

# PASSION!

# MATTERS!

#PassionDriven

ANGELA MAIERS

“I believe passion to be  
**the single most important asset**  
we have as educators, leaders and organizations.  
Passion differentiates and defines us and needs to  
be continually nurtured,  
evolved and invigorated by the people entrusted to  
keep it true and alive.”

-Angela Maiers-



**PASSION!**  
**MATTERS**

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## THE PASSION GAP

*“Nothing great in the World has been accomplished without passion.”*

— Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, German philosopher, 1832

I recently spoke at the Dell Innovation in Education Panel at the Texas Association of School Administrators 2013 Conference in Austin.

When we were invited to sum up at the end, I realized that one guest had not been invited to the table: Passion. I was the first to interject this word, saying that “passion should not be the number one thing on the agenda, it IS the agenda.”

The #TASA13 hashtag on Twitter, which had been moving moderately, exploded, with several dozen tweets supporting my statement.

At any other conference in any other industry, passion is on the lips of nearly every participant, but at some education conferences, you are far more likely to hear the words “assessment,” “standardize,” “common core” and “pedagogy” than you are to hear the word “passion.”

**There is a passion gap in education, and students are falling through it and drowning in ennui.**

This is not to say that students are never passionate at school. As a teacher at the K-2 level for 14 years, I had the privilege of spending each day with children eager to learn and explore. Yet this begins to change somewhere around the fourth grade.

Why does passion matter? What are the real-world implications of an education system that discourages passion?

In a recent column in The New York Times, Thomas Friedman explained that “we need everyone to be innovating new products and services to employ the people who are being liberated from routine work by automation and software. The winners won’t just be those with more I.Q. It will also be those with more P.Q. (passion quotient) and C.Q. (curiosity quotient) to leverage all the new digital tools to not just find a job, but to invent one or reinvent one, and to not just learn but to relearn for a lifetime.”

When Bill Gates appeared on “The Colbert Report,” Colbert asked Gates whether data or passion was more important to him in pursuing his foundation’s aims. Gates response? “I think passion is probably the most important...backing scientists who have great ideas.”

So if passion is so essential in the work world, how do we invite passion to stay in school past fourth grade? How do we bridge the passion gap between school and the rest of life?

Schools mistake passion for an emotion, as something kids like to do in their spare time. Those are hobbies. Passion is what you must do, even if you have to suffer to do it. Passion is the genius of all geniuses. It's discipline at a level we can't comprehend. To release a passion, a student may need above all else a role model. It may be a parent, an aunt, a neighbor, a coach, but as often as any of these, it is a teacher.

To lay the groundwork for students to develop passion, teachers must do two things – greet students – by name – when they walk in and hug them (either physically or metaphorically) when they leave. Whatever happens in between, students will remember that you notice them and they mean something to you. Teachers must let students know that they expect that students will accomplish great things. All of this may sound trite, but it is derived from the responses we received when we asked 500,000 students last year, “What would make you run to school?” These responses are not confined to the young; they mirror the results when a similar question was asked of 7,000 adults.

Sir Ken Robinson writes, “Passion is a deep attraction. It can be for someone else or for a process: music, maths, cooking, sport, entrepreneurship, teaching... whatever fires your imagination and stokes your energy. We all have different aptitudes and we have unique passions. The challenge is to find them because it's in the fusion of both that we live our best lives.”

