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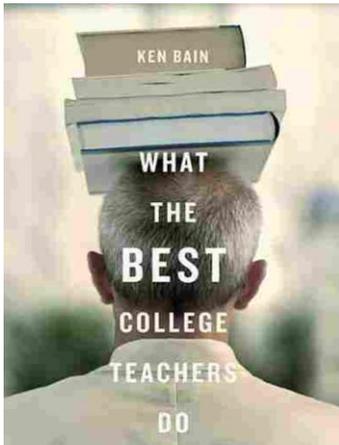
# “SETTING STUDENTS ON FIRE”

SUPPORT RESOURCES/STIMULUS

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“highly effective teachers



... realize that human beings can and do change, and that the nature of their instruction can have an enormous influence on that process” AND

“stress the beauty, utility, or intrigue of the questions they try to answer with their students . . .” (41).

2 related resources [further below]

1 “5 Ways to Share Your Passion for Learning”  
*by Jordan Catapano*

2 Harvard Educational Review of Robert Fried’s  
*The Passionate Teacher: A Practical Guide*

Fried discusses what he believes is the greatest obstacle that educators face: what he calls “having to play ‘The Game of School.’” As he sees it, educators face this obstacle . . . “when the idea of learning is treated as a mindless duty – something to ‘get through any way you can’”. . . “as a trick rather than as an opportunity to learn” (93).



# 5 Ways to Share Your Passion for Learning

by Jordan Catapano

Many teachers would verify that they entered the field of teaching because they love it. Not only do they love teaching others, but the subject material they teach thrills them. Stories abound of would-be teachers switching out of college majors to pursue the career they love. In other cases, teachers work with their subject material - whether it be English, Math, Science, or whatever - in arenas beyond just their classroom. They gravitate towards those venues. They feel complete when they work with and talk about what they love.

And then they meet students who are, shall we say, not quite as enthusiastic. Some teachers can be caught up in a moment of pure passion when talking about a topic without realizing their audience doesn't exactly sympathize with their sentiment.

The truth is that teachers regularly love "this stuff," whatever it is they may be teaching. The question is, "How can passionate teachers get their students to be passionate, too?" After all, unless students have some degree of interest in the topic, they are not going to be motivated to excel.

1. **Be open with your own passion.** It's unbelievably boring to learn from someone who doesn't even seem to care about what they are saying. It's incredibly inspiring, on the other hand, to have someone talk about a topic with pure joy. If you love something, then show it. It's contagious.
2. **Regularly apply your passion, and tell your students.** Be an example. If you were thinking about something, working on a project, or just walking along and found something interesting that relates to class, tell your students about the experience. What you and your students talk about doesn't have to be isolated to your classroom. Let them see how what you're teaching applies to the world beyond the classroom.
3. **Get students to apply it, too.** Whatever your content is, if students have experience applying that knowledge to more than a test, they'll be hooked. The world is diverse and fascinating. Classrooms, on the other hand, are abysmally isolating at times. Give them a glimpse of the real world.
4. **Passion is cool.** At least, that's what we adults think. Students often shy away from becoming too "academic" or "nerdy" because school isn't always presented as something cool. But it is. Constantly remind students that being smart, passionate, engaged people is cool - and give them plenty of opportunities to be cool.
5. **Set goals and reward improvement.** When students set a goal for their own academic growth, half the battle is already won. Now they have an internal motivating factor that will help propel them to that next level of success. And lavishly reward students who make any improvements.

Turning even just one student onto a particular topic is not easy, and getting an entire class passionate is a true challenge. But with the right enthusiastic atmosphere, students might just realize that learning can be really, really cool.

Harvard Educational Review  
Harvard Graduate School of Education  
“The Passionate Teacher: A Practical Guide”  
By Robert L. Fried

an excerpt

In *The Passionate Teacher: A Practical Guide*, Robert Fried argues that many of the difficult issues in education today can be faced constructively, and perhaps be overcome, by passionate teachers. Fried has developed the concept of the passionate teacher through his work in teacher professional development in schools throughout the country. For Fried, “to be a passionate teacher is to be someone in love with a field of knowledge, deeply stirred by issues and ideas that challenge our world, drawn to the dilemmas and potentials of the young people who come into class each day — or captivated by all of these” (p. 1). Speaking to both experienced teachers and new teachers, Fried examines several of the challenges that confront educators — including the amount of content to teach, the nature of assessment, and the most effective ways to motivate students — and illustrates, through stories of practitioners and their teaching, ways that passionate teachers can work through these dilemmas. While Fried acknowledges his debt to Deborah Meier and Ted Sizer for many of the ideas that he raises, his unique and effective contribution to the literature is the connection that he forges between philosophical ideas about teaching and practical steps that teachers can take to infuse their own teaching with passion.

