

In The Habit of Passionate Teaching, Deborah Rickey and Randall Wisehart share anecdotes from experienced teachers who have chosen to stay in the teaching profession and share their own insights about effective teaching practices.

**The Habit of Passionate Teaching:
Reflections on Teaching For Learning**

By Deborah Rickey and Randall Wisehart

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THE HABIT
of
PASSIONATE
TEACHING:

REFLECTIONS ON TEACHING
FOR LEARNING

DEBORAH L. RICKEY
AND RANDALL B. WISEHART

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Introduction

We have spent most of our careers learning from our students and colleagues. As you read this book, we hope you will reflect on what you have learned from your own colleagues and from your own experiences in schools. Whether you are a current teacher, a teaching candidate, or a teacher educator, we hope you can spend time reflecting on what you have learned from your own students and think about their stories. It is within these stories you can find true passion.

We are passionate teachers at heart. To us this means embracing questions that help us explore the nature of teaching and learning. It means we make it a priority to engage in reflection about our work and learn from our students and our colleagues. In this book we will ask a lot of questions. Questions have always guided our work as educators; questions also led us to write this book. Questions have helped us stay in the profession and love what we do. We hope this book will help you understand how to become a passionate teacher, but also sustain careers as passionate educators and support educators you meet along the way.

We want to emphasize from the start we do not propose to have an easy recipe for how to become a passionate teacher—how to suddenly increase student achievement to extraordinary levels, or how to make the teaching *for* learning process easy and efficient. Instead, we offer reflections peppered with questions and insights. We offer suggestions for how to think about learning and the teaching profession in ways that will challenge you to become better—and ultimately help your students achieve at higher levels.

Why This Book and Why Now?

It is a very challenging time to become a teacher in K-12 classrooms around the United States. Schools and teachers are routinely blamed for low test scores and other perceived problems. Teacher candidates are often required to meet cut scores on standardized tests to earn a license or even enter a teaching program. They are asked to jump through many, many hoops; sometimes the hoops are on fire. Finally, many students and families face challenging life issues that often can't be separated from their lives as students. No wonder the number of empty classrooms with teachers leaving them is staggering (Morrison, 2022).

Nevertheless, we believe this is a great time to be or become a teacher. Opportunities abound to make a difference in the lives of young people. This is a great time to embrace the challenge of becoming a passionate teacher—a teacher who knows how to build positive relationships with students and colleagues; a teacher who knows how to reflect on practice and continue to improve; a teacher who understands the complex interplay of theory and practice.

The Importance of Craft Knowledge: Educators Learning from Each Other

We write this book as a way to honor our commitment to nurturing and sharing craft knowledge (Barth 2001; Burney, 2004). Simply put, craft knowledge is knowledge specific to a profession. Sharing craft knowledge is what you might call “talking shop.” Some schools have structured sessions focused on professional learning in which teachers are encouraged to share ideas. However, feedback from current teachers suggests that even in schools where idea sharing is encouraged and, in some cases, mandatory, the school culture often

does not encourage the creating and sharing of craft knowledge (Wisehart, 2008; Wisehart & Rickey, 2014).

We have shared with our students in the past the image of a teacher's last day of her career. She sits in her classroom wondering what to do with all the unit plans, lesson plans, activities, and protocols she has used successfully throughout the years. Then she has it! She sends an email to her colleagues at school telling them she'll leave hard copies of her files outside her door. Anyone is welcome to take what they think they can use. She likely also leaves a note for the custodian, suggesting that anything left at the end of the day be put in the dumpster. That's what happens to much of the accumulated knowledge, the craft knowledge, of teachers: it ends up in a dumpster, forgotten as generations of new teachers are left to figure out how to improve and grow on their own. Thus, we humbly hope this book might help educators break the practice of discarding generational knowledge.

Throughout this book, we will share insights from our teaching careers and from our years-long studies of graduates we have worked with in a teacher preparation program. We will share what we have learned and continue to learn from our graduates including some of their insights and suggestions. We will also share protocols and activities that we have found useful and that readers may want to adapt for your own context. Most importantly, we will dedicate an entire chapter to suggestions from our former students, veteran teachers. With their permission, using their first names, we are also sharing their craft knowledge.