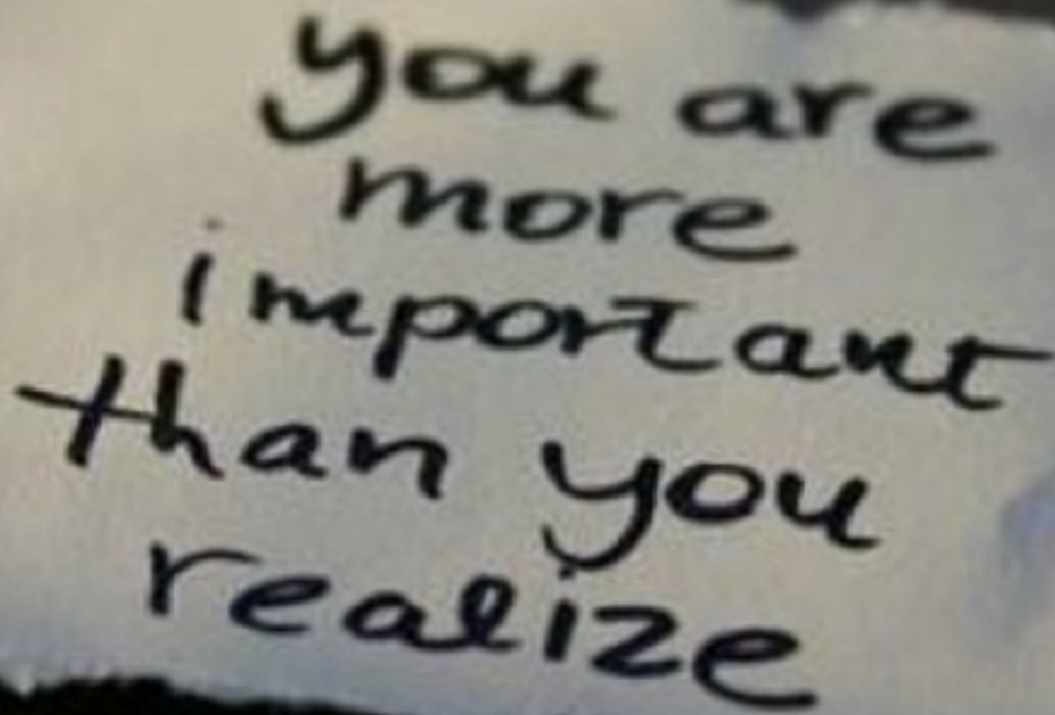
When will your school declare that its mission is to help students find the fusion of their aptitudes and passions to live their best lives?



**Tweet This →**

**“There is a passion gap in education,  
and students are falling through it and  
drowning in ennui.”**

(Tweet by clicking on the quote)

A piece of white, torn paper with handwritten text in black ink. The text is written in a casual, cursive style and reads: "you are more important than you realize". The paper is set against a dark, textured background.

you are  
more  
important  
than you  
realize

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# PASSION IS EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS

Passion is critical to long-term success of our students, our system, and own's well being. What to work on? Let's look at Teacher Passion, Student Passion, and Passionate Learning Experiences.

## TEACHER PASSION

When a teacher lacks passion for the material, he or she creates disinterested learners. The teacher's passion is contagious in the learning process. When the teacher has a high level of passion in the material, it will make the information come alive and stir the interest and motivate the student in learning. If the teacher can connect the material to something the student is passionate about, the teaching will become inspirational.

## STUDENT PASSION

A student's outlook on learning effects the way he or she receives the information. A teacher may only appear to be boring on an emotional level because the student has a high level of apathy for either the material or the process in general. For example, two students can sit through the same lecture or demonstration. The one who is motivated will find the teacher inspiring, the one who is disinterested won't make the necessary connections needed to find the learning experience meaningful. The student has a responsibility to be teachable - to have a learner's mind. Like the saying goes, "When the student is ready, the teacher will appear." When a student has a passion to learn, he or she will more readily recognize and listen to teaching.

## PASSIONATE LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Powerful and passionate learning is more than a series of lessons, a coverage of standards, or the completion of projects. Learning that lasts; learning that sticks is an experience. And when the experience of learning is good, school is good regardless of the content. Creating passionate learning experiences requires planning, vision, design and practice.





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# GUIDELINES OF PASSION BASED LEARNING

I was honored to speak at a Future of Education talk that addressed the ways to bring about passion-based learning in schools, along with experts and colleagues Amy Sandvold, Lisa Nielsen, and George Couros, mediated by Steve Hargadon. Here are some of the main points from the talk, along with some additional thoughts from John Seely Brown, co-author of “A New Culture of Learning: Cultivating the Imagination for a World of Constant Change”, and educator Jackie Gerstein.

## **REACH OUT TO THE DISENFRANCHISED**

We say that we want creative, passion-driven students, yet we reward the opposite. Standards-based education stifles engagement and passion in students. While drop-outs are considered to be lazy and unmotivated, many are simply not interested because they don't understand the relevance of what they're being taught. We're rewarding students who are best at obedience, memorization, regurgitation, and compliance. And those who do succeed in school often don't know what to do when they get out. We need to prepare kids to be successful in the real world, not just while in school.

## **SHOW RELEVANCE TO LIFE OUTSIDE SCHOOL**

Passion is the narrative of mattering. It's that simple and that difficult. Everyone has a deep rooted drive to know that they matter to others and that what they're doing matters. When you're doing work that matters, with people who matter, you're willing to suffer and study more. Passion-based learning is not about matching students with topics that interest them, it's about presenting subjects to students in a way that's relevant. People gain empowerment when they're doing work that matters and is respected. A class essay rubric may seem irrelevant for some, and having students surf the web to identify writing standards that are "worthy of the world" may engage them to take ownership of their writing.

