HOPE AND ZEST: WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT FOR TEACHERS?

P. Gradišek

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education (SLOVENIA)

Abstract

Character strengths, defined as personality traits that are morally valued, represent an important topic in the research and practice of positive psychology. In the present paper, we focus on two character strengths, hope and zest, because of their important contribution in the educational context. Several studies from general population samples have shown that individuals who express higher hope and zest, report more satisfaction with their lives and work; are more physically healthy and more efficient at work. In a sample of 68 middle school and high school teachers, we examined a relationship between hope and zest regarding perception of teaching as a calling, life- and job- satisfaction. Teachers filled in the VIA Survey, a 240-item questionnaire measuring 24 character strengths (including hope and zest), a Work-Life Questionnaire measuring perception of work as a job, career, and a calling; Satisfaction with Life Scale and Satisfaction with Work Scale. We also collected data from students (N=1151) of these teachers’, who assessed their teachers’ classroom management and reported their satisfaction with teachers. Results showed that teachers’ hope and zest both correlated significantly with life satisfaction and job satisfaction, as well as with a perception of teaching as a calling. Moreover, students reported higher levels of satisfaction with teachers who had higher hope and zest; these teachers were perceived more positive regarding their classroom management. In the paper, the role of hope and zest will be discussed and some strategies for developing these two character strengths will be presented.

Keywords: Character strengths, hope, zest, teachers, students, classroom management, positive psychology.