

Towards A Typology of Sources of Inspiration of Student Teachers

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ABSTRACT A typology of student teachers' sources of inspiration in the form of a two-tiered theoretical framework formed the foundation of a questionnaire administered to student teachers in three different countries. The results of this study show that inspiration amounts to a student teacher being driven, enthused, guided, motivated and self-directed by sources towards the attainment of a goal, in this case to become and remain a professional teacher. Although scholars have a good comprehension of what inspires teachers for their profession, there seems to be a facet of this phenomenon that is not yet fully fathomed. This is confirmed in this study, by the fact that the typology regarding teacher inspiration succeeded only in explaining 55.79% of the variance in the data pool.

INTRODUCTION

Teacher educators annually find themselves faced with new cohorts of student teachers. As some groups can be large, they have no real insight into what inspires their students to want to become teachers or what contributes to their staying power. Discussions about a connection between (sources of) inspiration and teacher education are relatively scarce. A Google Scholar (2011) search with descriptor "*inspiration*" and "*teacher education*" yielded around 184 000 hits, most of which touch upon the issue of inspiration of future teachers only tangentially.

In his search for what he refers to as the concerns of student teachers for entering into the teaching profession, Ekiz (2006: 71, 73-74, 77) mentions students' experiences (for example, teaching the only job available), personality, ability, the social environment, interrelated sets of thought and expectations (Vogels 2009) but not what exactly inspires them to study for the teaching profession. Korthagen's (2004)

core-reflection theory investigations are more promising: the more a teacher is able to reflect on his/her 'mission' as a professional, the more s/he will be in contact with his/her unique qualities. Such connectedness requires from the student to be aware of a 'flow' in the form of excitement, ecstasy, inner clarity and intrinsic motivation. Presence and a caring attitude also predispose a student for the profession (Györgyiné 2000; Korthagen and Vasalos 2005: 54, 2008, 2009).

References to inspiration in literature (Jay and Johnson 2002; Brouwer and Korthagen 2005: 157) draw attention to a possible nexus between inspiration and teacher education: inspired students readily subject themselves to being moulded into professional teachers. Their inspiration finds expression in an awareness of a calling to the profession, determination, persistence and directedness towards professional goals. Although it is difficult to determine what exactly inspires a teacher (Shulls and Ritter 2013: 29), teacher educators must attempt to understand what inspires their students before as well as during their training because that would enhance their students' sense of meaning and purpose during training. This is a daunting task, in view of Jones and Jones' observation (2013: 73) that there are persistent levels of ambiguity regarding aspects of teacher education.

The remainder of this article, in which the researchers demonstrate how they examined the phenomenon of what inspires student teachers,

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is structured as follows: After justifying the research method, they present three interrelated aspects of sources of inspiration of student teachers in the form of a conceptual-theoretical framework. The researchers then present the results of an empirical investigation in support of the contention that the conceptual-theoretical framework was able to explain a significant percentage of the variance in a data pool¹.

METHOD

Table 1 (refer Onwuegbuzie et al. 2007; Onwuegbuzie et al. 2009; Creswell 2009, 2012) shows that a researcher has first to decide on the research paradigm/world view perspective that s/he intends working from, and then about the particular research design. This is followed by a choice about theoretical orientation, the research elements, and finally about how findings can be generalised.

In this case, the researchers departed from a constructivist-phenomenological-hermeneutic epistemological as well as critical and pragmatic approach (column 1). They subsequently reviewed the available body of scholarship on student teacher inspiration. They collected, interpreted and validated their data on the basis of their literature review, and this article reports the findings (columns 2-4; see highlighted cells.)]

SOURCES OF INSPIRATION OF STUDENT TEACHERS

The researchers aimed at adding a further perspective to student teacher inspiration theory (De Jong et al. 2008; Van der Zee et al. 2009) by subsuming the theory in a two-tiered theoretical framework.

First Tier

Column 1 in Table 2 denotes the outcome of their study of the nature of the sources of inspiration and column 2, their understanding that sources of inspiration may constitute a range of meanings regarding the behaviour and actions of people. Column 3 shows that sources of inspiration may describe an incremental spiral from motivation to ultimate purpose.

