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A SUCCESSFUL CAREER IN TEACHING : STUDY OF DIMENSION OF WELL-BEING AND STRENGTHS OF CHARACTER AMONG PERSEVERANT ELEMENTARY AND HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS

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In Quebec (Canada), since the massification of the educational systems and the democratization of teaching, the teaching profession has been made more complex (Tardif & Lessard, 1999). The institution increased control on teacher work, the arrival of specialists and parents in schools, the succession of educational curricula, the uncontrolled social changes such as the breakdown of the family and traditional values and the access to information and media with the fast-paced development of technology are social aspects of the profession affecting the work environment of teachers. In addition, working with humans increases this complexity : teaching is based on interaction between two people and creates a interrelationship. It is not enough to know pedagogy and didactics well: teachers must deal with students who are unpredictable and, unfortunately, often offer resistance to learning. Then, they rarely have the chance to see how they contribute to the students' future. The difficulty to interact with students combined with higher and higher social and institutional demands and focus on teachers can lead the teaching body to professional disengagement or even worse, to drop out. The teachers' dropout rate in Quebec is oscillating around 14% during the first years of teaching and 20% for all faculties (Mukamurera, 2006). Moreover, a study by Houlfort and Sauvé (2010) demonstrates that more than ever, teachers suffer from mental illness. Nevertheless, many persevere and experience well-being in teaching. This research focuses on the well-being in teaching, more particularly in terms of well-being theory (Seligman, 2011) and character strengths and virtues (Peterson and Seligman, 2004). Our research questions are:

- 1) What elements of well-being do teachers develop to feel happiness in their work?
- 2) According to these teachers, which strengths of character contribute to the development of their feeling of well-being?
- 3) How do these strengths of character allow them to find meaning in the teaching profession to develop well-being ?

This research explores which character strengths are involved in the development of a sense of well-being in teaching as well as the possible links between some of these character strengths and the well-being in the profession.

FRAMEWORK

Elements of well-being

Seligman (2011) works on five elements of well-being whose goals are to increase flourishing. These elements are positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships, and accomplishment.

Strength of character

Peterson and Seligman (2004) concluded that universal strengths of character distinguish the individuals who feel well-being in general. The strengths of character distinguish individuals from others.

