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Athanassia is currently working as a Senior Teacher for General English in Melbourne. She has taught ESL at private colleges, high schools and universities both in Australia and France. She has completed a Master of Education in Leadership and created a Guide for Student Engagement outside the classroom. Having moved to Australia as an international student from Greece, she experienced the benefits of engaging within the wider community first hand and hopes to aid this process for our students today. aiosifidou@hotmail.com

Student-teachers' narratives of good language educators: Examining some contributions of poetic inquiry

María Cristina Sarasa

Introduction

This article presents a poetic inquiry which summarises forty-eight English language (EL) student-teachers' school and university narratives about their best educators. It is part of a larger narrative inquiry into the narrative construction of future EL teacher identities. It was carried out in an Argentinian EL university teacher education program, where I teach and where participants were taking sophomore and junior courses.

EL teacher identity is central to education programs when they focus on the collaborative discussion of what it means to become a teacher (Pennington & Richards, 2016). My research is committed to a narrative definition of identity as stories we all live in personal and professional landscapes of practices (Clandinin, 2015). At the centre of future teachers' narrative identities and biographies, we find memorable teachers, those outstanding individuals who have remained in their students' hearts and minds (Bain, 2011).

My research methodology is narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013). The participants and I retold their future teacher identities by composing together individual and group stories and by analysing the meanings we all derived from our experiences. In this article, I will present a related methodology which is poetic inquiry (Wyatt, 2016). I have shifted, chosen, and rewritten key words from participants' narratives on their best teachers to produce a *found poem* (Prendergast, 2009) that tries to capture their senses of what makes teachers great. Finally, I conclude by reflecting on some implications that narrative and poetic inquiry have for EL teacher education and good teaching.

Outlining teacher narrative identity

For some time now, ELT has viewed (future) teacher and student identity as changing, struggling, and socially constructed. By defining identities as stories, professionals and researchers have found a working category to express individualities as narratives (McAdams, 2018).

Understanding teacher identity as stories suggests that identity, contexts, and knowledge are related and can be understood narratively. Defined as *stories to live by*, teachers' identities express their professional and personal knowledge, their experiences, and their biographies (Clandinin, 2015). They are constructed by reliving and retelling them in multiple landscapes of practices. In the field of EL teacher education, this focus on narrative identity moves away from the concept of learning to that of identity negotiation and development (Meijer, 2017).

Characterising (future) good teachers

Good (prospective) teachers transmit content effectively and thoroughly, using methods that are suitable for their students and also morally justifiable, since they foster learning. These educators are exceptionally active, motivating, encouraging, honest, respectful, and fair (Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2005). They have "achieved remarkable success in helping their students learn in ways that [have] made a sustained, substantial, and positive influence on how those students think, act, and feel" (Bain, 2011, p. 5).

Additionally, teachers' narratives on their lives and work—and students' stories of memorable teachers—highlight educators' passion and moral sense expressed in their determination, their resilience, and their tireless belief that they can make a difference in students' lives. Research shows that passion is "a commitment to understand and teach every learner" and that it includes "hope and optimism" (Day, 2012, p. 17). Passion is not an inborn characteristic but rather grows or decreases according to settings and leadership styles. It relates to well-being and professional identity as it blends expertise, knowledge, personal obligation, morals, and confidence. In this sense, "teaching at its best... is a passionate affair" (p. 19).

Student teachers often negotiate their identities through stories of their memorable educators. Thus, these future teachers' identities are socially constructed through their own practices, their knowledge, and their narratives of previous teaching and learning experiences that influence their choices of becoming (or not) a certain kind of teacher (Hsieh, 2015).

Engaging in narrative and poetic inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a research methodology considering narrative both as a method and as the experiences that are being studied. It explores and recreates those experiences as stories that are lived, told, retold, and

relied in personal and professional landscapes of practices (Clandinin, 2013, 2015). This paper summarises one theme that emerged during my narrative inquiry into EL student teachers' processes of constructing their narrative identities. It involves their stories about the long-lasting influence of good educators.