1.¹Inspiration has certain ontological features. It takes the form of a process² (Brown 2005: 64): it takes time for a (prospective) teacher to become inspired for the profession (Van den Brand et al. 2007: 39-63). The process flows from a range of meanings (De Savornin Lohman et al. 2001: 25-27; Korthagen et al. 2005: 53; Halskov et al. 2007: 185-186; Roeleveld et al. 2007: 26-30; Phillips 2008: 3, 9; Valenkamp 2008: 344) which can range from transcendent (“beyondness”) and transcendental (“underlying or grounding”)

Table 1: Methodological justification

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| <i>Research approach / paradigm (Onwuegbuzie et al.)/ Philosophical worldviews (Creswell)</i> | <i>Research design (Onwuegbuzie et al.)/Strategies of inquiry (Creswell)</i> | <i>Orientation (Onwuegbuzie et al.; Creswell)(Choose one:)</i> | <i>Research methods (Creswell) (Include all the following elements in report:)</i> | <i>Five types of generalisations (Choose one, or a combination:)</i> |
| Positivist | Quantitative or qualitative or mixed methods | Case-oriented analysis | Research questions | External statistical (to entire population) |
| Postpositivist | | | Sampling and instrumentation | Internal statistical (to sample only) |
| Constructivist / interpretive / heuristic | | Variable oriented analysis | Data collection | Analytical (logical) |
| Critical | | | Interpretation (data processing): inferential and / or descriptive statistics | Validation |
| Participatory Pragmatic | | Process / experience oriented | Write-up (reporting) | Naturalistic |

Table 2: Anatomy of teacher inspiration

| 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|--|---|
| <i>A. Ontology of inspiration (essential features, structural elements)</i> | <i>B. Range of meaning, finding expression in behaviour and action</i> | <i>C. Spiralling nature of inspiration</i> |
| 1. Inspiration is a process | 5. Development of occupational identity | 10. Motivation (external and internal sources of inspiration; transcendent and/or “common place”); leads to... |
| 2. Inspiration flows from a range of meanings | 6. Invigoration | 11. Emotional energy and drive; leads to... |
| 3. Inspiration appears in particular circumstances | 7. Stimulation | 12. Integrated enthusiasm; leads to... |
| 4. Inspiration results in particular actions and behaviours | 8. Moving of the soul | 13. Rational guidance; leads to... |
| | 9. Emotion-driven process | 14. Self-directed action and behaviour; leads to... |
| | | 15 ¹ . Teleological direction: attainment of goal, that is, a teacher student and future teacher with staying power in and for the profession) |

to mundane or common place (such as an inspiring teacher, parent, book or the prospect of a salary) sources (Lemmer et al. 1997: 51; Järvinen 1999: 6; Best, 2001: 62-63; Giya et al. 2005: 6-7; Korthagen et al. 2005: 51; Van den Brand et al. 2007: 39-63; Bloch 2009: 21-22, 98, 108; Drinkwater 2010: 37). Inspiration surfaces in particular circumstances (Dyer 2002: 9; Thrash et al. 2003: 872; Korthagen et al. 2005: 52-53; Foley et al. 2006: 20; Phillips 2008: 4). These observations tie in with those of Hargreaves (1998: 850) affirming that teaching is not only a technical competence but “involves significant emotional understanding and emotional labour as well” (Brown 2005: 66; Rothkamm 2008: 307). Inspiration furthermore results in actions and behaviours (Korthagen 2004; Van den Brand et al. 2007: 39-63).

2. Inspiration embodies meaning (Bras 2005: 17-31; Hardjono et al. 2005: 7-16; De Klerk-Luttig 2008: 513-514; Schatzki 2009: 33, 41-42; Sestieri 2010) that finds ways of expressing itself in the actions and behaviour of the inspired person. In the case of a (student) teacher, it can express itself in the process of developing a professional identity (Klaassen et al. 1999; Beijgaard 2009), and/or through invigorating the person towards becoming a proficient teacher (De Jong et al. 2008: 53, 54). In the case of transcendent sources of inspiration, it could be noted that inspiration may lead to a moving of the soul (Nordell 1888: 49; Chickering 2004; cf. Nagy 2007). Inspiration is virtually always also an

emotion-driven experience (Hargreaves 1998: 835, 838).