## **INDOCTRINATE PASSION INTO THE SYSTEM**

We must switch from a control narrative in the classroom to a passion narrative. While our education system allows continuity between grade levels, provides a streamlined performance metric, and "teacher-proofs" schools, assessment-based education can quell the creative process in teachers. Lisa Nielsen writes in her Innovative Educator blog: "Are we going to lose another excellent, passion-driven teacher to a compulsory system of education that as Seth Godin so aptly expresses, 'only values compliance not initiative, because, of course, that's what's easiest to measure.'" School mandates paralyze educators from taking a close look at their passion for learning. School administrators should support teachers and empower them to be creative. Teachers and leadership, as exemplified by those from Aurora High School in Ohio, can read books like *Passion-Driven Classroom* to discover ways to use more passion in their classrooms. The Island School is an example of a public-financed school in New York



City that's implemented a school-wide enrichment model focusing on talent development and nurturing multiple intelligences.

## **TRY USING THE SCHOOL-WIDE ENRICHMENT MODEL**

Passion-based learning is about finding a “hero,” learning what makes him/her successful, and acquiring the practices and the norms of established practitioners in that field. The Schoolwide Enrichment Model identifies student strengths, nurtures skills, and creates authentic opportunities for students to utilize these skills not just as students, but as practicing professionals providing experiences and opportunities to work and learn with others in the fields in which they are interested. If a student takes interest in the culinary arts, watching the 60 Minutes interview of Jose Andres, following up on studies of molecular gastronomy, volunteering at a local soup kitchen and exchanging recipes with a network of cooks is far more enriching than simply taking a cooking class. Jackie Gerstein said: “I realized that it becomes much more than learning about the culinary arts. It becomes a way of being in the world, the dispositions that contributes to success as a culinary artist.

## **DIGITAL MEDIA IS KEY**

Students can read and view media about their heroes and possibly even connect directly with them. John Seely Brown, a notable passion-based proponent and keynote at the New Media Consortium this past summer, says that passion involves an extreme performance with a deep questioning disposition. Without digital media, this quest is not possible in formal education.

## **TAP INTO THE WISDOM OF YOUR TRUSTED PEERS**

Social media and Personal Learning Networks (PLNs) are necessary. Teachers need to publish their innovative work and share it with their personal learning networks. It's also important for teachers to help students get connected to PLNs via social media.

## **BECOME DIGITAL CITIZENS**

If for no other reason, then to be able to guide students. Students need to be shown what's appropriate and instructive with social media in and out of the classroom. Schools' banning of social media sites impedes this process. Having teachers and students learn side-by-side can provide great opportunities for building respect and openness.

## **PASSION IS INFECTIOUS**

Being around passionate people is the best way to become passionate. A passion-driven teacher is a model for her students. Teachers must be able to lead in the areas that they're passionate about (whether this be in the classroom or after school). They must demonstrate that they have lives outside of school and that they are well-balanced people. Being transparent with students and building relationships with them beyond the classroom can help drive learning – students work harder with people who matter to them. The Science Leadership Academy, for example, uses Facebook as a means of connecting students and teachers to each others' interests. Students and teachers even do things together outside of the classroom.

## **CONNECT WITH PARENTS**

Building relationships between parents and schools is crucial. George Couros says that having a pre-conference at the beginning of the school year with parents allows teachers and administrators to listen to parents talk about their kids and gives parents a chance to tell the school what their competencies are and where their expertise lies. Teachers can then create “resident expert” walls. By identifying strengths and talents of parents, parents gain a sense of recognition and human value – they feel engaged. This leads to opportunities for parents to teach topics that they love within the school.



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## THE 5 C'S OF PASSION DRIVEN LEADERSHIP

*“Passion is one of the most powerful engines of success. When you do a thing, do it with all your might. Put your whole soul into it. Stamp it with your own personality. Be active, be energetic and faithful, and you will accomplish your object. Nothing great was ever achieved without passion.”*

*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

I had the distinguished honor of giving the keynote address this week at a conference for the Utah Association of Middle and High School Principals. What a pleasure it was to be in the presence of such passionate and dedicated leaders.

It was the perfect place to debut a new framework for leadership and systems improvement I have been working on called:

## **THE FIVE C'S OF PASSION DRIVEN LEADERSHIP**

I believe passion to be the single most important asset we have as educators, education leaders, and educational organizations. Passion differentiates us consistently over time, and it needs to be nurtured, evolved, and invigorated by the people entrusted to keep it true and alive.