The Importance of Reflection and an Action Research Mindset

Two fundamental concepts threaded throughout this book are *reflection* and an *action research mindset*. The ability to use reflection

is part of what happens when people begin exhibiting an action research mindset. They continually ask questions about their work, reflect on what they have learned, and ask others for advice and feedback. They make it a practice that is not simply “an act of will or the result of encouragement. You have to build it into people’s practice, make it a part of their day” (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012, p. 99). The habits of reflection and inquiry are foundational to an action research mindset and to the practice of passionate teaching. They are also the cornerstones of teaching *for* learning—that intentional practice of taking the “and” out of teaching and learning and replacing it with “for” to show the relationship between teaching/learning. Thus, the use of “for” indicates that teachers teach from the perspective of their students, their learning, and their needs. That simple changing of “and” to “for” is a part of that reflective work of a passionate teacher. *For* whom are you teaching?

Passionate educators engage in reflection regularly and make changes in their practice based on their reflection. Sometimes the reflection is part of an action research mindset in which educators pose a question or a wondering about their classroom as the beginning of a process. Passionate teachers create knowledge about teaching and learning: it’s part of who they are as educators.

The Most Important Question

An enlightened reader might ask, do we really need another book about education, especially right now? Would we not be better off finding ways to help solve the teacher crisis and figure out how to get more teachers who will stay in the profession? These are excellent questions.

As we began writing this book, we realized we have actually been exploring one question (with a large number of related questions)

throughout our entire careers. Our approach may be of interest to not only prospective teachers but also new teachers, veteran teachers, building administrators, educator preparation faculty, and anyone who is interested in reading a story about how we have explored this question in a number of contexts over more than forty years. The question is: What does it mean to be a good teacher? Although we realized as we wrote this book that the question had evolved into: What does it mean to be a passionate teacher?

We believe this is a question that is as timely now as it was when we began our careers more than forty years ago; it will still be a timely question forty years from now. Sometimes the question was explicit, but often, the question was implicit—engrained in our reflective practice. By putting this question at the core of our exploration of our work—as teachers in secondary schools, as building administrators in high schools, as faculty and administrators of teacher preparation programs—we were able to grow and improve throughout our careers. In this book, we want to share what we have learned about good teachers and good teaching—about what it means to be a passionate teacher.

We hope readers will find something that sparks an interest then build on our ideas and experiences and share any emerging understandings with others. We contribute to improving the profession of teaching at all levels by making a commitment to inquire and reflect; and then share emerging understandings with one another. That's how we construct craft knowledge about teaching. If we want to do something tangible to help address the teaching crisis, we need to really understand what it means to keep this question in the hearts and minds of teachers.

Voices of Passionate Teachers

Over the past ten years we have received input from fifty-four Earlham Graduate Programs in Education (GPE) graduates. This number includes graduates from both the MAT and MEd Programs. All but two are currently working in educational institutions. They work in a variety of schools, public and private; rural and urban; small and large; colleges and departments of education. Some have worked internationally, some in prisons, and some in alternative schools. These voices together reflect a total of over eight hundred years of teaching experience. Including the two of us, this book reflects more than nine hundred years of accumulated knowledge about teaching. With permission, we have relied on the voices of these educators. Therefore, we shall quote them heavily.

A Blueprint for Reading This Book

Some of you may want to start reading from the beginning and read through to the end; however, others may choose to skip some chapters or skip ahead and read chapters that are of most interest to you first. After reading this introduction and Chapter One, you should have a pretty good idea of whether you'd rather keep reading or skip ahead. The following thoughts may assist you in this decision making.

Chapter One: Read this chapter if you'd like to know a little more about the key foundational ideas that underlie this book, the practices of passionate teachers that lead to the habit of passionate teaching. This chapter also introduces the idea of an action research mindset, which will be explained in more detail in Chapter Nine.

Chapter Two: Read this chapter if you'd like to know more about Debbie's experience as a passionate teacher and leader through the years.