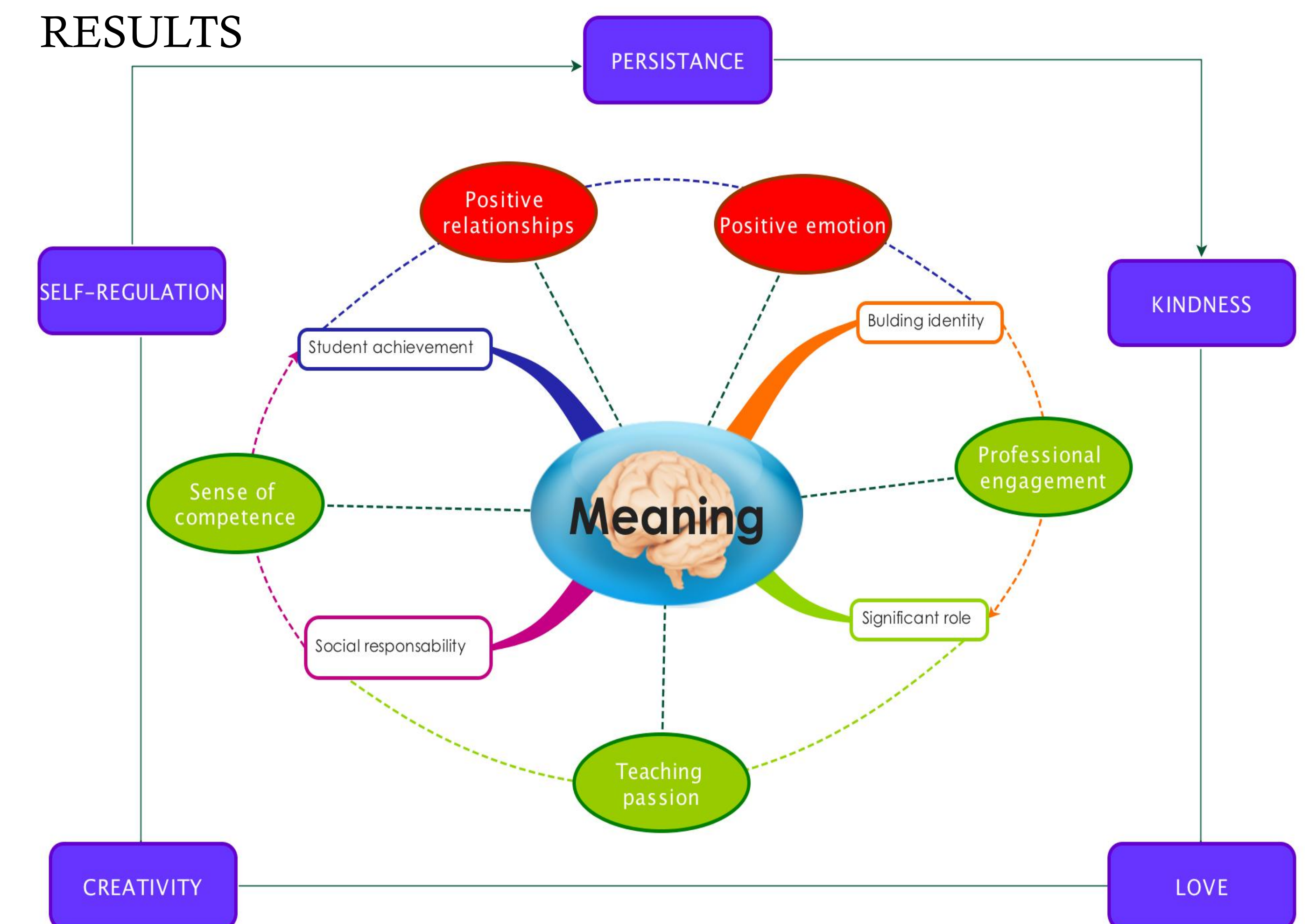
Six dimensions	Strengths of character
Wisdom and Knowledge (strengths that involve the acquisition and use of knowledge)	Creativity, curiosity, love of learning, open-mindedness, prospective and wisdom
Courage (strengths that allow one to accomplish goals in the face of opposition)	Authenticity, bravery, persistence , vitality
Humanity (strengths of tending and befriending others)	Kindness, love , social intelligence
Justice (strengths that build healthy community)	Fairness, leadership, active citizenship
Temperance (strengths that protect against excess)	Forgiveness and mercy, humility and modesty, prudence, self-regulation
Transcendence (strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning)	Appreciation of beauty, gratitude, hope, humour, spirituality

METHODOLOGY

The data were collected by in-depth phenomenological interviews within Seidman method (2006). We proceeded with a three-interview series. The first interview focused on the past life of the teachers, their professional insertion and highlighted the main motivations to become a teacher. The second interview focused on present experience and context. The last interview allowed the participants to reflect on the meaning of their experiences.

Six participants (3 elementary school teachers and 3 high school teachers) who had more than four years of experience (Huberman, 1989) took part in three 90-minute interviews. The data were analysed by units of sense related to the strengths of character, using the Nvivo software.

RESULTS



DISCUSSION

The analysis of these results suggests that the Humanity dimension is predominant in life stories. In fact, kindness and love for students are character strengths that teachers associate with perseverance in the profession. Furthermore, some teachers link well-being with the need to reflect on their own teaching practices through self-regulation and creativity. Moreover, teaching passion, professional engagement and sense of competence seems to be three specific elements in the teaching well-being phenomenon.

To summerise, this research allows us to understand the well-being in teaching phenomenon in depth and to discover some specific strengths of character related to teaching. The results of this research could lead to the creation of teacher training devices to help professionals developing wellness teaching oriented emotional and psychological characteristics.