



What Motivates Teachers towards Expertise Development: A Mixed-Methods Study of the Relationships between School Culture, Internal Factors, and State of Flow

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Abstract

The purpose of this sequential mixed-methods research was to discover the impact school culture, internal factors, and the state of flow has upon motivating a teacher to develop teaching expertise. This research was designed to find answers concerning why and how individual teachers can nurture their existing internal factors to increase their motivation to seek expertise development and to explore how school culture, internal factors, and state of flow may encourage or limit the development of expertise in order to add to the discussion of educational reform efforts. The major findings of this study included: (1) Teacher-student kinship, an almost family-like relationship, is the driving motivational force behind a teacher's development towards expertise; (2) Expert teachers can seamlessly merge their strong pedagogical, content, and interpersonal knowledge into a single expert lens through which they view all interactions and activities to positively impact student achievement; (3) Expert teachers constantly and consistently seek deep-impacting professional learning experience; and (4) Expert teachers can function at high capacity regardless of school culture, but prefer optimal school culture. These major findings hold implications for theory, practice, and future research particularly in the realm of teacher quality and the change of mindset towards the profession and the standards of education.

Keywords: Motivation, Flow, Expert Teachers, School Culture, Internal Factors.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this sequential mixed-methods research is to discover the impact school culture, internal factors, and the state of flow has upon motivating a teacher to develop teaching expertise. This research is designed to find answers concerning why and how individual teachers can nurture their existing internal factors to increase their motivation to seek expertise development. The research is designed to explore how school culture [12], internal factors [2], and flow [3] may encourage or limit the development of expertise in order to add to the discussion of educational reform efforts.

Research from this study contributes to the body of knowledge concerning expert teachers and the forces working within and upon these individuals and their development in order to inform policy at the local, state, national and international level. The research for the past four decades indicates teacher quality significantly impacts student achievement [1,6,8,13]. The research has also created a well-rounded set of teacher practices, which specifically increase student achievement [8,11, 13]. When the effective teacher research is combined with school culture research, a very clear picture of effective teaching and professional learning develops [4, 5, 7, 9]. The element missing in the research is a deep understanding of the impact school culture, internal factors, and the state of flow have upon motivating teachers in the constant development of expertise.

2. Methodology

2.1 Design: The sequential explanatory mixed-methods study design was created to include quantitative elements collected through the Teacher Motivational Expert Questionnaire designed to collect information concerning demographic data of the participants, as well as constructs of school culture, internal factors, and state of flow. In addition to the quantitative elements descriptive qualitative data, both observations and interviews, were conducted to capture data on the behaviors and thinking of teachers who pursue expertise.

2.2 Population: The sample of 680 invited educators, which resulted in 249 respondents, was created from a list of 2000 nationally recognized teachers compiled from two national award programs. Both programs had established guidelines and procedures for the identification of honorees.



2.3 Research Questions: The study consisted of four research questions, which were analyzed based on the methodology. RQ1: How do the internal factors, the state of flow, and school culture motivate teachers to develop towards expertise? The analysis of RQ1 was triangulated through an analysis of the questionnaire, interviews, and observations data. RQ2: What relationships exist among the constructs of school culture, internal factors and flow as measured by Pearson's r correlation? The findings for RQ2 were based on a quantitative analysis using a Pearson's r correlation of the Teacher Motivational Expert Questionnaire. RQ3: What are the actions of an expert teacher in the classroom as measured by the Expert Teacher Observation Standards form? RQ3 was qualitatively analyzed using the observations transcripts from the observations based on the Expert Teacher Observation Standards. RQ4: What drives a teacher to pursue expertise as measured by the interview protocol? RQ4 was qualitatively analyzed based on the interview transcripts using the Expert Interview Protocol.