Here's what came out of the presentation and what turned out to be a fantastic and "passion driven conversation":

**Clear Direction:** The future may be made up of many uncertain factors but the passionate will not only survive ; they will thrive. Let's make sure we paint a vivid picture of that future immersed in choice, leveraged with opportunity, and fueled by passion.

**Clarity Focus:** Ambiguity is the enemy of change. The resistance we feel in moving people forward dissipates when we articulate the steps and behaviors need for the entire community to move towards achieving its vision, mission, and goals.

**Capacity:** Everyone has the capacity to learn therefore everyone has the capacity to change. It is important not to ensure the work ahead is "easy" but to make the hard work they will be doing easier by promising the conditions that build confidence and competence are present in every experience and interaction.

**Credibility:** We live in an information abundant but trust-scarce world. People want to know they can trust the individuals who define and design their future. To garner that trust, leaders must "go first" so that we are able to grant those who follow us the things they desire most – empathy, familiarity, insight, and compassion. Show them do not tell them what the future holds- Go there first!

**Courage:** In times of big, complex change; it seems logical that we need big complicated solutions. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Less is more. The courageous leader is not the one who says yes to every new program, initiative, and invention. The courageous leader says no letting go of all that does not matter. These 5C's taken together are what set apart a good school from a great school. Any leader who decides to adopt this level of intensity and conviction will be valued and admired.

I closed the speech with the following call to A.C.T. which stands for:

**A- ACTION  
C - CHANGE  
T- TIME**

As you consider each of these passion driven principles, on any of these principles and practices which ones:

**A - TAKE IMMEDIATE ACTION ON**

**C- CONSIDER LETTING GO OF, CHANGING  
DIRECTION OR COURSE**

**T- DEVOTE THE MOST TIME, TALENT, AND  
RESOURCES TO**

Passion is not a nicety it is a necessity. It's important that we recognize them, nurture them, and let them know that they matter. To all the passion driven leaders I have the honor and privilege of working with and learning from, I have two final words for you: **YOU MATTER!**



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# PASSIONATE TEACHING: A GIFT EVERY STUDENT DESERVES



I was just getting ready to write the last part of my Passion in Education Series. The final topic: **Passion as a Difference Maker.**

And then, Nicole Badgley's passionate post came across my reader. As you read her heart- felt letter to her seniors, you tell me...is passion a difference maker?

*Today you mentioned that tomorrow is your last day. I am not sure if that means your last day in my class, or the last day of high school, but what I realized is that it is the my last day with you. I am going to miss you so much. I will miss your triumphant emergences from the "writing closet." I will miss "kick starting" your creative process when you get stuck. I will miss hearing your stories about your "boyfriend" whom you babysit. I will miss your sweet smile when you have just helped another student and you look to me for approval. But the hard reality is that you will move on. You should move on. It is your time to move on. Your life will get really exciting, full of new firsts, new struggles which lead to new triumphs, and new loves. Loves that hopefully involve learning, experiences, and someday people. You will go on to college, and then on to a job you love, and eventually into a family.*

*When I look at you I see a lot of myself when I was the same age. I know, I know, this likeness could be perceived as a curse because of the way I turned out, but let's call it a good thing for the sake of this letter. The things I see that we have in common are numerous.*

*I see in you as a dreamer with goals. You know what you want to do, where you want to be (philosophically) a few years down the road. I knew I wanted to be a teacher, and that I wanted to work with kids, even though I knew I would never make it rich. But the best advice I can give is to follow your passion. If you dare to dream you will be happy and fulfilled. If you have goals that go with those dreams, you will find that the money will find its way into your wallet.*

*I see in you an accomplished writer. You seem to thrive on being able to put into words the thoughts you don't really have a verbal audience for. You see the value in preserving those thoughts, because they can be fleeting. I was the same way. I have many journals, but I have more backs of envelopes, scraps of paper, loose-leaf notebooks of pages from all kinds of notebooks, and many digital files of*

*writing. The difference between you and me? You are confident enough to share those pieces of writing. I didn't have that confidence when I was young. In fact, it took many years to want to even share the very best – let alone the drafts. Don't be afraid to share your ideas and your writing. You have a great talent, and someday I hope to see you (and Allistair Graves) on the best-seller list. I promise to even stand in line for your first book signing.*

***I see in you a compassionate leader. You are someone who cares about others, their well being, and their progress.*** You are fair and caring towards other people, and that shows in the manner in which you help others, including those who frustrate you. At your age, I loved being a waitress, helping with the Special Olympics, tutoring in college, teaching Bible School, and eventually moving into teaching. I can see all the same in you, which can be a heavy burden, but rest assured, “paying it forward” in your community is well worth the time and energy, and you get paid back in love and respect twofold.