Chapter Three: Read this chapter if you'd like to know more about Randy's early teaching experiences as an aspiring passionate teacher.

Chapter Four: Read this chapter if you'd like to learn about the concept of being a critical friend and how Debbie and Randy have served that role for each other over the years.

Chapter Five: Read this chapter if you'd like to know more about the importance of knowing oneself as a foundation for becoming a passionate teacher.

Chapter Six: Read this chapter if you're interested in the role of relationships in teaching. We share what we have learned from our graduates, from formal studies, from observations, and from conversations.

Chapter Seven: Read this chapter if you're interested in the role of reflection in becoming a passionate teacher. Again, we share what we have learned from our graduates.

Chapter Eight: Read this chapter if you're interested in how to create and nurture a learning community in the classroom. We go into detail about how Earlham College principles and practices, including Quaker principles, have helped us refine what we understand about classrooms as communities.

Chapter Nine: Read this chapter if you're interested in the role of an action research mindset and inquiry informed by professional knowledge in becoming a passionate teacher.

Chapter Ten: Read this chapter if you're interested in the power of listening and questioning in the classroom and learning more about how Socratic seminars can help both teachers and students develop listening, questioning, and thinking skills.

Chapter Eleven: Read this chapter if you'd like to focus on the process of evolving from the practices of passionate teachers to the habit of passionate teaching. We use the words of teachers who have already been applying practices of passionate teachers to illustrate the process.

Chapter Twelve: Read this chapter for specific advice from veteran teachers who have chosen to pursue a life as a passionate teacher.

Chapter Thirteen: Read this chapter if you're interested in how to sustain practices of passionate teaching and even help others understand and implement the practices. Also read this chapter if you'd like to think more about leadership, whether it's informal leadership or aspiring to a formal leadership position.

Chapter Fourteen: Read this chapter if you'd like to focus on what to do on Monday. We highlight advice from graduates who have grown into passionate teachers and who offer some specific activities and strategies that have helped them develop the habit of passionate teaching.

Chapter Fifteen: In this chapter we offer some concluding thoughts about the habit of passionate teaching.

Whether you decide to read this book from beginning to end or select chapters you are most interested in, we hope you will reflect on the voices of our students. Be a student yourself. Ask your own questions. Consider how these ideas and experiences compare to your own experiences in schools and try out some of the practices of passionate teachers. Above all, our hope is for each reader to find connections, affirmations, and possibilities toward understanding what it means to be a passionate teacher.

Chapter One – The Habit of Passionate Teaching: Teaching *for* Learning

I want to develop a community that expresses to students that they all have talents and strengths, that they are all capable of high levels of learning, and that they will learn best when they are engaged, active, and working with each other... My students will have an active voice in the classroom... Each student's abilities, interests, and learning profiles will be taken into account when developing assignments... Students in my classroom need to be players, decision makers, and stakeholders in their own education and destiny. They should be expected to self-assess, reflect, and give feedback to their peers and to the teacher.

-Kim Vincent, MEd Cohort One

Good teachers understand how to help students make progress as learners. Passionate teachers go beyond that: they help students build a foundation for lifelong learning. Passionate teachers embrace important questions about learning and consume professional knowledge. They have extensive content knowledge, but they also know they must cultivate authentic relationships with students to help them learn. As Kim Vincent notes in the quote above, they understand their most important role in the classroom is to empower their students to take ownership of their own learning. These practices and others help teachers build, over time, the habit of passionate teaching.

We remember seeing colleagues from our teaching days, as well as MAT graduates, working with middle school and high school students on projects. Remembering how the teachers worked with students on projects reminded us of many of the elements of passionate

teaching. Throughout this book, we use examples from the teachers and teacher candidates we have worked with to help us explore what it means to be a passionate teacher. The following anecdote has been cobbled together from a combination of what we have seen in different classrooms from a variety of teachers.

It's at least three months into the school year. Luann S. and Corey V. have been teaching a number of teambuilding activities to help their seventh graders learn how to work together in a variety of group settings. At the beginning of the unit, the teachers had shared with students they would be designing presentations to help each other learn the important ideas from each chapter even though groups had read different chapters. The two teachers offered pieces of chalk to two students randomly and moved to opposite sides of the room, Luann sitting in a chair and Corey pacing.

