The Person in the Profession: Renewing Teacher Vitality through Professional Development

by Sam M. Intrator and Robert Kunzman

Abstract

A teacher’s vocational vitality, or capacity to be vital, present, and deeply connected to his or her students, is not a fixed, indelible condition, but a state that ebbs and flows with the context and challenges of the teaching life. In light of this, an emerging form of professional development programming explicitly devoted to nourishing the inner life or core dimensions of teachers is increasingly important for today’s educators.

As longtime teachers, high school administrators, and now teacher-educators, the authors of this manuscript have observed and taught with hundreds of teachers. They’ve known teachers who are celebrated because of their capacity to listen to students with abiding reverence. They’ve witnessed lectures that were so gripping in style and substance that students sat perched on the edge of their seats. They’ve watched as teachers have deftly facilitated high-octane conversations. They’ve observed teachers whose understanding of cooperative learning allows them to orchestrate sophisticated group projects. They’ve seen teachers fill their classrooms with the aplomb of a diva; teachers who have energized their students with contagious enthusiasm; teachers who swaggered down the rows of the classroom as if they were Patton; and still others who were so soft-spoken that you barely noticed them in a faculty meeting—yet students flocked to them.

Potent teaching—teaching that energizes and inspires students—eludes easy characterization. Teachers who make a difference employ various methods, and their success cannot be linked merely to facility with a technique or a method. Instead, the authors contend that a teacher’s capacity to teach well is linked to a set of ineffable, hard-to-codify qualities that often become characterized as heart, passion, or connectedness. These intricate qualities emerge from the inner
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or core landscape of a teacher’s life and represent the integral feature of inspired and memorable teaching.

In what follows, the authors describe the contours of these qualities, which they have termed *vocational vitality*. They argue that a teacher’s capacity to remain vital, present, and deeply connected throughout his or her career is affected by many factors and, therefore, does not remain constant. In light of this, they advocate for teacher renewal programming—an emerging form of professional development training explicitly devoted to nourishing the inner life or core dimensions of teachers. An illustrative case study is used to show what programs of this genre strive to do. The authors then address the tensions inherent in attending to the inner lives of teachers, given the focus in schools on more tangible outcomes for students and their learning.

**The Contours of Vocational Vitality**

Many researchers and theorists have sought to identify the elements of powerful teaching. In this article, three elements serve as an entrée for considering the implications of professional development programming that goes beyond a vision of teaching as technique.

First, teachers who exhibit vocational vitality are *engrossed* in their roles as teachers. To be engrossed, one’s energy must be channeled into the physical, cognitive, and emotional labors of teaching. An engrossed teacher has a sense of vigor marked by an enthusiasm for his or her work, a sense of dedication, and a feeling that the work is meaningful and important. There is a state of commitment to one’s labors that organizational theorist William Kahn (1992) described as being “fully there”—a psychological and experiential presence that allows an individual to infuse his or her role and task performances with a sense of personhood.

The capacity to remain *tuned in* is the second dimension of vocational vitality. To be tuned in implies an acute sensitivity to the needs of students and context. It is not merely being open and receptive to pain or anguish, as in discerning that a student needs support to overcome an emotional wound, but manifests itself in other ways as well. A tuned-in teacher has the capacity to read the often well-masked situational and expressive cues of student emotion and possesses the ability to communicate about these issues in constructive ways.

Lastly, vital teachers are *purposeful*. They take initiative in improving current conditions or responding to adversity by imagining what could be. They view themselves as efficacious agents capable of challenging the status quo rather than passively adapting to ordinary contexts and approaches. They possess a mature sense of purpose that accounts for the teacher’s capacity to teach well is linked to a set of ineffable, hard-to-codify qualities that often become characterized as heart, passion, or connectedness.
for the uncertainty of outcome and the routine problems that occur. Their orientation toward the everyday predicaments of teaching is marked by the resilient capacity to problem solve, remain future-minded, and view impediments as opportunities to learn.

Teaching is demanding intellectual, emotional, and moral work. To do it well requires a repertoire that includes knowledge of subject matter and pedagogical skill—but that is not enough. Inspired and memorable teaching requires a person to be imbued with vocational vitality.

