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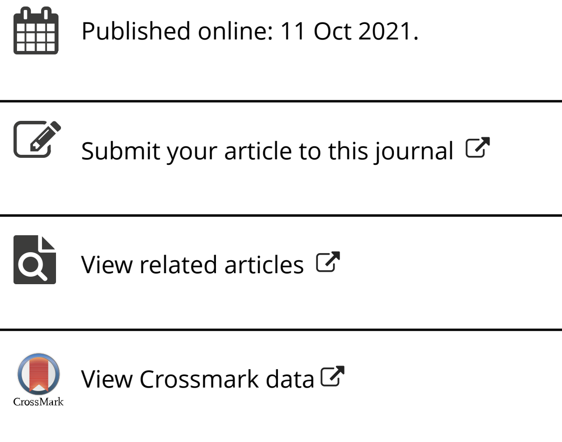

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Emotional Demands and Moral Rewards: A Story Told by Fifteen Teachers

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ABSTRACT
In several publications, Doris Santoro has argued that modern schools emphasize success to such a degree that they exclude the possibility of the moral rewards embedded in good teaching. Lack of such rewards, she says, leads to demoralization that is commonly misdiagnosed as burnout. Commenting on her work, Jeff Frank has argued that teachers may need to live with the fact that their work cannot in the foreseeable future be the way it should be. This paper is based on interviews with 15 teachers in Iceland and Greece. They all described boosts and payoffs in terms that fit into Santoro's account of moral rewards. The stories they told us indicate that although the dark clouds of demoralization hang over their workdays, they also enjoy the sunlight of pedagogical freedom and professional autonomy. The reality they experience is a mixture of shadows and light.

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Teachers; professionalism; autonomy; emotional demands; moral rewards; burnout; demoralization

Introduction

This paper is based on interviews with teachers who teach in kindergartens and primary schools in Thessaly in central Greece and in West Iceland. The questions we asked were about good teaching and professional development – what supported them and what worked against them, how they learned to do their jobs and what brought them joy and gave them strength.

In a previous paper, based on the same interviews (Harðarson & Magos, 2021), we described how our interviewees saw their professional development. They related a long course of education that began early in life and continued through years of work where they enjoyed professional autonomy, were trusted, had freedom to experiment, together with opportunities to exercise practical wisdom and engage in discussions with colleagues. We concluded that their narrative about professional development was in accord with a broadly Aristotelian notion of moral development where the latter stages, leading to practical wisdom, required autonomy and opportunities to engage in deliberations about human affairs.

In this paper, we focus on what the teachers said about the emotional demands and moral rewards of their work, and how this connects to their professionalism and their job satisfaction. We interpret their answers in the light of what Doris A. Santoro (2011, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2018) has written about moral rewards.

Moral Rewards

In recent years, various scholars have described forces at work in modern societies that act against teaching as a practice guided by professional conscience and ethical deliberation. Summarizing

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recent trends towards technical rationality and ideals of control, efficiency, and accountability in school administration, Joseph Dunne says for instance: "The ideal to which technical rationality aspires … is a practitioner-proof mode of practice" (Dunne, 2011, p. 17). Another well-known philosopher of education, David Carr, writing about teachers in the UK, describes these same recent trends as "political attempts … to 'de-professionalize' teachers mainly via the imposition of state mandated (national) curricula and so-called 'competence' models of professional training that aim for tight prescription of educational content and methods" (Carr, 2014, p. 19). This is borne out by a report on good teaching published by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues at the University of Birmingham, where the authors declare that "accountability regimes … limit the space available for the virtuous teacher to practice their vocation" (Arthur et al., 2015, p. 28). Richard Osguthorpe and Matthew Sanger (2013a, 2013b), and more recently Atli Harðarson (2018) and Kevin Gary (2019), argue, in the same vein, that there is a tension between the moral aspirations of teachers and the prevailing educational ideology with its narrow focus on "academic" outcomes. As Kristján Kristjánsson (2020, p. 32) points out in his latest book, this narrow focus and its concurrent de-moralization of the school is a recent aberration.