Luann began. "You can see on the handout the guidelines for this project. You are in groups of six and each group has read a different chapter from the textbook. You must design a presentation that involves every group member and shares with the rest of the class the most important points of the chapter." She nodded toward her teaching partner. "Mr. V and I will help you along the way, but first you must decide how you'll present the material. Remember, the entire class will take a test over what you've presented."

Mr. V paced to the front of the room and raised his hand, "Mrs. S, I have a question." He waited for her to nod, then continued. "Shouldn't we talk first about what makes a presentation good? Maybe share examples of good presentations we've seen?"

Luann smiled as Corey paced back to the side of the room. "Good idea Mr. V." She looked at the students who had been holding the

chalk. “Tiffany. Curtis. Would you go to the front of the room please and record what we come up with?” After the students reached the front of the room, pieces of chalk in hand, Luann continued. “Now, class, let’s discuss some examples of presentations you have seen in the past that have helped you learn.”

“Mrs. S? May I interrupt again?” Corey remained on the side of the room, chin in hand, a thoughtful look on his face. “I was wondering. What if we gave them three minutes to chat with a group of three about past presentations before we begin sharing?”

Luann smiled at her teaching partner. “Another good idea, Mr. V. Let’s do it.”

After the brief time for sharing, Curtis and Tiffany began recording the thoughts of their seventh-grade classmates: “It included something visual. They repeated the important parts. They gave us time to take notes. The presenter had a sense of humor. They asked if we had any questions in the middle not just at the end.”

After reviewing the list, Luann addressed the group again. “This looks like a good list. Now let’s decide how you’ll use this list to make sure you’re creating an effective presentation.”

This is an example of passionate teaching, but why? The teachers, Luann and Corey, spent time building positive relationships with their students through the year so that the students knew their teachers would listen to them and incorporate their ideas. The teachers knew their content area so well they were comfortable giving up some power in the classroom, confident they could make adjustments so students would make progress toward course standards. Luann and Corey would have met beforehand and agreed they had a genuine question guiding them: what are the elements of an effective presentation? They

expected their students to help them explore this question collaboratively (i.e., teachers and students) in the context of the class.

What is Teaching *For Learning*?

Passionate teachers teach *for learning*. This is more than just a catchy phrase. It is fundamental to understanding how to be a passionate teacher. Based on our experiences and observations, when teachers kept the idea and ideals of teaching and learning separate, they engaged in planning and instruction from the teacher's lens without focusing on what individual students needed. Teachers need to understand and embody the idea that all their planning and preparation for teaching should come from pondering the following question: "What do my students need in order to learn today?" This is teaching *for learning*.

Classrooms with teachers who teach *for learning* focus on understanding important ideas in a content area, not merely memorizing or "covering" important facts. Teaching *for learning* classrooms are designed to empower students to ask important questions, not merely obey teacher instructions; they celebrate failure as part of learning rather than accept fear of failure (Fried, 2001; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). In classrooms exhibiting teaching *for learning*, the students' voices, and their learning matter more than what the teacher likes, enjoys, or presumes to know.

Let's look at a practical example of this. When we worked together as teacher educators, we wanted to drive home the concept of teaching *for learning*. Therefore, we included the following practice as part of our day one plan with each new cohort of teacher candidates. We routinely wrote on the board the words "Teaching and Learning" and asked candidates what the phrase meant to them—how they had heard it used before. After a short discussion about teaching and learning,

one of us strode to the front of the room and put a slash across the word “and” replacing it with “for,” which left “Teaching *for* Learning.” A conversation about what this meant began during the first few days but continued throughout the entire program. The final assignment for a teaching degree was a capstone essay in which candidates were asked to articulate how the teacher within them had been awakened: how they now understood how to teach *for* learning.