Another way to understand the contours of this vitality is to consider the opposite condition, which has received far greater research attention (Schaufeli et al. 2002). If vitality is the capacity to live, grow, or develop, then its vocational contrast would be the condition of burnout, which Edelwich and Brodsky (1980, 5) described as “a progressive loss of idealism, energy, and purpose experienced by people in the help professions as the result of the conditions of work.” Other researchers who have studied the depletion of individuals in the human services field (e.g., Maslach 1982; Sakharov and Farber 1983) characterized burnout as the loss of empathy, the increase in cynicism, and the tendency of once-caring professionals to blame clients or students for their problems.

The teaching profession has long struggled with a high incidence of burnout and resulting attrition. Many researchers have explored both individual-level factors and institutional structures complicit in this condition. Little attention has been focused, however, on understanding the qualities of teacher vitality and the conditions that promote optimal and engaged teaching.

Neglecting the Person in the Profession

Professional development for teachers largely has ignored the importance of vocational vitality. True, researchers and policy makers have begun to focus on the critical impact of the teacher on student achievement. The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future’s study What Matters Most: Teaching for America’s Future (1996, 10) intoned, “What teachers know and can do is the most important influence on what students learn.” The American Council of Education (1999, 5) synthesized a slew of research to arrive at a similar conclusion in its report To Touch the Future: Transforming the Way Teachers Are Taught: “The success of the student depends most of all on the quality of the teacher. We know from empirical data what our intuition has always told us: Teachers make a difference. We now know that teachers make the difference.”

Though it would seem that an emphasis on teacher quality would mean that greater efforts would be made on enhancing the capacity of teachers to sustain their vocational vitality, this has not happened. The dominant approach to teacher professional development has long adhered to a training model focused primarily on expanding an individ-
ual’s repertoire of well-defined, skill-based classroom practices (Little 1993; Fullan and Hargreaves 1996). Staff development efforts typically have focused on innovations that are offered to teachers in self-contained, one-shot workshops that embody a view of the teacher as deficient and needing to be fixed through the transmission of a new technique or skill. According to Fullan and Hargreaves (1996), this model of teacher development does little to enhance the dimensions of vocational vitality and, in some cases, might actually depress teachers’ abilities to be fully present and vital in their work.

So, why has there been virtually no professional development preparation explicitly focused on deepening self-understanding, developing emotional resources, and sustaining a sense of vocation and purpose in teachers? The authors offer three explanations.

First, despite the emerging research base that acknowledges that teachers are people with biographies and changing life circumstances and not merely repertoires of skills and techniques, the personal realm of teachers has been considered private terrain (Goodson 1994). As Hargreaves (2001, 1057) observed, “Becoming a tactful, caring, or passionate teacher is treated as largely a matter of personal disposition, moral commitment, or private virtue, rather than of how particular ways of organizing teaching shape teachers’ emotional experience.” The upshot of this line of thinking is that qualities such as presence, connectedness, and purpose are inherent in the individual; either you have these qualities or you don’t.

A second reason why vocational vitality is neglected in professional development is its inexact nature. Attending to human qualities, such as energy and emotional acuity, present unacknowledged complexities for training programs focused on technical skills such as reading methods or cooperative learning processes. Addressing the person within the profession requires a long-term process: a commitment to conversation, reflection, and community that may not immediately translate into improved test scores, curricular reform, or a standardized pedagogy.

A third reason for neglect of the person in professional development is a zero-sum mentality about time, resources, and outcomes. The contrast between the long-term, time-consuming commitment of teacher renewal and the more straightforward implementation of pedagogical techniques and curricular reform can create a false choice. Time and funding for professional development in schools are scarce, and countless technical models and reforms clamor for attention. Many of these programs are important and worthwhile; however, their long-term benefits for students and schools will be muted without a concurrent focus on teachers’ vocational vitality through explicit forms of professional development.