Arguably, attrition and teacher burnout are related to the de-professionalization described by the authors mentioned above. Current psychological accounts of burnout syndrome typically distinguish between three factors. The core factor is exhaustion, physical, emotional, and cognitive. The other two are cynicism and reduced personal efficacy (Chang, 2009; Nagar, 2012; Näring et al., 2012; Shirom & Melamed, 2006; Van Maele and Van Houtte, 2015). As regards the first factor, many studies describe teaching as an emotionally demanding profession. In a paper containing a thorough review of literature on burnout and emotional work in teaching, Mei-Lin Chang argued that, when her paper was published, the connection between teacher emotion and teacher burnout was "still an unexplored research area" (Chang, 2009, p. 214). Some of the research published in more recent years indicates that teachers' emotional exhaustion is related to repeated experiences of unpleasant emotions, and also that the emotions engendered by teacher-student interactions can be exhausting or invigorating for the teachers, depending on the quality of the relations they have with their students (Corbin et al., 2019).

Some recent studies give reasons to think that burnout correlates with distrust. Anthony Gary Dworkin and Pamela F. Tobe (2014), for instance, describe trust in the ethical sense as organic trust. Reliability that is contrived through accountability they call contractual trust. Based on their analyses of samples of more than 8,000 teachers in Texas, they contend that "the shift from organic to contractual trust, occasioned by an expanding school accountability system, has resulted in heightened levels of teacher burnout" (Dworkin & Tobe, 2014, p. 123). They also argue that burnout can be conceptualized in sociological terms as alienation, i.e., in "terms of structural and organizational causes, rather than as a result of failings of the individual to cope with stress" (Dworkin & Tobe, 2014, p. 127). One of their main findings is that supportive principals significantly reduce burnout, and teachers can better cope with stressful work if their superiors within the schools support them.

Dimitri Van Maele and Mieke Van Houtte (2015) likewise conclude that burnout is aggravated by distrust and that principals can reduce exhaustion among teachers by trusting them. These results seem to indicate that burnout is not mere fatigue – that it is, at least partially, caused by the moral climate of the workplace, not only by the sheer difficulty of the work. The conclusion that burnout among teachers correlates with a limited moral agency is also supported by L. Carolyn Pearson and William Moomaw (2005). Writing about research on elementary-, middle-, and high-school teachers in Florida, they conclude that autonomy contributes to resilience and professionalism. Reviewing earlier research, they say that "the degree of autonomy perceived by teachers is indicative of current job satisfaction" (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005, p. 39).

The term "autonomy" has several different meanings. In a book about moral agency Nomy Arpaly distinguishes between eight different ways the word is used. One of them denotes the normative moral autonomy that people have when they are "allowed to make their own decisions and to be free from paternalistic intervention" (Arpaly, 2002, p. 120). Although Pearson and Moomaw

do not explain in detail how autonomy relates to moral agency and moral aspirations this seems to capture their sense of the term because the autonomy they tried to measure involved "personal on-the-job decision making" (2005, p. 44). Although such decision making does not necessarily require ethical deliberation, it is essential to moral agency. In so far as work in schools is guided by the practical wisdom of teachers, rather than by fixed rules of procedure and mandates from above, teachers make their own decisions.

Santoro (2011, 2018) takes the connection between resilience and moral agency further. Writing about teachers' need for professional autonomy, she distinguishes between teaching that is merely successful and good teaching. The latter, she says, brings moral rewards – the rewards people reap when they see their own work as worthwhile. She points out that theoretically "one could be a successful teacher of inappropriate material or a successful teacher who uses reprehensible methods" (Santoro, 2011, p. 8). On her account, a moral reward is the job satisfaction that teachers enjoy when they perceive their own work as morally praiseworthy or honourable. It is different from mere success because it is at least possible to succeed in keeping discipline and making students do their homework by, say, humiliating or intimidating some children in the class. Although what teachers see as morally good or praiseworthy may depend on their opinions and values no morally upright professional could see that as admirable.