The Dance of Teaching *for* Learning

As she described her path to becoming a passionate teacher, Mimi, MAT Cohort Fifteen, likened her year of educator preparation where she learned how to teach *for* learning to a dance:

At my high school there was a tango teacher in the dance department named Mr. Magee that everyone wanted to dance with. It is such a thrill to dance with Mr. Magee because he really knows what he’s doing. He danced with confidence; he improvised; he never took his focus off the dance or his partner, and effortlessly adapted his style to his partner’s level of ability and readiness for challenge. Perhaps the most remarkable thing was that each time I finished a dance with Mr. Magee, I felt not as though he was such a good dancer, but that I was!

In a way I can use a dance metaphor to describe my awakening as a teacher. At the beginning of the year, I knew some of the steps, but could not lead confidently or improvise very well. Now I feel more confident, not only performing the steps myself but leading a class of partners, inviting them to suggest patterns and steps, and working hard to adapt the dance to their style and ability level.

I let my students' interest in music, real-life projects and acting direct our treatment of texts and our writing projects. As a leader in this dance, I also reached clarity on several topics that I don't let the partner decide, such as whom they work with, whether they do the work, or whether they are respectful in the classroom. My teaching practices, to use the same dancing metaphor, have become more self-assured and confident.

Mimi talked about the importance of trying new strategies in the classroom:

[This] helped me see that students can take the lead in the dance too, and that doing so doesn't need to threaten my authority and catapults the student's sense of self into a whole new dimension.

This reflection shows how a teacher thinks about teaching *for* learning. She embraced the idea of students being her partner in learning and not objects of her instruction. She made it a priority to know her students well and use her knowledge of her students to help them learn. She understood she could both foster positive relations and insist on students being respectful as they worked to achieve high expectations. She understood encouraging her students to sometimes “take the lead” did not diminish her authority but did help them become more confident as learners. The focus, as always for passionate teachers, is on both her own growth and the growth of her students.

The Practices of Passionate Teaching

Good teachers are a special breed. They come in many shapes and sizes. Ted Sizer famously said no two good schools are alike (Sizer, 1992). Similarly, we propose no two passionate teachers are alike. Based on what we've learned from listening to our students and our graduates over the years, we have some tentative understandings to share. Thus, based on our own teaching experiences and the reflections of the students and teachers we have worked with through the years, we share the following as a partial list of practices of passionate teachers. Furthermore, while talking through these practices as we wrote this book, we were struck anew by the complexity of teaching. Trying to isolate specific practices was challenging. Writing about one practice necessarily overlapped with what we wanted to say about another practice. But that's teaching for you. Messy and complex.

We offer the following list as a starting point for an exploration of the practices of passionate teachers with the understanding there is so much overlap among the practices that what we say about one practice also helps describe or define another practice. It reminds us of something we often told our teacher candidates during their educator preparation program. The teacher candidates experienced the program as a cohort, taking all courses together except for a content methods course. There was inevitably a point when we'd be dealing in one course with a topic or practice introduced in another course and a student would say, "Wait a minute. What course are we in right now? I'm confused." To this, we would say, "You caught us. Although the catalog says you are taking thirteen courses, you are really just taking one course about how to be a good teacher and we arbitrarily break it up into manageable bits we call courses." That's the reality of teaching. Content overlaps with pedagogy, theory overlaps with practice.

Passionate Teachers Teach from the Inside Out

Passionate teachers teach from within and know themselves well. They focus on the content their students need to learn but never lose sight of their own humanity and the humanity of their students (Palmer, 2007). This also includes understanding they must challenge assumptions about learning and teaching as part of knowing oneself. By routinely looking for opportunities to challenge assumptions, passionate teachers are continually honing their beliefs about learning, teaching, and their bottom lines.

Teachers who teach from the inside out make sure they don't just focus on content, facts, and figures. They know their own strengths and limitations. They can discern when to put in extra hours planning or grading and when to take a break to renew their energy. In addition, a passionate teacher can read the room. When she sees glazed over eyes and lagging attention, she stops and does something to re-energize her students. When she sees looks of confusion, she asks questions like, "Who can explain to the rest of the class the most important points we have just been reviewing?" or "Who can suggest something we need to spend more time on?"