**Teacher renewal programming is an emerging form of professional development training explicitly devoted to nourishing the inner life or core dimensions of teachers.**
Professional Development That Attends to the Inner Life of Teachers

Though there are a range of professional development programs supporting teacher learning (such as cohort study groups, teacher research groups, lesson study, and critical friends communities), the programs discussed here are distinct in that they emphasize the connection between the person and the profession. How can teachers remain inspired and vital in the face of daily challenges and the realities of teaching?

Against this backdrop of needs and challenges, a movement of loosely coupled organizations has emerged, devoted to deepening self-understanding, developing emotional resources, and renewing a sense of vocation and purpose in teachers and educational leaders. Some of these proponents of “teacher renewal” include the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching; the Center for the Advancement and Renewal of Educators; and the Center for Courage and Renewal, the organizational center for the Courage to Teach Retreat Program. Though each center differs in its programming, the anchoring construct of their work is devotion to the renewal of the person in the profession.

A basic principle of teacher renewal is that “we teach who we are.” Most teachers enter the profession with a vision of themselves as potent agents of change in the lives and learning of their students. Along the way, however, when faced with a steady stream of external challenges and institutional limitations, their idealism, energy, and purpose often wane. Even veteran teachers hold deep beliefs about the kind of teacher they would like to be. They also struggle with the sense of despair, self-doubt, and frustration that occurs when they experience themselves as teachers in ways incommensurate with that vision. These inconsistencies occur when a teacher’s practice veers off course from the purposes he or she holds. Many institutional impediments and practices routinely challenge our deepest beliefs as teachers: tracking, rigid scheduling, relentless testing, obsession with grades, and isolation from colleagues. The status quo of schooling often forces teachers to make treaties or compromises that exact a toll on our spirit and energy. Constant compromise grinds teachers down. In Horace’s Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School, Sizer’s (1984, 3) character, Horace, believes that the status quo of school “forces him to compromise in ways that cripple his teaching.” Teachers know what it means to feel disengaged from their work and not fully present in the myriad encounters of the school day. Rhythm and purpose are elusive; everything feels detached and methodical; obstacles seem insurmountable. This weariness of spirit makes it impossible to teach well.

Teacher renewal seeks to respond to this weariness, this disjunction between original ideals and current realities. But renewal is more than just replenishment of inner reserves.
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and outward energy. Renewal is a word that has many connotations. Though a common definition—filling again by supplying what has been used up—may seem apt in this context, this notion of refilling misses a central point. What teachers need is not simply a refill of energy and vigor, but careful exploration of the question: How should I allocate my energy in ways that are consistent with the deepest values I have about myself as a teacher and a person?

The passion and presence of vocational vitality are not fixed, inherent attributes. Rather, they ebb and flow as the varied contexts of our teaching shift and as we change ourselves as developing people. Renewal should not simply be a refilling, a replacing of what was lost, but rather a generative process that provides new insight, maturing perspective, and avenues for growth that are responsive to the changing needs of the person within the profession. To the extent that renewal is like the phoenix rising from the ashes, it entails a different bird emerging each time.

At the core of teacher renewal is a concern with authenticity, a negotiation of personal identity and purpose with the work and context of one’s teaching. Vital teachers—engrossed, tuned in, and purposeful—effectively navigate the ongoing, ever-shifting relationship between the self and the work. This alignment is what is meant by authenticity. Amid the shifting demands of policy and reform—not to mention the multitude of student needs—teachers need the opportunity to pursue and reflect on their own growth and change, to continually reintegrate their sense of purpose and calling within the context of their schools and work.

Both this concern with authenticity and a generative orientation toward teacher renewal resonate with a range of adult development theories. Though significant variation exists between theories, most involve the recognition of a developmental trajectory of the adult learner as someone who draws on a deep well of personal experiences, which is itself a central tenet of teacher renewal. Furthermore, concerns of generativity, integrity, and authenticity infuse the various images of development encountered in the literature on adults as learners (Erikson 1968; Gould 1978; Levinson 1978). Yet consideration of the contexts most supportive of adult learners are largely absent in schools and the professional development available to teachers (Levine 1989). Teacher renewal programming has sought to address this shortcoming through a variety of formats.