Santoro also argues that current policies emphasize success to such a degree that they may even exclude the possibility for good teaching, with the result that the moral rewards embedded in teaching are endangered in our times. Lack of such rewards, she says, leads to demoralization. She maintains that demoralization is commonly misdiagnosed as burnout, and she does not want to use the term "burnout" to cover alienation as Dworkin and Tobe (2014) do. Demoralization and burnout are, she says, different problems – with different causes and different solutions. In cases of burnout, the problem is fatigue and can be solved either by rest or by acquiring more resilience and endurance. Demoralization stems from problems with the work conditions rather than the worker and building up abilities to cope with what is morally wrong is not a way to grow and flourish (Santoro, 2018, p. 44).

Santoro points out that good work is not only useful for society, but it also enables the worker to flourish and become a better person. Nevertheless, "a sustained consideration of how moral and ethical reasons may contribute to educators' decisions to leave the profession is absent from nearly all of the literature on teacher attrition and on the moral dimensions of teaching" (Santoro, 2011, p. 4). She also claims that the moral rewards of teaching "are necessary for sustaining the work of practitioners who care about their profession and their students" (Santoro, 2011, p. 5).

Santoro (2013) distinguishes between teachers' loyalty to their occupation and their loyalty to their employing organization. When the organization demands that they expend energy on tasks that have nothing to do with good teaching, or are possibly even harmful for students, the integrity of their practice is threatened. In a more recent paper, Santoro (2017) describes this as moral violence and says that it can drive teachers beyond the brink of madness.

Like Dworkin and Tobe (2014), and Van Maele and Van Houtte (2015), Santoro maintains that while principals can play a key role in enabling teachers to flourish, they can also be agents of destruction and moral violence. Good teachers are sometimes critical, and their primary commitments to the pedagogic, professional, and democratic values that are inherent in good teaching make them sceptical of policies and mandates from above (Santoro & Cain, 2018). When principals do not acknowledge teachers' moral motivations, when they perceive such teachers as "obstacles to be overcome or liabilities that require damage control" they rob teachers of their moral rewards (Santoro, 2018, p. 135). Accordingly, on Santoro's account, it is crucial that principals acknowledge teachers' professional conscience and moral motivations. Although she does not use the term "practical wisdom", her conclusions and arguments run parallel to several recent publications by scholars, working within the paradigm provided by the ethical works of Aristotle, who emphasize the importance of autonomous exercise of practical wisdom for professional development. This type of wisdom is commonly defined as including the ability to evaluate the morally relevant features of a complex situation (Darnell et al., 2019; Harðarson, 2019).

In a recent research report published by the Jubilee Centre, it is argued that one component of practical wisdom is "the agent's emotions being in line with her construal of a given situation" (Kristjánsson et al., 2020, pp. 12–13). If this is right, if good professionals feel bad when they are not allowed to act in accordance with their own practical wisdom, then the organizational demands that Santoro describes as demoralizing give rise to hard feelings. It seems plausible that the type of madness she writes about is engendered by being forced to forsake one's own practical wisdom and ethical commitments. Chris Higgins (2011, 2015) presents almost the same view of how and why teachers cannot flourish unless they are masters of their own work. He draws upon philosophical works on Aristotelian virtue ethics and argues that the flourishing of teachers should have a central place in the ethics of teaching because the needs of their students can only be met by robust professionals. On his account, this requires the autonomous exercise of practical wisdom and opportunities to deliberate. Cristian Simoni (2020), who also works within an Aristotelian framework, supports a similar conclusion and says that "educational success requires having deliberated continually, wisely and profitably over a long period; something that cannot be adequately captured by the achievement of standardised learning goals" (Simoni, 2020, p. 102).