Passionate Teachers Teach Who They Are

For passionate teachers, understanding who they are is crucial as a basis for forming meaningful relationships with their students. They engage in introspection in order to understand who they are as a teacher and, they ask, as Palmer (2007) often asks, "Who is the self that teaches?" They understand the importance of exploring their beliefs and priorities and regularly check to make sure their activities, assignments, assessments, and expectations are consistent with who they are as a teacher. They understand their "bottom lines" (Wilhelm, 1999). That is, they understand the qualities they want students to

embody are a priority whether it be to persist in adversity, to learn from failure, to find joy in learning or something else.

In practice, teachers who teach who they are make sure they have clearly expressed their beliefs about learning *for* teaching. They have written a list or created a visual they can look at from time to time throughout the year and compare what they say they believe to what they are actually doing.

Imagine a teacher a few months into the school year wondering if she is just going through the motions and not focusing on what is most important for her students. She might reach into a drawer and pull out a list of her most cherished beliefs. She may pull up a file on her computer with a visual illustrating her beliefs about teaching *for* learning. Then she reviews how she has spent time in class recently. Has what she has been doing (and what she has asked her students to do) this past week reflected her beliefs and priorities? If she doesn't have an artifact to refer to, she'll never know.

Passionate Teachers Seek to Understand Students as People and as Learners

Passionate teachers intentionally build a classroom community based on the belief the job of a teacher is to engage with real people in the exploration of important ideas in a discipline; they do not merely dispense information and hope anonymous students are able to repeat it. In a classroom of a passionate teacher, a teacher might ask individual students to reflect on the following questions in writing or during a meeting: “What are your strengths as a learner? What are a couple of challenges you think you’ll face in this class?” Then after reviewing this information, a teacher might ask: “What will you do in this class to build on your strengths? What might you do to meet one of the challenges? What do you need from me to meet one of your

challenges?” Passionate teachers experience teaching as a relationship with individual students. They teach students—not subjects.

Passionate Teachers Build Positive Relationships

Passionate teachers intentionally forge positive relationships with students and colleagues. They include parents and the community when appropriate and make decisions about teaching and learning based on knowing their students. A key aspect of these positive relationships is having high expectations for students, believing in their potential to excel, and a commitment to helping all students learn. Rob Fried calls this “stance” (Fried, 2001).

Passionate Teachers Continuously Reflect

Passionate teachers reflect in a number of contexts: after engaging with professional knowledge; before, during, and after instruction; alone, with colleagues, and with students; when working on curriculum and lesson planning. Whether thinking about students or teachers, learning doesn’t take place without reflection and reflection must be modeled and explicitly taught in classrooms; and it is as crucial for secondary school students as it is for teacher candidates or veteran teachers and principals. Good teachers reflect before, during, and after teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Schon, 1983).

Passionate Teachers Nurture Communities of Learners

Passionate teachers understand that K-12 school classrooms, K-12 schools, and college teacher education classrooms are communities of learners. They invite students into the learning community, first by making sure they and their students have a shared understanding of what it means to be part of a community focused on learning.

As teacher educators, we modeled and applied some ideas from the Earlham College principles and practices (Earlham College, 2023), making sure they were woven throughout the program. These principles—acknowledging the worth of each human being, engaging in conflict resolution that values diverse viewpoints, implementing principles of consensus decision making so all members of the community have some degree of power, advocating for equity in a wide range of situations—are foundational to the creation of those communities of learners that support passionate teaching.

Passionate Teachers Have an Action Research Mindset

Passionate teachers are always posing questions, challenging implicit assumptions, and using the results to make changes. Questions permeate their practice, and they continuously engage in inquiry and engage with professional learning. We call this having an action research mindset. Passionate teachers are always in a cycle of posing questions about their practice, gathering data, reflecting, and analyzing the data, asking colleagues for input, and then deciding whether to pose a new question or continue to explore the current question. This practice of being in an action research mindset guides passionate teachers to make decisions about their work and their classrooms.