3. Inspiration follows an upwards spiralling trajectory (Wendt 2003: 1) that is neither deterministic nor linear. At the most basic level, inspiration leads to motivation (Brown 2005: 66; Rothkamm 2008: 307). Inspiration should not be confused with motivation: inspiration refers to “breathing spirit into” whereas motivation refers to movement towards the attainment of a goal (Fodor 1997; Brown 2005: 64; refer Ben Ze-Evi 2009). Motivation can be either of external origin (a teacher, parent, book) or of internal origin (an urge to become a teacher) (Hardjono et al. 2005: 9; Korthagen et al. 2005: 50, 68; Szalek 2007: *passim*; Phillips 2008: 3; Sestieri 2010). Motivation also leads to some form of emotional energy and drive (Korthagen et al. 2005: 50, 68). Inspiration can be either transcendent (religious, spiritual), transcendental (from the bedrock of existence) or commonplace (for example, the prospect of a salary) (refer Thatcher 1970: 809; Järvinen 1999: 6; Kalland 2002: 145; Chuengsatiansup 2003; Haldane 2003: 12; Loimeier 2003: 237, 241; Hardjono et al. 2005; Hermans 2007: 5-19; Aston 2008: 47). The inspired person is driven emotionally towards entering and staying in the training and/or profession, and this can lead to enthusiasm (Hardjono et al. 2005: 9; Sestieri 2010). Enthusiasm leads to rational guidance (Korthagen et al. 2005: 48-50; Halskov et al. 2007: 188; Drinkwater 2010: 10, 23) which in turn leads to self-directed action and behaviour (Rothka-

mm 2008: 302, 307) the latter which finally leads to the attainment of the goal (Ekiz 2006: 70). All of this seems to support the notion that sources of inspiration may describe an incremental spiral from motivation to ultimate purpose.

Each of these elements retains its impetus as the inspirational spiral unfolds.

Second Tier

The theoretical framework above is contextualised in and by self-organisation theory which, in turn, is founded in teleological thinking. The researchers prefer to move the emphasis from the rather more deterministic aspect (structuralist forms of regulationism; cf. Collinge 1999: 558) of systems theory (Pyka and Küppers 2002: 3-21; Wendt 2003: 2) to the view that inspiration proceeds spontaneously from the channelling of system dynamics via structural boundary conditions toward a particular end-state.

Inspiration is experienced from the bottom upwards by the student teacher. His or her experience of feeling inspired can be constrained by conditions such as the teacher education programme, the practical teaching conditions at the school and family-related conditions.

According to self-organisation and teleological theory, a purposive agent aims at realising an intentional teleological process. Final causation involves goal-seeking (Wendt 2003: 8,9). Inspiration embraces a specific form of motivation; it gives reason to act in a particular way. In this sense, inspiration is normative (Wendt 2003: 7). The end-state toward which a person moves is an essential part of the explanation of how s/he gets there.

Self-organisation theory describes upwards causation: it shows how order can emerge in a system as a result of its elements following purely local rules (Wendt 2003: 11) without central coordination (Serugendo et al. 2006: *passim*). Self-organisation theory therefore has a strong methodological individualist orientation (Wendt 2003: 11). Although the orientation in teacher education is, to a large degree, individual, the direction of the training programme is not aimless or directionless; the student teacher becomes a partner in the social practices of teaching and the teaching profession (MacIntyre et al. 2002: *passim*).

The inspiration process embodies a continuing interchange within, as well as between, different sub-systems, though not deterministically. Under the influence of other (sub) systems, inspiration is reorganised within the student teacher in such a way that he or she develops unique individual characteristics as a future teacher (Thrash et al. 2003: *passim*).

As far as downward causation is concerned, self-organisation theories root the bottom-up story in methodological individualism (Wendt 2003: 12,13). Parts and whole are nevertheless mutually constitutive. Downward causation is biased towards homeostasis and so does not explain change. On the other hand, self-organisation theory's upward causal focus on non-linear dynamics does not explain direction. To get a sense of direction, the researchers need to add final causation to the picture (Wendt 2003: 15). For individual inspiration to be allowed to spiral upwards towards the desired end-state, it must acquire purposive direction.