Commenting on Santoro's work, Jeff Frank (2016) says that she "has done the profession of teaching a great service by developing, through qualitative research and theoretical work, the significance of demoralization in the lives of teachers" (Frank, 2016, p. 127). Nevertheless, he questions the possibility of moral rewards and points out that the prospects are less promising than Santoro suggests. Teachers may, he says, need to live with the fact that their work is not, and cannot in the foreseeable future, be the way it should be. Citing James Baldwin's 1964 essay, The Uses of the Blues, Frank adds that "teaching is now a blues profession, teachers have to learn from a blues people" – that is they must learn from other oppressed people how to get by in spite of it all. David T. Hansen and Carmen James are less pessimistic and argue that although we have accountability and standardization that "deprofessionalize and demoralize educators by limiting severely their input into the policy-making and policy-enacting process in schools … teachers still enjoy significant degrees of pedagogical freedom" (Hansen & James, 2016, pp. 101–102).

These publications by Santoro and others leave us with questions about the reality teachers experience. Do they enjoy moral rewards and job satisfaction by virtue of exercising practical wisdom and doing what they know is right? Or is demoralization omnipresent in modern schools?

Methods and Data – Fifteen Interviews

The data we collected are semi-structured interviews with eight teachers from the region of Thessaly in central Greece, and seven teachers from West Iceland. Our subjects were all fully qualified teachers, eleven women and four men, of whom six taught in kindergartens and nine in primary schools. They all had more than ten years of teaching experience: five had been teaching school between 10 and 20 years, five between 20 and 25 years, and five for more than 25 years. We found them by asking around for experienced teachers who were seen by their principals and peers as successful. When choosing our interviewees, we did not ask about difficulties they had encountered in their work or the quality of their work environment. We did not search for teachers with stories of emotional distress. Our sample was simply 15 individuals who people in their local communities saw as good teachers.

Our subjects are listed in Table 1. The names are pseudonyms because our interviewees were promised anonymity.

The interviews were all between 30 and 60 min in length. They were taken in February and March 2020, in the mother languages of the teachers i.e., in Greek and in Icelandic. After we had typed the interviews and translated the Icelandic ones into English (since only one of us understands Icelandic), we searched for common themes relevant to emotional demands and moral rewards.

Table 1. Interviewees.

Anna (G, F, K, 16)	Freyja (I, F, P, 11)	Rannveig (I, F, K, 26)
Birkir (I, M, P, 29)	Kleri (G, F, P, 23)	Svala (I, F, P, 41)
Dimos (G, M, P, 40)	Meri (G, F, K, 25)	Unnur (I, F, K, 23)
Embla (I, F, P, 34)	Myrto (G, F, K, 19)	Valur (I, M, P, 19)
Fani (G, F, K, 12)	Panos (G, M, P, 25)	Zina (G, F, P, 23)

Notes: G = Greek, I = Icelandic; F = female, M = male, K = teacher in kindergarten/preschool, P = teacher in primary school. Numbers indicate years of work experience as a teacher.

Initially, our methods were close to what is described as grounded theory in texts on qualitative research (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007) but when our work progressed, we used thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2016; Neuendorf, 2019). In the latter stages of our coding of the interviews, we marked everything that touched on job satisfaction, moral rewards, emotional demands, and difficult feelings. After several online meetings where we discussed and revised our coding, we constructed three main themes from the labels we had typed on the margins of the interview files. These three themes are emotional engagement, demoralization, and moral rewards. These themes draw upon the literature we had reviewed.

At the later stages of our work, we focused more on what the teachers had in common than on their differences. This was partially because we were more interested in the nature of their work than in their individual idiosyncrasies, and partially because when we read the interviews over and over, we saw that they had more in common than we had first expected. We did not discern any interesting differences between men and women, Greeks and Icelanders, or older and younger teachers.

Results

Emotional Engagement

When talking about the moral and emotional aspects of teaching, some of our interviewees implied that people who want to teach are people with high-minded ideals. One of the Icelandic teachers used the word "hugsjónir" which literally means mental visions, but also, is often used to connote lofty aspirations.

Rannveig: People who choose this occupation are people with "hugsjónir" … people who want to give.