Picture this conversation in the teachers' lounge among two MEd graduates and one MAT graduate: Karen, Scott, and Chad who all taught separate content—English, math, and social studies—to sophomores often talked about their classes and students. One day they began talking about the many overlapping ideas from their separate contents. For example, can one really understand certain pieces of literature without understanding the context of the world when it was published? As they began talking, they also began wondering why they weren't helping their own students learn in this more connected way—especially since these connections were clear to them: “If we see these

connections, would it help our students to also make the connections and then perhaps understand the content better?”

That conversation and subsequent questions from these teachers led to them forming a proposal they took to their administration, one where they would coordinate the content to teach it in a more holistic way that would layer the learning around overarching questions and combine their individual subjects. The result was a pilot project where sophomores engaged with these teachers in a blocked format in order to learn differently. The results and the engagement from the students and the teachers involved were impressive. These teachers were always posing questions of each other, exploring whether their students were learning and understanding differently. These passionate teachers asked questions, challenged assumptions, and modeled an action research mindset in order to bring about a change for their students.

Passionate Teachers Teach with Students, Not at Students

Passionate teachers experience teaching as a process they undertake *with* students not something to *do to* students. A favorite phrase we used often was “when in doubt, ask your students.” Passionate teachers intentionally build time into their instruction to actively listen to students and use student input to improve their instruction and assessment. They are not satisfied with merely asking students for feedback at the end of a semester or end of a unit. Instead, passionate teachers directly ask students for feedback as a natural part of teaching, sometimes on a daily basis.

One efficient way to build this into a school day is to utilize that often problematical last few minutes of class when students are anxious to put away materials so they can stare at the clock waiting for the bell to ring. A teacher could pass out half sheets of paper and with

five minutes left in class say: “On this paper, write down three important things you learned today and one question. I’ll stand at the door and collect them as you leave. Ready? You have four minutes. Go!” Often a teacher who reviews these slips from their students recognizes what students seem to be learning and where they are confused. Making adjustments based on this feedback makes students and teachers partners in learning.

The Habit of Passionate Teaching

There is an old adage, “practice makes perfect.” While we do not think any of us are perfect, we do believe that practices form a habit and that engaging in the practices of passionate teachers leads to the habit of passionate teaching. That is, the practices become so deeply engrained in the complex work of teaching, that they become natural, like breathing as some of our graduates like to say. That natural inclination, like breathing, is how we experience the habit of passionate teaching. Not separate strategies or skills, but simply the total embedding of those practices into the overall habit of passionate teaching. The practices become so embedded that we do not even realize we are implementing them; it’s just the way we do things. This book is about the practices of passionate teaching. Our hope is that readers will explore, implement, and hone these practices so that, like the teachers we talked with, they become part of who you are.

Passionate Teachers are Lifelong Learners

It is important to note that it takes years to develop the habit of passionate teaching. Passionate teachers continually pose questions about which of their practices are most likely to help students learn and grow. It takes hard work to develop the habit of passionate teaching.

Implicit in the practices of passionate teachers is the importance of a passionate teacher being a lifelong learner. Both of us have been inspired by Peter Senge's thoughts about personal mastery in *The Fifth Discipline* (2006). Senge says that personal mastery is "the phrase we use for the discipline of personal growth and learning" (p.131). He goes on to explain that "Personal mastery goes beyond competence and skills.... It means approaching one's life as a creative work, living life from a creative rather than a reactive viewpoint" (p.131). Senge drives home the importance of being a lifelong learner:

People with a high level of personal mastery live in a continual learning mode...But personal mastery is not something you possess. It is a process. It is a lifelong discipline. People with a high level of personal mastery are acutely aware of their ignorance, their incompetence, their growth areas. And they are deeply self-confident. Paradoxical? Only for those who do not see that the journey is the reward. (Senge, pp. 132-133)

Passionate teachers spend their professional lives navigating this delicate balance of knowing their shortcomings as well as their strengths. They address their areas for growth as they recognize what they are doing well—and they teach their students how to do this as an integral part of the classroom experience.

We speak from experience when we say that even after forty years each as educators, we are still honing the practices of passionate teaching. We are able to implement some practices better than others, and even though we engage in the practices as a habit, doing them as naturally as we breathe, we are still learning how to do them better or more consistently.