To illustrate one such approach, the following section provides a snapshot of a program of teacher renewal, The Courage to Teach. The intent here is not to endorse one particular model or even the broader movement in its current shape, but to provide the reader with an appreciation for the kind of experiences teachers undergo as they participate in this form of professional development.

For teachers to strengthen their vocational vitality, they need sustained opportunities to renew connections between their personal selves and their work.
An Example of Teacher Renewal Programming

The Courage to Teach (CTT) is a program of quarterly retreats for the personal and professional renewal of public school educators. The program was piloted 1994–1996 by Parker Palmer with a group of Michigan educators. Then, in 1997, the Fetzer Institute established the Center for Teacher Formation (now the Center for Courage and Renewal) to develop, deepen, and expand the CTT program.

In this program, a cohort group of 20–30 educators gather for three-day, quarterly retreats over a one- or two-year period. In large group, small group, and solitary settings, “the heart of a teacher” is explored, making use of personal stories, reflections on classroom practice, and insights from poets, storytellers, and various wisdom traditions. The following vignette (Jackson and Jackson 2002, 283–84) shows how this approach addresses the challenges of renewing vocational vitality:

Twenty-five teachers and administrators sit in a circle, giving their full attention as an elementary teacher speaks passionately and poignantly about her love for her students and her commitment to reach each and every one of them. She goes on to tearfully describe the personal toll this is taking on her own life—creeping guilt at not having enough time or emotional energy to give to her own family, bone-deep exhaustion, nonstop worrying about the safety of some of her students, the weariness of facing an always burgeoning mountain of papers and projects to grade, a sense of increasing isolation from friends and colleagues because there is simply no more to give. The listeners sit quietly, respectfully, as she finishes, each reflecting on their own version of her story.

The next teacher speaks of the debilitating effects on the morale of his colleagues as more and more pressure is being placed to raise test scores at his school or else! While teaching was once a labor of love, it is now becoming an onerous task as the nearly singular focus on standardized testing dominates all communications among faculty and administrators. More silence.

The next person to speak, a newly appointed principal, describes her recent attempts to mediate an explosive situation between a student, his parents, and a teacher. In the midst of helping the parties work through their threats and misunderstandings, she has become aware of the heavy burden of responsibility she carries. Yet in the telling of her story, she also recognizes a growing confidence and inner sense of authority, grounded not in her role as a new principal, but in her personal integrity. Around the circle it goes—each person relating stories and examples of how their complex journey as teachers and leaders has unfolded since the last time they were together a few months ago.

As this vignette illustrates, the curricula of the retreats do not focus on pedagogical methods or content knowledge, but on the exploration of personal and professional beliefs. As with many programs focused on supporting adult development, the CTT model invites teachers to voice their own ideas and feelings and explore the meaning embedded in their personal experiences. The dialogue described sought to invite teachers to explore the deep well of their vocational calling and was evoked by a pair of questions:
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What aspects of your identity and integrity feel most threatened or endangered by your work? What aspects of your identity and integrity feel most supported and engaged by the work you do?

Using dialogue, reflective silence, journaling, and poetry reading, the CTT program invites teachers into sustained examination of questions such as those just suggested. To the facilitators of CTT, these approaches deepen self-understanding, invite an examination of beliefs, and invite shared appreciation of one another. Though the vignette does not allude to the use of poetry, story, and art, the CTT approach uses what is called “third things” to create a mediating presence in the dialogue. These metaphors help participants speak indirectly about things they might have great difficulty saying head-on and to discover truths about themselves in a less threatening context (Palmer 2003).

Creating opportunities for individuals to encounter archetypical themes, such as fear, loneliness, and vulnerability, while having space and community support to explore their own relationship to these themes is a specific goal of the program. According to one participant (Jackson and Jackson 2002, 300–01)—a veteran high school teacher—this approach can be very poignant:

A poem about fear led to an amazing conversation about the fear in our own lives. Very capable and accomplished professionals shared openly and honestly. People with multiple graduate degrees and years of experience and awards in their professions shared their fear of being inadequate, their fear of failure, and their fear of letting people down. Sharing that vulnerability, in a way I still don’t completely understand, helped strengthen all of us. But somehow knowing we were all indeed quite human and quite apprehensive about being able to meet the challenge of educational leadership actually made us bold to keep on trying.