3. Results

3.1 Major Finding 1

Teacher-student kinship is the driving motivational force behind a teacher's development towards expertise. The construct of Teacher-Student Kinship was not included in the original conceptual framework, but emerged through the triangulation of the data. While the survey demonstrated teachers truly enjoy teaching students, the interviews and observations revealed an almost-family type of relationship occurred between students and expert teachers with the core being the teacher's overwhelming sense of responsibility to impact not only students' mastery of their content, but also students' self-efficacy and life past their time with this teacher. The deep connection or responsibility these teachers expressed is the main motivational force behind their pursuit to develop and increase their expert teaching abilities

3.2 Major Finding 2

Expert teachers exhibit strong pedagogical, content, and interpersonal knowledge, which seamlessly merge together to create a single expert lens through which the expert teacher views all interactions and activities to positively impact student achievement. This study revealed the teacher's strong internal factors support the development of strong pedagogical, content, and interpersonal skills, which merge seamlessly together to create a lens through which all decisions are based from the classroom to their professional learning choices. For example, a teacher's understanding of a student's content weakness informs the choice of strategy he/she may choose using his/her pedagogical knowledge. The teacher's high self-efficacy combined with flexibility and craftsmanship combine to assist the teacher's decision-making process. In the interviews expert teachers struggle to remember a classroom situation for which they could not find a solution. This high level of pedagogical, content, and interpersonal knowledge combined with high self-efficacy is evident. The teacher's ability to read the face of the confused student or analyze a work sample attests to all three types of knowledge and demonstrates consciousness of the situation. When questioned during interviews, the teachers could not separate decision into pedagogy, content, or interpersonal knowledge, but rather used all three intertwined to make best choices for students. The three types of knowledge are fluid and interdependent therefore merges into one expert lens through which the teacher views his/her teaching world in order to make choices for students and for their own professional learning.

3.3 Major Finding 3

Expert teachers constantly and consistently seek deep-impacting professional learning experience. Teachers have developed and continue to develop their craft through various professional learning experiences. The teachers choose professional learning which impacts student learning, challenges to their already high-skill set, and engages them in deep reflective conversations with peers and themselves. Expert teachers choose professional learning on their perceived weaknesses in order to improve their own craft and thereby improve their students' achievement. Expert teacher enjoy and are motivated by deep-impacting professional learning.



3.4 Major Finding 4

Expert teachers can function at high capacity regardless of school culture, but prefer optimal school culture of shared leadership, strong differentiated professional learning, and positive collegial relationships. Expert teachers seek high-functioning professional cultures. When their school meets their expectations, they are more willingly involved in the school culture. When the school culture is sub-par to their expectations, the teachers will leave, create their own professional mini-culture within the school, or create a professional culture with other educators outside of their school.

4. Conclusion

This sequential mixed methods study was considered important because the study offers new understanding of how the motivational factors impact teacher teachers who pursue expertise. While previous studies have researched teacher impact on student achievement and the impact of school culture upon teachers, none have sought to find what motivates these expert outliers to pursue expertise. This study investigated the motivation behind a teacher to continuously develop expertise and sets forth a new perspective for the potential recruitment, training, and development of teachers, as well as, a fresh perspective the need for differentiation of professional learning.

Teacher motivation was explored through the correlation between the internal factors, flow, and school culture. Strong correlations were found between the internal factors and flow, the internal factors and the professional culture factors, and flow and the professional factors. The qualitative research clarified further the relationships found between the factors and revealed an underlying, unseen factor motivating teachers to pursue expertise.

While the teachers in the study have highly evolved internal factors such as self-efficacy, craftsmanship, flexibility, interdependence, and consciousness, as evidenced in the questionnaire results, these factors were not the ignition point of their motivation, but rather the conduit. The relationship between the teacher and the student or the teacher-student kinship is the fuel motivating the teacher to increase their internal factors and therefore produces a state of flow in which the teachers and the students are symbiotically working together in harmony. The expert teacher will work within the elements of the school culture as long as the culture positively impacts his/her classroom culture. When the school culture, including leadership, hampers the teacher's work, he/she will leave or find a way around the impediment. Understanding the motivational factors and needs of expert teachers offers new insights for future recruitment, training, and retention of teachers in the field.

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