

The bi-polar professional self of aspiring teachers: Mission and power

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to map and organize the expectations of aspiring teachers in the final stage of training into a coherent conceptual framework. A theoretical model, termed The teacher's bi-polar professional self (TBPS) model, was developed and data assembled to provide corroborating empirical evidence. The research design was based on Facet theory, to define observations and analyze the results. A questionnaire was administered to 156 students from a national teacher training college in Israel. It was found that teaching trainees' expectations could be mapped schematically as two opposing poles with an intermediate zone: one pole is termed the "altruistic aspirations" pole, pertaining to expectations regarding the realization of values such as relating to students as individuals and providing them with one-on-one instruction, help and friendly support. The opposing pole is the "narcissistic needs" (or self-serving altruism) pole, which relates to hopes of getting respect and power, and of significantly effecting the students' future. Between the poles lies an intermediate zone, which harbors the teacher's hopes of acquiring and possessing the necessary educational and teaching knowledge and skills that will facilitate the fulfillment of the expectations encapsulated by the two poles.

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1. Introduction

Many studies have tried to understand why people become teachers. Lortie (1975) suggested that teachers opt teaching due to the fact that it offers ongoing contact with young people, is not related to illness, poverty or emotional disturbance, and that teachers see themselves as accomplishing a unique social assignment of a high moral value. Teaching allows practitioners to prepare young people to assume useful adult roles in society, and

it is the teacher who, in fact, conveys the tradition of a particular society down the generations. Material remuneration was not reported as a factor that motivates people to take up teaching, although benefits of this kind carry more weight than people are willing to admit. Teachers' work schedule involves particularly short days, and relatively long vacations, and while teachers are sensitive to criticism on this point, it nevertheless provides strong incentive for entering and retaining teaching. Johnson (1990) summarized the findings of studies made up to the late 1980s, and indicated that the first, most common factor which motivated people to enter teaching was the desire to work with

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people—adults or children. The second most important reason for becoming a teacher identified by Johnson was the teacher's interest in pedagogy, the desire to deal with and impart learning contents, in other words, to see children learn.

Sarason (1999) found that factors that drew people—mainly women—in past generations to teaching were related to a hope of gaining a particular status in the community. Nowadays, people teach out of a desire to contribute to society, whose future may be threatened should the young generation not be educated properly. Brenner, Zerkovitz, and Toker (2002), found two main reasons for choosing teaching by young aspiring teachers: (1) a sense of social vocation and (2) a fulfillment of personal needs. The sense of vocation relates to helping shape children's character, molding their future, and ensuring that learning is joyful rather than painful. It also relates to "giving of myself" and conveying knowledge, preserving cultural values and contributing to a disciplined society. Among the reasons associated with meeting personal needs is the desire to work, and experience direct relationships with people, thus bolstering one's ego ("for them to listen to me", "for them to like me", "to see the fruits of my labor"). Kass (2000) reported similar findings, namely that teachers enroll in the teaching profession in order to compensate for a sense of personal inadequacy left over from childhood.

The findings reported by Lortie (1975), Johnson (1990), Sarason (1999), Brenner, Zerkovitz, and Toker (2002), and Kass (2000) show that the appeal of teaching which stems from a sense of vocation and social relevance, and the need for self-fulfillment is associated with teachers' expectation of being rewarded for their work. These findings also accentuate that teachers would prefer rewards which they can benefit from in the present, rather than delay gratification in the hope of benefits in the future, and that this preference affects the type of rewards they expect to enjoy. These rewards are spiritual, belonging to the intrinsic class of rewards. Teachers' rewards pertain to their students, the most important of which being a sense of "reaching" each and every student, and of succeeding in affecting students both as individuals and as a group. Another, no less important expected reward is shaping student morals, and having an impact on their students as society members. Other rewards teachers expect of their work with students pertain to stimulating the students' intellectual curiosity

and interest in learning, and being connected to a group of young people as an integrated social unit. These studies suggest that teachers often see their ability to impart knowledge to their students and to provide emotional and social support as the quintessence of their professional accomplishment and as a personal and professional mission.

The present article focuses on the rewards of classroom work with students which aspiring teachers expect to reap at the early stages of their career, with the aim of shedding light on different aspects of teacher's work. A specific goal of this article is to define and test a model of teacher professional self that might provide some insight into why people choose to become teachers.

1.1. Altruism, narcissism and the bi-polar self

Teachers exhibit giving behavior in the classroom, an altruistic form of behavior. Social psychology defines altruism as a behavior involving helping others without expectation of reward or gain, even if sacrifice or risk to the provider of the assistance are involved. Psychologists believe that the desire to help is inherent in the human psyche and that learning and circumstantial pressure play a significant part in such behavior (Colman, 2001). Altruism is therefore considered a behavior, which has no reward although it also seems not entirely devoid of all expectation of a reward. In fact, studies have shown that people whose lives are unsatisfactory tend to help others in order to help themselves feel better (Cialdini, Darby, & Vincent, 1973). People seem to enjoy being helpful because it offers them something in return. In other words, helping benefits the helper. People who help others are respected by society, gain social esteem and avoid social disapproval (Archer, 1991). This may explain the tendency to help others by serving as a means of improving personal welfare (Schaller & Cialdini, 1988). Social exchange theory (Homans, 1974) suggests that teachers who provide instruction, knowledge, personal and social support to their students, expect personal reward (e.g., satisfaction, acknowledgement of personal and professional abilities) and social reward (e.g., status, leadership, control over social and other processes in the classroom, school and community). Indeed, as Lortie (1975) summarizes "...teachers favor outcomes which are not arcane. Their purposes, in fact, seem to be relatively traditional; they want to produce 'good' people—students who like

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