This participant’s description of what he experienced during a CTT program highlights a key principle of the CTT approach: the exploration of self-narrative—stories we tell about our life and experiences—can yield important insight into who we are, what we believe, and where we would like to go in the future. Narrative researchers Jalongo and Isenberg (1995) believed that the telling of one’s story can be a vehicle for creating distance from that experience, making it a legitimate object of scrutiny. The process of telling and deliberating on one’s stories not only invites attitudinal change, but also can stimulate changes in teaching behavior and classroom action.

As noted at the beginning of this paper, the ineffable qualities of potent teaching must be nurtured despite the fact that they may elude easy characterization.
Furthermore, the qualities of vocational vitality ebb and flow and must be explored across the arc of a teacher’s career. This is no easy task; however, the CTT approach suggests that sustained engagement with a highly structured retreat model focused on questions of one’s inner life and core beliefs can contribute to the critical replenishment of a teacher’s vocational vitality. For example, the CTT approach aims to:

- **Heighten a teacher’s capacity to be fully present in his or her work by providing a reprieve from the hectic bustle of teaching.** The structure of the retreats seeks to radically alter the pace of a teacher’s life. The activities slow teachers down, invite evaluation of priorities, and explore disjunctures between one’s ideals and one’s lived experiences. The goal is to foster more mindful inquiry and encourage teachers to return to their classrooms with a better balance and a clearer sense of where to optimally allocate their attention.

- **Deepen a teacher’s capacity to tune in to the individual needs and gifts of students and colleagues.** Listening, asking questions, and reflecting back to others are key features of the CTT approach. Through a number of activities, participants practice listening and attending to one another. The subject of attention includes the fears, values, concerns, and commitments of our lives. The intent of diving into such deep water helps deepen one’s understanding of the issues at the center of the common work while providing practice in communicating about the emotional, moral, and spiritual dimensions of teaching.

- **Expand a teacher’s capacity to be resilient and purposeful.** CTT invites ongoing exploration of tension that exists between deep personal beliefs and the realities and pragmatics of teaching within a complex institution. Teachers engage in activities that bring to the fore their inner directives and ask them to consider how they play out in the external world so that teachers can be better equipped to make more discerning judgments on what’s worth fighting for, letting go, or attending to.

This brief exploration of CTT and its animating principles raises a crucial question: What difference does a professional development experience of this sort make in the practice of educators, their students, and their schools?

**Teaching Renewal Programming: What Do We Know about Its Impact?**

The research literature suggests that we still have much to learn about this type of programming. What does seem increasingly clear is that educators embrace the idea that teaching and leading must embody personal, spiritual, and emotional dimensions, as is evidenced by the popularity of recent works by Parker Palmer (1998, 2004), Margaret Wheatley (2006), Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal (2001), and Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan (1998). Many of these theorists advocate for professional development that attends to the inner dimensions of a teacher’s life. Education journals have devoted special issues about the importance of wholehearted commitment to good teaching. For example, the January 1999 issue of *Educational Leadership*, which focused on spirituality in education, ranks as the journal’s single most-requested reprint.
Despite apparent enthusiasm for these ideas, relatively little empirical research has appeared in peer-reviewed journals, particularly in terms of helping educators to understand how, to what extent, and under what conditions transformative professional development processes can influence outcome variables important to education. From a series of evaluations and dissertations conducted on programs primarily offered through CTT and the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching, insight into how this work impacts individual teachers and begins to spill over into the context of schools and classrooms is being generated. The authors’ review of 18 different studies (see Table 1 on page 30)—whose methodology were qualitative in nature, relying predominantly on self-reporting by participants—found that two strands of questioning were explored: What was the character of teachers’ experiences during participation; and How did their experiences influence their ensuing professional practice? The questions asked and the methods used did not explore important outcome variables such as school and classroom climate, collegial interaction, parent-teacher relationships, teacher and administrative retention, and relational trust.