Self-organising systems operate based on contextual, local interactions. In some cases, self-organisation is coupled with emergent behaviour in the sense that, although individual components execute a simple task, as a whole they are able to carry out complex tasks (Serugendo et al. 2006). De Wolf and Holvoet (2005: 1,2,9) support Serugendo et al.'s view by emphasising the notion of "emergence"; it is the phenomenon where global behaviour arises from the interaction between the local parts of the system (De Wolf et al. 2005: 3).

The speed at which any structural "event" such as inspiration will be realised is historically contingent. This process is neither deterministic nor linear; forward movement may be blocked for a time and progress may even be reversed (Wendt 2003: 1).

EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

Teacher educators can apply the contents of the cells of Table 2 as criteria for establishing whether a (student) teacher indeed feels inspired for the profession and would possess the tenacity and resilience to stay in training and the profession. To test this claim, the researchers transformed the contents of this Table into an empirical survey instrument and administered it to student teachers at institutions in three different countries. The findings show that the

model explained above may indeed be used as a tool for assessing the extent to which (student) teachers feel inspired for their training and for their future profession.

A sample of student teachers was drawn from teacher education institutions in South Africa, Netherlands and Hungary (n = 2 135). A factor analysis revealed that the conceptual- theoretical framework explained 55.79% of the variance in the data pool, which was not optimal, but acceptable in view of Darling-Hammonds' 2002-study, where it was found that a factor accounted for between 40 and 60% of the variance (Beare et al. 2012: 159). This does not, however, take away the necessity for refining the framework. The investigation yielded the following results (on the basis of factor analyses) with regard to the sources of inspiration identified by the respondents on a five-point Likert-type scale:

Table 3: Results of empirical investigation

| <i>Source of inspiration (factors)</i> | <i>Mean response on a five-point scale (ranging from 1 = no influence to 5 = very strong influence)</i> |
|---|---|
| Image of the ideal teacher/ inspiring lecturers | 4.40 |
| Teaching practice (in schools) | 4.38 |
| Family and extended family | 4.19 |
| Religious and life-conceptual influences | 4.12 |
| Theoretical training and mentoring by lecturers | 3.87 |
| Peers; interaction with fellow students | 3.82 |

DISCUSSION

Cell 1 of Table 2 – the responses lend support to the fact that to be inspired for the training as well as for the profession itself *is a process that plays out over time*. Students are exposed to their families and friends for many years and they are exposed to their lecturers and practical teaching mentors for three to four years.

Cell 2 – these respondents drew relatively strong inspiration from at least six different *sources of meaning*.

Cell 3 – the respondents derived their inspiration from a *constellation of different situations and circumstances* (family, lecturers, peers).

Cell 4 – although the empirical data do not reflect particular *action and behaviour* on the

part of the respondents, they seemed to be relatively highly motivated for their future profession. In some cases they responded with an average of 4⁺ out of a possible 5.

Cell 5 – the *image of the ideal teacher* (occupational identity) exerted the greatest inspirational influence on this sample of respondents, with an average of 4.4 out of a possible 5.

Cell 6 to Cell 8 – the fact that this sample of respondents scored higher than 3.82 for all six sources of inspiration is evidence of their feeling *invigorated, stimulated and moved in their souls* for their training as well as for their future profession.

Cell 9 – the investigation provided no direct evidence of the *emotions* as a source of inspiration.

Cell 10 – the six sources identified by the respondents were mainly *external* in nature. One would have expected them to have mentioned *internal sources* such as feeling a divine calling or an urge to become a teacher or a caretaker of children.

Cell 11 – emotional energy and drive: the respondents were clearly strongly inspired by the six sources identified.

Cell 12 – integrated enthusiasm: from the data it is not possible to infer the degree to which the respondents might have integrated in their hearts and minds the six sources of inspiration.

Cell 13 – Teaching Practice is a highly structured, *rational series of actions* and behaviour. The image of the teacher as professional educator also suggests continuous embodiment of design, planning, management and rational execution of a complex series of related actions and behaviour. The same applies to the theoretical training of a prospective teacher. All the three sources of inspiration provided *rational guidance* to the respondents.