The book is organized in five parts. In Part One, *The Passion*, Fried demystifies what he means by the passionate teacher. Breaking passionate teaching down into three components, he argues that passionate teachers can be passionate about their field of knowledge, issues facing the world, or children. Speaking to teachers, he says: “The passion that accompanies our attention to subjects, issues, and [student learners] is not just something we offer our students. It is also a gift we grant ourselves: a way of honoring our life’s work, our profession. It says: ‘I know why I am devoting this life I’ve got to these [students]’” (p. 19). Interweaving stories from practitioners he has met in his professional development work, Fried brings passionate teaching to life by demonstrating ways that specific teachers forge relationships with their students, create classroom environments that promote integrity and respect, and provide students with opportunities to take ownership of their learning.

In Part Two, *The Game*, Fried discusses what he believes is the greatest obstacle that educators face: what he calls “having to play ‘The Game of School’” (p. 93). As he sees it, educators face this obstacle “whenever nobody cares what’s going on intellectually in the classroom or the school, when the idea of learning is treated as a mindless duty — something to ‘get through any way you can’” (p. 93). Students play the game of school when they figure out what teachers want and treat school as a trick rather than as an opportunity to learn. However, Fried argues that administrators, parents, and teachers . . . can also play the same game. . . . Teachers play the game of school when they are more interested in covering the curriculum than in their students’ learning. Parents who pressure their children to take on activities or courses with the purpose of constructing transcripts and records that will impress colleges, regardless of their children’s actual interests, are playing the game of school. According to Fried, the way that schools function makes us vulnerable to the game. As he explains, schools “load us up with things to do that help everybody avoid confronting issues about meaning and motivation and choice in our work” (p. 96). Fried maintains that passionate teachers can change the game of school by generating excitement about their subject matter,

about issues in the world, and about students and their learning. The genuine enthusiasm that passionate teachers express in their work can motivate students and focus the attention of administrators and parents on student learning as the highest educational priority. In this way, passionate teaching counteracts and interrupts the game of school.

In Part Three, *The Stance*, Fried argues that passionate teachers have what he calls a stance: “a philosophy, an attitude, a bearing, a way of encountering students based on a set of core values about kids and their learning potential” (p. 139). Grounded in this philosophy, passionate teachers project their stance in their teaching, in their planning, and in their interactions with students, parents, and administrators. In the chapter “Putting Your Stance into Practice,” Fried gives readers questions to consider as they formulate their own stances as teachers. These questions are designed to encourage teachers to clarify and verbalize their values and to uncover connections between their values and students, the subject area, and teaching and learning:

What are the five most important values or beliefs in my life? What are the ideas and ideals I try my best to live by? What are five core beliefs that I hold about [student learners]? If I were the boss of the whole school, what words would I like to see greet everyone who entered the building and every student who walks into a classroom? What is it about the subject(s) I teach that connects with my core values and beliefs? Why have I chosen to devote my professional life to this field? What might my students produce or demonstrate that would prove to me that they had really benefited from my role as teacher? (pp. 173–174)

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In Part Four, *The Student*, Fried discusses three ways that teachers . . . can inspire students to perform at their personal best. First, he argues that teachers should teach only what is most important about their disciplines, that the amount of subject matter that covered by most courses is too great, which gives students only superficial exposure to a wide range of material. By emphasizing **depth over breadth**, Fried hopes to encourage teachers and students to explore the curriculum through **engagement with meaningful ideas and experiences**. Second, Fried suggests that teachers give students **meaningful challenges in the classroom**, rather than rote or mechanical activities. He calls these challenges “real jobs” and notes: “There is hardly an instructional unit that cannot be transformed into a job that students can plan, organize, carry out and complete for the good of the community. Only then will we feel their pride and see how capable our students are” (p. 107).

*The Passionate Teacher: A Practical Guide* offers an inspirational perspective on teaching and learning. Furthermore, by skillfully blending philosophical writing, the voices of real practitioners, and practical suggestions for becoming a passionate teacher, Fried brings passionate teaching to life in all its richness and complexity. Works by John Dewey, particularly *Experience and Education* and *The Child and The Curriculum*, would be interesting companions for this book, as they are the most often cited formulations of these ideas in U.S. educational history.

Fried uses an informal, conversational tone that makes the book an engaging read, and his interviews with and stories about teachers seat the reader at a fascinating roundtable discussion with skillful, passionate practitioners. Some readers may find Fried’s focus too narrow, as he places the responsibility of facing — and perhaps overcoming — educational issues on the individual teacher. Nowhere in the text does Fried address the ways school structures can inspire and support passionate teaching. Still, ***The Passionate Teacher is must read for all teachers***, no matter what subject or age groups they teach, and this book is a particularly valuable resource for educators of preservice teachers.