Some of the teachers also described their work as requiring not only commitment to the values inherent in education, but also dispositions and character traits that are consonant with these values.

Unnur: If you do not feel the joy of working with children, then this is not the right place for you.

Most of them seemed to take it as a matter of course that a caring attitude is an essential part of their profession. Granted that such an attitude must be to some extent affectionate and warm-hearted, it comes as no surprise that all fifteen of our interviewees described emotional elements of their work. Here are three typical remarks:

Zina: If the children are happy then we, the teachers, are also happy.

Freyja: I teach with my heart, and I love to teach. If a student has difficulties, then I take that with me home. I cannot shake it off.

Valur: A good day is a day where you engage your students, get them to be ambitious and enthusiastic. And that is really a good experience … you feel good when this succeeds.

Some mentioned both positive and negative emotions:

Embla: And if I am happy with what the kids do, then I am really pleased. And sometimes I tell them I am disappointed and really mean it.

Fani: In this job one day you can feel like a rag and the next day you fly in the clouds.

Notwithstanding occasional allusions to hard feelings, most of our interviewees talked about the emotional engagement with their students as invigorating rather than exhausting. They did not describe the emotional work as a burden. They saw it, rather, as a human dimension that added to the worth of their practice and kept them youthful and buoyant.

Svala: What makes me want to continue is that there be some creativity, some fun. You live to have some moments of joy, and I think that fun is very important.
Dimos: What keeps me going in this work is the daily contact with the children … When you work with children you become a child again. That is why many teachers look younger than they are.
Meri: I believe that my job is not only important for the children but also for me myself. I would say it is psychotherapeutic, it keeps the child alive inside me.

Demoralization: All These Things that Are Not Really Teaching

Although most of the things our subjects said about the emotional aspects of their work were positive, none of them described teaching as all rosy and full of joy. They talked about being tired and fed up and some had thought of quitting.

Dimos: Only those who have worked in a classroom understand how difficult the work of the teacher is.
Panos: There is also the fatigue of this work.
Fani: It is a difficult work.
Rannveig: And I have sometimes thought that I have had enough.
Valur: There have been periods when I had some symptoms of burnout and stagnation.
Freyja: If work takes up all your energy, then it affects the quality of life for you and your family … I speak from some experience … It was last winter … I became sullen … I saw everything, every innovation, as a threat. I saw it as more workload, and I did not have the energy.

Some of the teachers mentioned difficult students, behaviour problems, and class size as contributing to their fatigue. Most of them, however, had more to say about lack of respect than about the classroom when they specified in detail what it was that weighed them down.

Zina: I often feel lack of respect for my work. This makes me sad.
Kleri: I think that society does not esteem the work of the teacher.
Fani: I think that the teacher's job is important, and that society underestimates it.

Another common theme was increasing bureaucracy and difficult interactions with superiors and school administration.

Embla: What I like the least is all these things that are not really teaching, I mean like meetings.
Myrto: What weighs me down is things that have to do with the administration.
Freyja: I feel that the work of us who teach in primary schools is very much directed, too much controlled … and this weighs us down.
Svala: If you need to file information and administer tests you have less time to do something with your students. We have only 24 hours a day … Should we really spend time filling in forms with lies every day. I grew horns on my head and cloven hoofs on my feet when I was told about this … The system is getting more centralized and there is now more control from above.

Svala's metaphorical reference to horns and hoofs seems to indicate that under the pressure of these demands, this waste of her time and energy, she felt transformed, devil-like. Other interviewees also expressed frustration in connection with detailed mandates and too much control from above.

Another factor that seems to affect the work of teachers is their relationship with the parents of their students.

Kleri: The parents' association influences the operation of the school. If the association is positive, all is well, if not it can cause problems. I think that sometimes the parents see the teachers as opponents, with jealousy. This is not right. Parents need to encourage the teachers and vice versa. Sometimes parents are intrusive. They came to me to tell me which chapters from the book on religion they did not want me to use … I told them that I did not accept this, and they left annoyed.