Despite the limits of the research, the teachers’ self-reports suggested that something dramatically important happened for them in the context of these professional development experiences. First, through their experiences with these programs, teachers felt reconnected with their core beliefs about teaching. Second, teacher renewal programming served to rekindle teachers’ faith in the value of teaching well. Third, these programs provided teachers with a better sense of their own sources of strength and vitality. Fourth, teacher renewal helped teachers to see the value in and foster collegial relationships in their work settings.

One important caveat regarding these program evaluations is that data tracing links between teacher renewal and student learning does not exist. In fact, many advocates of teacher renewal programming resist a focus on student outcomes when considering the value of such efforts. Renewal, according to some, is good unto itself; and linking it to measures, such as student achievement data, devalues the premise that a teacher’s heart deserves caring, focused attention for its own sake.

The authors believe that an emphasis on teacher outcomes can coexist peacefully and productively with an obligation to demonstrate their ultimate value for students in the classroom. In fact, both authors recently have worked with the Fetzer Institute to develop a grant request to study the impact of teacher renewal programming and transformative professional development on systems changes (mediators or proximal outcomes) that are known to lead to improved student learning (distal outcome).
The challenges of measuring such a link are obviously substantial. For example, some evidence (Intrator and Scribner 2000) suggested that external changes in teacher practice—and thus potentially student experience and learning—manifest long after the retreat experience has ended. Nevertheless, the authors believe that waiting and watching for such effects is a vital next step in making the case that teacher renewal programming merits a substantial and ongoing commitment by teachers, administrators, and policy makers.

Focusing Inward to Turn Outward

Many advocates of teacher renewal programming argue for the intrinsic value of an intense focus on a teacher’s inner life. However, in a climate of standardized test scores, prescribed curricular strategies, and high-stakes accountability, it is understandable that many administrators and policy makers would construe teacher renewal as a luxury, or at least secondary to issues such as pedagogical technique and curriculum development.

The claim here is much bolder: If vocational vitality is an essential component of good teaching—and by extension, student learning and effective schools—then it deserves commensurate attention in the lives and work of teachers. Certainly there is a place for the policy and curricular restructuring efforts perpetually underway. However, both personal experience and empirical research suggest that what students notice most about their educational settings—even when queried following massive school restructuring—are the strengths and weaknesses of their teachers (Judith Warren Little in Weissbourd 2003).

Nevertheless, understandable hesitations exist. Teacher renewal is discounted not only by administrators who see scant connection between the inner lives of teachers and practical learning outcomes for students. Researchers and theorists also have criticized its inward focus given the pressing needs of students and schools. Focusing on teachers’ passion, motivation, and fulfillment obscures the objective, professional role that teachers must play. Buchmann (1986, 530) argued:

> What is close to people is always important to them; the personal will take care of itself. But professional aspirations, responsibility, and curricular subjects with their pedagogies must be learned. Tendencies in teacher preparation and staff development to stress individualism, self-realization, and the personal—even idiosyncratic—element in teaching are therefore problematic.

While the authors take issue with Buchmann’s faith that the personal will take care
of itself, they believe that if teacher renewal programming is to gain the attention (and concurrent professional development investment) it deserves, these broader concerns must be acknowledged and addressed.

Earlier, the authors suggested that teacher renewal, at its core, is concerned with authenticity. For teachers to strengthen their vocational vitality, they need sustained opportunities to renew connections between their personal selves and their work, to ensure that their labors are an authentic outgrowth of who they are as people and what calls them to the profession of teaching.

Yet, authenticity in teaching cannot simply consist of “to thine own self be true.” Good teaching requires educators to integrate their own needs and desires with the varying (and oftentimes unfamiliar) needs of their students. Good teaching, while it depends mightily on the personal resources of the teacher, ultimately emerges in the relationship between teacher, student, and context. Every teacher has to negotiate between his or her personal vision and an array of external realities—some dictated by state regulations or local policy, others emerging from the needs of students. For teachers, personal vision and values can develop in dialogue beyond themselves and can share a sense of purpose with a broader community. Educators achieve, in the words of Palmer (2004, 21), “a complex integration that . . . supports both personal integrity and the common good.”

