifying an interval precludes the possibility of examining the frequency of occurrence of events—a crucial component of affective events. The fact the teachers indicated that certain occurrences 'did not happen' increases the confidence in our finding as does the similarity with regard to proportion of positive/negative events and the importance of student learning/engagement, which was also found in a diary study in which a week was the interval under consideration (Kitching *et al.*, 2009). It is clear that judgements about affect are susceptible to apparently small methodological differences (e.g. Sturman & Taggart, 2008); the biases inherent in the reconstruction of the various episodes that make up summary judgements need considerably more investigation.

We accept that the particular kinds of affective episodes that are most influential are likely to change depending on the career stage and indeed the context of the teacher's work. In this regard, the implication of studies like those of Margolis (2008) is that the pattern of relevant rewards and sources of job satisfaction are different at a stage that follows the first five years of teaching, while at later stages again, the quest for job satisfaction in education may lead to a career path outside the classroom (Quartz *et al.*, 2008). The important point is that there is a need to devise a way of matching teachers' motivation with the new demands and obligations in the constantly changing educational environment.

Conclusion

In considering the effects of various efforts to re-structure schools and motivate teachers through test results or through similar threatening factors, ‘a better approach might be to strengthen and reward teachers’ efforts to care about their students’ (Cochran-Smith, 2003, p. 372). Indeed, diminishing negative episodes or perceptions of constraint may not necessarily increase teacher commitment. The paper foregrounds the importance of the idea that teachers can cope with negative experiences at micro level and perceptions of change at macro level provided that positive episodes—such as strong relationships with students—are constantly experienced. We propose this idea as the main increment of our study on previous work.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Marilyn Cochran-Smith for comments on an earlier draft and to the teachers whose diary entries motivated us to write this paper. The research reported here is part of the programme of the Colleges of Education Research Consortium.

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Appendix 1. Experiences of events in each domain of motivational influence*Classroom level*

Experience	Affect	Frequency	Significance	Rank
Positive				
Children engage seriously	9.3	8.1	75.9	3
Planning has paid off	9.1	8.2	75.3	4
Enjoy interpersonal aspect	9.4	9.0	85.2	1
Seeing children make progress	9.3	8.4	78.6	2
Coping with everyone's needs	7.4	6.5	49.5	12
Negative				
Children act disruptively	7.8	5.4	42.1	16
Too many constraints	7.3	6.9	51.4	11
Children are absent from school	7.1	5.2	38.0	20
Children's circumstances difficult	7.9	7.3	57.8	10
Child disclosing abuse	9.2	1.2	11.2	40

School level

Experience	Affect	Frequency	Significance	Rank
Positive				
Ideas discussed by colleagues	8.1	5.2	44.0	15
Working with other teachers	8.5	7.3	63.4	8
Free to make decisions	8.4	7.4	63.9	7
Part of professional community	8.9	8.0	72.2	5
School management dependable	8.8	7.8	71.1	6
Negative				
Parent's negative comments	8.8	1.7	14.2	39
Inadequate resources	7.8	4.4	34.3	22
Competitive unfriendly environment	8.8	2.6	22.2	31
Threatened by a parent	9.5	2.0	18.5	35
School not benefit all	8.7	3.0	25.3	28

State/national level

Experience	Affect	Frequency	Significance	Rank
Positive				
More jobs in system	7.6	4.9	38.1	19
Favourable news on pay	8.9	3.6	31.5	23
Regulations make role clear	7.9	2.9	23.0	30
New opportunities in system	8.2	3.5	29.1	25
Educational system working better	8.2	4.8	39.3	18
Negative				
Teacher in litigation	8.7	1.8	15.8	38
School reports widely available	5.8	4.9	27.8	27
Career opportunities outside education	4.0	4.7	19.0	32
More topics in the curriculum	4.4	4.4	18.8	34
Teachers working longer hours	7.2	4.3	31.1	24

Global level

Experience	Affect	Frequency	Significance	Rank
Positive				
Greater recognition of qualifications	8.0	2.3	18.9	33
Education can change countries	7.0	6.3	45.2	13
Teaching becoming a real profession	7.9	3.5	28.5	26
Significance of teachers' work	8.7	6.7	59.4	9
Schools changing for the better	8.6	5.0	44.1	14
Negative				
Greater need for documentation	4.6	4.0	18.3	36
Access to teaching too easy	6.4	2.9	18.1	37
Low influence of teachers	7.8	3.0	23.7	29
Teaching behind other professions	8.0	4.3	34.4	21
Negative portrayal of teachers on TV	8.3	4.9	40.9	17