Moral Rewards: Freedom, Growth, and Creativity

Most of the fifteen teachers expressed worries that their professional autonomy was becoming more narrowly circumscribed. Notwithstanding, they also cherished the freedom they still enjoyed, and much of what they said about the joyful aspects of their work was closely connected to stories about the exercise of creativity and professional autonomy. Some also praised their school-heads for allowing them to work autonomously, and others expressed their desires to be creative and find their own solutions. Here are two typical remarks:

> Valur: I have been lucky because my principals have given me freedom. In my school, teachers are trusted to organise their own work and this autonomy is a key element in my job satisfaction. One needs to have a say over how the work is done. I have been trusted … I follow the National Curriculum Guide and use teaching materials that are published by the Directorate of Education. I do, however, not let their publications completely control what I teach … I have freedom to experiment with teaching materials.
>
> Panos: For me it is important to try every day to create something new with the children.

Most of them also talked about growth and personal development through their work:

> Myrto: I believe that my work … is important, not only for the children, but also for me … I feel that what I do is worth it, I feel that I am evolving, I am improving.
>
> Kleri: For me, work has to do with dignity. It gives me opportunities to develop and be creative, beautiful everyday things, and of course a salary to live on.
>
> Anna: I think that through this job I become a better person.

We did not ask the teachers about their own benefits or what they gained from interacting with their students. Still, most of them described dividends in terms that fit into Santoro's account of moral rewards. Some of them told stories about this and here are excerpts from four of them:

> Zina: I have worked in some remote villages. For example, in a small village where there was a kindergarten with ten children. At Easter I decided to make candles. When they held them in their hands they cried, they had never seen decorated candles … If the children are happy, so are the teachers.
>
> Embla: When I left in the spring, one of the boys hugged me and there were tears in his eyes when he said: Embla, I wish you could stay. And this is also something you take with you. And the next winter they sent me a Christmas present. I put all my soul into that class.
>
> Unnur: My husband sometimes says that it is like living with a rock star. Every time we meet the children … in shops or somewhere … they want to hug me.
>
> Meri: I remember one day when we did a presentation, and the kids were very happy. They did paintings, dramatization. It was all fun. This joy, it also reached to me.

Some talked in more general terms about how their work has been rewarding:

> Rannveig: And there are all these small victories. And the small victories are important. Like say when a child is slow to talk, and one day they can say something. You understand? We see children develop, see them learn social skills and acquire new abilities. And we, the teachers, we watch this together and the joy unites us. Each of us senses that the others are glad.
>
> Anna: My reward is the joy of the children. Working with children with special needs that I have had in my class has been an important experience for me. You see the difficulties, but also the small steps that are important for these children … very important things for every teacher to see and think about.

All these things the teachers said, they said in Greek and in Icelandic – some of the remarks we have quoted appear to us more prosaic in our English translation than in the original, and sometimes it is hard to capture all the nuances. One of the most common words in Greek is the adverb "ωραία" [oraia]. It has connotations on a spectrum from being nice and OK to the beautiful, delightful, and superb.

> Myrto: It is a good day when I see that the kids are happy, when I see smiles. On such a day I say to myself, look how "ωραία" all this went, and I hear favourable remarks. Such are the good days.

We give the last word to Birkir, the only interviewee not quoted so far. He talked about several examples of how he kept finding new ways to build good relations with his students and fill the schooldays with joy and fun, often doing things that were unexpected, even irregular.

> Birkir: Most often teachers walk with their classes along the hallways … I go we-all-dance-conga and I also make them compete in funny walk, you now like Monty Python … [laughs loud] I am going to make them compose their own dance to dance on their way to the classroom. I want them to dance. I want school to be fun and it is fine to act like a clown now and then. What is dangerous about laughter?

Discussion

In our introduction we mentioned that other researchers (Corbin et al., 2019) have found that, in their daily work, teachers are subject to strong emotions, both exhausting and invigorating. This is borne out by our results, in what our interviewees said about emotional engagement with their students. Most of them saw this emotional side of their work as positive and some of them even said that it kept them youthful.