These practices of passionate teaching became important to us through our professional experiences, our personal experiences, our reading, and our own ongoing coursework. Both of us realize our unique experiences helped us understand the practices in a way that was grounded in who we are and what we were learning. However, during the development of the Earlham MAT program, we began to explore how to help others think about the practices and apply them in new and unique ways based on their own beliefs and experiences. Our desire was to help instill in our graduates that these practices are not “add-ons” to their work but a part of who they were as teachers, so deeply engrained that they would not be able to think of them separately. Instead, the practices would become as natural as... breathing.

Getting to the point of saying we have developed the habit of passionate teaching does not mean we engage in all the practices flawlessly. Rather, it means we are engaging in some of the practices of passionate teaching naturally, without explicitly thinking about the specific practice. Part of being a passionate teacher means understanding we are continually learning, continually devouring professional knowledge, continually wondering how to do things better. Lauren, a teaching veteran of sixteen years asked: “Do we ever stop being teachers? For me it was: Find my way. Refind [sic] my way. Refine my way.”

One of our former students, Casey Pohlenz, MAT Cohort Five, a truly passionate teacher and coach, wrote the following after student teaching and lived it throughout his teaching career:

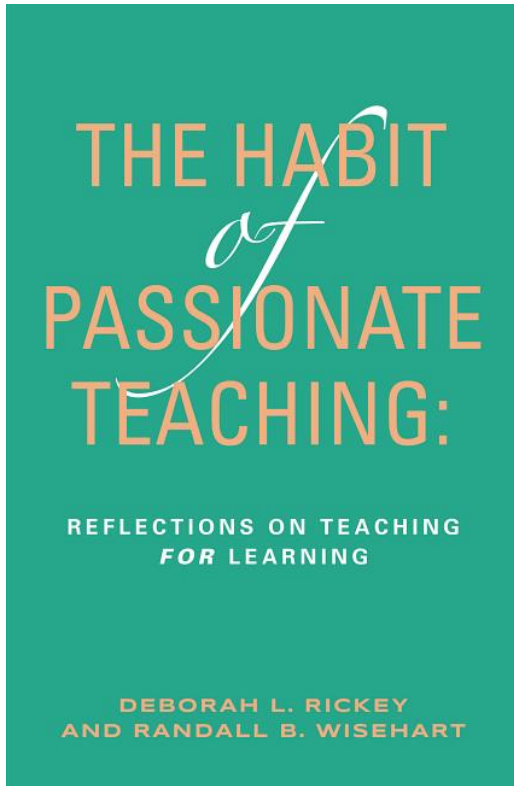
One of the main things I have learned is that in order to be a truly passionate, caring, quality teacher, you must become a lifelong learner... I can tell you (and therefore have learned) that it is not enough to keep learning. I need to keep practicing

what I learn... If I can accomplish that along with the other core values that were either instilled in me or existed but were reinforced by being in the MAT, I think I will be on the road to being a great teacher, and that is what I came here to learn how to be.

Being true to the core values of passionate teaching while continuing to hone one's skills and embracing a commitment to lifelong learning? We think Casey got it just about right.

Going Deeper: Questions for Aspiring Passionate Teachers

1. What does a passionate teacher look like?
2. Do you think of yourself as a passionate teacher? Why or why not?
3. What does it mean to teach *for* learning? Where do you agree with the authors? Where are the points you disagree with?
4. What is one thing you might change in your classroom if you wanted to explore the idea of teaching *for* learning?
5. What are your priorities for your students, your bottom lines? How do the experiences of your students in your classroom align with your priorities?
6. Which of the practices listed in this chapter are you most curious about? Why?
7. Which of the practices listed in this chapter seem most challenging to you? Why?



In The Habit of Passionate Teaching, Deborah Rickey and Randall Wisehart share anecdotes from experienced teachers who have chosen to stay in the teaching profession and share their own insights about effective teaching practices.

**The Habit of Passionate Teaching:
Reflections on Teaching For Learning**

By Deborah Rickey and Randall Wisehart

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