Cell 14 – self-directed: the image of the ideal teacher provided *direction* to the future teacher. Similar influences flow from Teaching Practice and theoretical training. Support also flowed from (extended) family, religious and life-conceptual influences, and peers.

Cell 15 – all of the above, particularly the fourth strongest source of inspiration, namely religious and life-conceptual influences, lends support to the element contained in this cell; the motivated, enthusiastic, rationally guided and self-directed student teacher can arguably attain his/her *objectives in life* (teleological direc-

tion) in general and in education as a profession.

Self-organisation theory casts further light on the findings. The development of self-organisation and how it takes effect depend on how the student teacher processes the inspirational influences. The findings furthermore vindicate the notion of the student teacher working towards a desired end-state. Table 3 shows that a range of meanings entertained by the respondents lend credence to their goals. The contents of the Table also seem to lend credence to the notion of top-down and bottom-up forces converging for the purpose of bringing the student teacher closer to the attainment of goals. It can also be deduced that the inspiration process is spontaneous and most likely non-deterministic in nature. Inspiration is indeed mediated by change at the micro-level and conditioned by circumstances at the macro. A student teacher's feeling of being inspired can be constrained by external conditions such as the teacher education programme at the university, the practical teaching conditions at the school, and family-related conditions.

A purposive agent aims at realising a teleological process; it is the end toward which the system (the teacher education programme) moves. The results of the empirical study support the notion that inspiration gives those who are inspired towards a particular goal reason to act in a particular way and to choose among different actions. In this sense, inspiration is indeed normative. Table 3 shows that the respondents had made choices about what should guide them in their training (for example, the image of the ideal teacher and the development of professional identity).

Nothing in the findings of this study seems to refute the notion of a percolating bottom-up and top-down interaction. Top-down conditions at the three teacher education institutions seem to have provided space, impetus, stimulus and support to the respondents (the average responses were higher than 3.80 throughout). According to self-organisation theory, if left to bloom, the inspiration experienced by the students could indeed add to the quality of the teacher education environment.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Student teachers enrol for (and persist in) a teacher education course because they are in-

spired by sources that may range from the transcendent through the transcendental to the commonplace. The researchers' conceptual analysis of 'inspiration' and 'sources of inspiration' revealed a range of meanings many of which are relevant to student teachers in that they relate to the development of occupational identity, for example invigoration, stimulation and moving of the soul. This reference to a range of meanings refers to the fact that teacher inspiration has not yet been fully fathomed by scholars. This is in line with research finding regarding teacher effectiveness: identifying exactly what inspires a teacher is difficult. There are persistent levels of ambiguity regarding aspects of teacher education (in casu, reflective inquiry). Despite the fact that teacher inspiration has not yet been fully fathomed, the results of this study imply that it is an embedded aspect of the hidden curriculum and should be intentionally infused in teacher education.

A phenomenological-hermeneutic analysis of inspiration exposed four essential features or structural elements of inspiration: it is a process, can flow from a range of meanings, appears in certain circumstances, and results in actions and behaviour.

The framework presented above can be used as a tool by means of which (the level and degree of) inspiration in the lives and education of student teachers can be assessed: the transcendent and transcendental aspects of inspiration, its teleological aspect, the fact that it refers to a search for meanings and purpose, as well as the fact that it is connected with everyday experience.

All of the above leads to the general conclusion that inspiration amounts to a student teacher being driven, enthused, guided, motivated and self-directed by sources towards the attainment of a goal, in this case to become and remain a professional teacher.

NOTES

1. The detailed results of the empirical part of the researchers' investigation into sources of inspiration have been submitted for publication in another accredited, peer-reviewed journal. Contact the corresponding author for details.
2. These references are utilized below in the discussion of the empirical findings.
3. This reference refers to the contents of column 1 (Table 2).
4. Inspiration may occur at a specific moment in time (e.g. as in the case of religious conversion), in

professional contexts, it usually comes to fruition over a period of time (see Van den Brand et al. 2007: 39-63).

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