Although one would perhaps expect teachers with several years of work experience to have developed defence mechanisms and abilities to distance their own state of mind from that of their students, it seems clear from the above excerpts that what happens in the classroom still has an emotional impact on the teachers. Myths about Nordic restraint and people of southern Europe being more emotional notwithstanding, we found no difference between Greek and Icelandic teachers in this regard. The work affects them in much the same way. Their words, quoted above, also indicate that, at least sometimes, teachers from both countries view their emotional engagement as therapeutic. Two of the Greeks, Dimos and Meri, even spoke of it as functioning as an elixir of youth. This highlights an interesting dimension of the teacher-student relationship, where the students may also, in a way, administer to the well-being of their teachers.

Fatigue was also a common theme in interviews with both the Greek and the Icelandic teachers. They described their work as both exhausting and invigorating, and what they said raised questions about to what extent these are two sides of the same coin. If teachers really do care about their work and about their students – if they are emotionally engaged – one should expect them to feel elated if things go well and experience negative emotions if they do not see their work as good or successful. Reading our interviews, we did not find any distinct demarcation between fatigue and demoralization. Some of the examples mentioned in the interviews, however, fit into Santoro's account of what weighs teachers down. Some of them mentioned lack of respect, increasing bureaucracy, and difficult interactions with superiors, school administration, and parents rather than with their students. This is also in accordance with the findings of Dworkin and Tobe (2014) and Van Maele and Van Houtte (2015) that we mentioned in the introduction. Trusting and supportive principals help teachers to cope with stressful work, whereas distrust and demands that they spend time and energy on tasks that are useless or even harmful makes them frustrated.

Our subjects also experienced the administrative parts of their work as an unpleasant burden and some of them were worried that the systems of education in their countries were becoming more and more controlled and centralized, restricting their freedom and initiative. Although they did not use strong terms like "violence" we have the impression that what Santoro (2017) described as "moral violence" was a familiar reality for some of them – something they had felt on their own skin.

Despite their worries, the teachers described boosts and payoffs in terms that fit into Santoro's (2011, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2018) account of moral rewards. Both the Icelanders and the Greeks described small incidents in everyday school life that offered opportunities for growth and joy, giving them incentives to continue to work as teachers despite all the difficulties that were also part of their daily life at work. What they said about moral rewards was intertwined with stories that we understood as examples of creativity and professional autonomy. They saw their flourishing as depending on being masters of their own work and having opportunities for deliberation and

autonomous exercise of practical wisdom. They obviously cherished the freedom they enjoyed, and they also worried that their professional autonomy was becoming more narrowly circumscribed. This is in accordance with conclusions reached by other scholars that we cited in our introduction (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005; Higgins, 2011, 2015; Simoni, 2020). For our interviewees, autonomy was thus not only a source of personal growth and joy but also conducive to good practice. As Santoro has argued in several publications, a work environment that is conducive to good practice is not only beneficial for the students but also invigorating and rewarding for the teachers.

At the end of our introduction, we quoted Frank (2016) and asked if teachers have, as he says, become blues people. Most of our interviewees talked about personal benefits in terms reminiscent of Santoro's account of moral rewards. Most of them also described threats to their professional integrity and connected these to lack of respect, bureaucracy, and school administration. They seemed fairly satisfied with their work, however, and the stories they told us indicate that although the dark clouds of demoralization hang over their workdays, they also enjoy the sunlight of pedagogical freedom and professional autonomy. The reality teachers experience is a mix of shadows and light. They may be blues people to some extent but it would still be off the mark to conclude that their work is joyless.

Our study does not support any generalizations about all teachers. It is limited to a small group of kindergarten and primary school teachers from opposite corners of Europe. It is still interesting that the concepts developed by Doris Santoro to describe the experiences of teachers in the US seem equally applicable to our subjects. This gives us reasons to think that her theorizing about moral rewards and demoralization can be used in further research to understand what supports, and what undermines, teachers' professional development.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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