The notion of renewal is not simply refilling, but generative and responsive to the changing needs of the evolving individual and context. This generative interplay between inner self and professional obligation is a vital element of teacher renewal. It also adds to the complexity of teacher renewal programming and the importance of providing opportunities for such growth that are responsive to a variety of stages in personal and professional life.

This outward turn, however, cannot be allowed to overshadow or crowd out ongoing attention to the inner lives of teachers. Though there is tension between the teaching self and external realities, giving teachers the space and encouragement to explore this tension is vital for the long-term growth of teachers, schools, and student learning. The personal must be tended so that teachers can tend the context. Concern for authenticity—and its classroom manifestations of vocational vitality—are essential elements in creating vibrant, inspiring institutions. Sustained, substantial investment in the personal, while aimed directly at the heart of teachers, is ultimately an investment in schools and student learning.

**Attending the Ebb and Flow**

Teachers play a pivotal—perhaps the pivotal—role in their students’ learning. However, anyone who has striven to make a profound difference in the classroom under-
stands that its many challenges can assail and dampen the fire and vitality of teachers. Disillusionment is an inevitable experience of the teaching life; this disillusionment can turn to depression and burnout, but there is another alternative. As Weissbourd (2003, 9) observed, disillusionment is not inherently bad, but rather the dismantling of illusion. It provides the opportunity “to face and absorb a greater portion of reality—a foundation for wisdom and maturity.” Only when teachers feel helplessly reactive—unable to creatively and energetically negotiate the divide between vision and reality—does disillusionment slide into burnout and ineffectiveness.

Over the long stretch of a school year and over the span of a career, teachers naturally will experience changes in their vocational vitality: treasured colleagues will leave, babies will be born, curricula will change, and myriad other forces will impact the person in the profession. There is no antidote for changing circumstances; however, the authors believe that teachers who work in isolation, who experience unrelenting overload, and who receive only narrow training around the technical dimensions of teaching will not retain what it takes to be their best and do their most inspired work. This paper began with a series of vignettes describing teachers who captured the attention of their students through a complex combination of craft, love of subject, and personal vitality. Teachers have long been able to develop their professional skills in the craft of pedagogy and subject matter. What rarely has been available is the opportunity to consider the role that the person plays in the profession. Teacher renewal programming provides teachers the opportunity to explore this neglected dimension, both for their own benefit and ultimately their students.