*Now you are probably sick of hearing nice things from me, and this letter might be getting a little long, but I can't stop without telling you that when you are older, like me, you might look back and appreciate something I have taught you over the last four years. What you probably won't realize, is how much I owe you; and if I don't tell you specifically, then you will never believe it. You have to know that you have inspired me through your columns. You make me stop and take a moment to appreciate the moment. Adults can get caught up in working toward the future so much, that they forget to appreciate and enjoy what is happening right now. You have given that back to me. I am stopping to smell the roses, or the coffee, or whatever.*

*You have also reminded me how much I love to write. Just as I said earlier, I have been so caught up in work, raising a family, grading papers, cleaning toilets, making meals, balancing the books, and all my other chores, that I forgot to stop and do something for me. I remembered how much I had to say, how much I had to write, and more importantly, I realized that I am good at something and I should enjoy it while I can. You reminded me that I once had a goal to get published, and to write a novel. I have been published, and now I am working on that novel – thanks to your enthusiasm.*

*It seems that at the end of each year I am sad to see the seniors go. I am sad to see them graduate, and I am sad to realize that they stop coming back to visit after the first long holiday or summer. I know in my head that it is normal – and as it should be, but it still makes me sad. It will be a sad day when you walk out that door, and when the only information I get about you comes from your younger brothers, and then from your mom and dad when I run into them, and eventually from announcements in the newspaper. It will be a joy to watch your life unfold, because that is what is really happening; your life is just beginning. So go out there and make all of us proud, and know that you have an unofficial cheerleader waiting on the sidelines to cheer you on. Good Luck and God Bless you with your future. — Mrs. Badgley*

**Mrs. Badgley- Your passion for students, for teaching, and for this work comes through in every word. You, my friend, are a difference maker!**

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**“I see in you a compassionate leader. You are someone who cares about others, their well being, and their progress.”**

(Tweet by clicking on the quote)

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# LEARN MORE ABOUT MY WORK WITH PASSION-DRIVEN LEARNING

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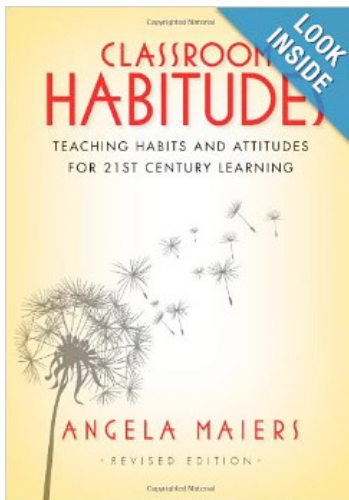


I believe that learning is a life-long journey. I speak, write, and guide organizations to harness the power of literacy, communication, and social technologies.

Please watch my TEDx talk: [You Matter](#)

You can also learn more about my [services](#) and [speaking](#) topics on my [website](#). Together we are smarter!

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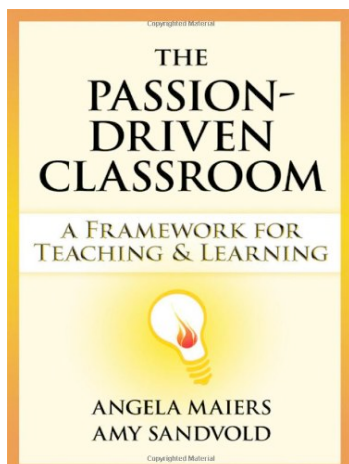


You know students need to acquire 21st century skills. But how do you work those skills into the curriculum? Learn how to use the content you already teach to challenge students to think critically, collaborate with others, solve new problems, and adapt to change across new learning contexts.

Help students build the seven habitudes--habits of disciplined decisions and specific attitudes--they need to succeed.

**[Buy the Book on Amazon](#)**

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Discover ways to cultivate a thriving and passionate community of learners – in your classroom! Learn how to move away from prescription-driven learning toward passion-driven learning, and begin to make a real difference in the lives of your students. These strategies will help teachers in Grades K-12 put the "heart" back into teaching and learning – and make a lasting impact as educators!

**[Buy the Book on Amazon](#)**