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**Table 1: Summary of Research on Teacher Renewal Programming and Its Impact on Educators**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Focus/Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poutiatine</td>
<td>N=31; CTT facilitators and participants (some teachers, some educational leaders)</td>
<td>Grounded theory</td>
<td>Reported on experiences of participants. Theoretical framework for understanding teacher renewal programming presented. Outcome effects identified by program facilitators included communication skills development and teaching mission and ideals exploration. Participants improved listening skills and focused on the formation of learning environments. Participants reported discovering vocational clarity and increased self-confidence in their practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poutiatine</td>
<td>15 studies reviewed</td>
<td>Research review</td>
<td>Reviewed research on teacher renewal programming. Five areas of impact were identified, including vocational disposition, personal and professional growth, teaching skills, life integration, and personal and professional renewal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simone 2004</td>
<td>N=4; CTT participants (all teachers)</td>
<td>Participant ethnography / multiple case study</td>
<td>Reported on the effects of teacher renewal retreats. Participants discovered a deeper sense of professional identity. That identity manifested itself in the vocational integrity of the individual participant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ho 2004</td>
<td>N=8; school superintendents</td>
<td>Mixed methods</td>
<td>Investigated efforts toward professional renewal of school superintendents. Findings suggested that superintendents who explore the ethic of relational care can create stronger educational organizations that are better equipped to make connections with their students, staff, and communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McMahon 2003</td>
<td>N=11; CTT participants (all teachers)</td>
<td>Phenomenology / heuristic inquiry</td>
<td>Reported on experiences of CTT alumni. Study concluded that depletion and burnout are serious realities for teachers. Participation in CTT retreats provided participants an opportunity to work through depletion and burnout, and professional renewal activities provided valuable impetus for changing vocational practices.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coward 2003</td>
<td>N=36; teachers and educational leaders</td>
<td></td>
<td>Examined teacher renewal programming at the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching. Findings showed that programming led to deep introspection on practice and an increase in teacher vocational satisfaction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitlock 2003</td>
<td>Six models of teacher development, theoretically deconstructed</td>
<td>Qualitative theoretical analysis</td>
<td>Investigated the relationship between renewal processes and conventional forms of professional development. Highlighted how renewal is not a substitute for increased instructional expertise, but an essential complement to quality professional development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faulkner 2003</td>
<td>N=32; CTT retreat participants</td>
<td>Survey: quantitative and qualitative</td>
<td>Profiled CTT participants, including factors that brought them to the programs and significant outcomes. Participants reported a deeper sense of vocational commitment and an improved ability to integrate renewal practices into their vocational lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poutiatine</td>
<td>N=51; participants in CTT retreat series more than 18 months</td>
<td>Survey: quantitative and qualitative</td>
<td>Profiled CTT participants, including factors that brought them to the programs and significant outcomes. Participants noted positive changes in life balance and vocational satisfaction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poutiatine</td>
<td>N=41; participants in CTT retreat series more than 18 months</td>
<td>Survey: quantitative and qualitative</td>
<td>Profiled CTT participants, including factors that brought them to the programs and significant outcomes. Participants reported improved instructional practice, better reflective skills, and a stronger sense of vocational identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrator 2002</td>
<td>N=25; CTT participants, teachers, educational leaders, and other educational professionals</td>
<td>Heuristic inquiry/participant ethnography</td>
<td>Described developmental impacts and renewal experiences of teachers and educational leaders as a result of participation in CTT programs and/or ongoing attention to issues of renewal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poutiatine</td>
<td>N=45; participants in CTT retreat series more than 18 months</td>
<td>Survey: quantitative and qualitative</td>
<td>Profiled CTT participants, including factors that brought them to the programs and significant outcomes. Participants reported professional identity clarification and the use of reflective practice in education.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Focus/Findings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intrator and Scribner 2002</td>
<td>N=56; participants in CTT retreat series more than 24 months</td>
<td>Survey: quantitative and qualitative; longitudinal</td>
<td>Surveyed and interviewed participants 2–5 years after they attended CTT retreats. Participants reported that the CTT program revitalized their teaching; had the potential to revitalize their practices; and could serve to help keep good teachers in the profession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jay 2003</td>
<td>N=4; teachers</td>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>Investigated the role of reflection in teaching and teacher development. Findings showed that reflection can support teachers’ practice and development, particularly in area of vocational clarity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carotta 1999</td>
<td>N=unknown</td>
<td>Participant ethnography / testimonial</td>
<td>Examined the use of reflective introspection as a tool for professional development and sustainability. Educators described enhanced vocational engagement and instructional practice as a result of structured reflection practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrator and Scribner 1998</td>
<td>N=65; participants in CTT retreat series more than 18 months</td>
<td>Survey: quantitative and qualitative</td>
<td>Surveyed and interviewed participants immediately after CTT programming. Teachers reported developing a renewed focus on nurturing, caring reciprocal relationships with students, and described becoming more attuned to the students’ needs. Teachers also felt that participation in the program helped them to be better able to build community in their classrooms.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mysliwiec 1997</td>
<td>N=95; teachers and principals</td>
<td>Critical incident case study</td>
<td>Explored how school leaders promote teacher renewal and formational development among their faculty members. Findings underscored the desire for holistic approaches that include renewal and formation as part of their vocational development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressley 1992</td>
<td>N=12; teachers</td>
<td>Mixed methods</td>
<td>Explored whether teachers change their practices as a result of renewal or formational professional development. Findings showed significant changes in professional practice that participants attributed directly to participation in renewal programming.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>