Participants were forty-eight undergraduates attending two sophomore and junior linguistic and cultural subjects I teach in an Argentinian EL teacher university education program. For two years, I collected their written and oral narratives concerning their favourite stories and films; their educational biographies; their greatest teachers and heroes; their lives' turning points, greatest challenges, and wisest academic decisions; and their self-definition compositions. Next, based on these texts I had collected, I wrote individual narratives together with each participant and we all engaged in personal and group member-reflection.

The forty-eight narratives we composed together revealed different processes of becoming EL teachers. Along these lines, all these individual stories allowed me to rewrite them into group narratives centered on the temporal, social, and local dimensions of these future teachers' identity construction processes. Stories about good teachers were present in these three dimensions as they suggested the kind of teacher participants would (not) like to become.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to retell individual or group narratives in academic papers such as this and in such a way that respects their meanings. Therefore, I carried out poetic inquiry, a form of exploration related to narrative inquiry that has gained importance in ELT research (Aliaga-Salas, 2017; Wyatt, 2016). Poetic inquiry is an area of qualitative research that includes poetry as an element in investigations. It is "commonly seen as poetic transcription and representation of participant data" generally by "using the technique of *found poetry*" (Prendergast, 2009, p. xxxvi, author's italics). Found poems are literally recovered from participants' own words, concentrating the meanings elaborated in their narratives briefly, selectively, and vividly.

To write the found poem below, I re-read all the narratives I had originally collected, the individual stories we had composed together, and those group narratives which had revealed the importance of memorable teachers. I identified and included within a chart (in a Microsoft Word document) participants' stories and descriptions that expressed the characteristics of good, memorable, educators that these students had offered. At this point, I went through a long process of selecting key words and phrases, combining participants' voices to write my found poem about good teachers.

Composing a found poem on good teachers

The found poem below tries to summarise the spirit of my students' narrative texts on great teachers. It respects participants' experiences without retelling them directly as it sums up the main features of good teachers' practices expressed in the original stories.

Every good teacher teaches
Who students would love
To become
And respect

The essence of great teachers
Alive
In students' minds and hearts
Forever

They care, care, care, care, care
They show ways
To face fears, to embrace education
They inspire love, learning, dreams, goals
They support
Engage
Commit
Share
They reach beyond and defy
Finding strengths
To start a memorable journey

When teachers love teaching, they also love their students
Good teachers are there
Being themselves
Humble, unpretentious
Sweet, lovable, thoughtful, gentle
Creating homes
Believing in students
Holding them to the highest standards
To do their best every single day of their lives

But
Above all
They feel
Enjoy
Self-defining passion
Passion inconsumable
For teaching
Learning
Sharing
Building
Connecting
Understanding

They teach passion
They become passion
For their students
Their discipline
Their subject
Their classes

And knowledge immeasurable

Their passion connects
Relates and becomes alive
Teaches life lessons
Living lessons
Life-changing lessons

Passion lighting
The fire of fascination in students' eyes
Passion awakening
Passions manifold
Passionate teachings
Desires beyond

In this found poem, I have tried to re-present the general impression of participants' stories about great, passionate teachers. These remarkable educators are defined by their passion while their lives contribute towards their students' ideas of who they are becoming and what they believe, know, and feel (Barcelos, 2015).

Conclusion

I would like to conclude by offering some reflections. First, I would like to highlight the value of focusing on identity in teacher education programmes. Becoming a teacher, working on that becoming, involves personal and social beliefs about who and what future teachers (do not) regard as influential persons during their education. Reflecting on these experiences through stories is very important (Meijer, 2017).

Second, I would like to stress the role memorable educators play in future teachers' negotiation of their identities, which are constructed publicly in the stories they retell and relive about their greatest educators in their school biographies (Hsieh, 2015). In all these narratives, we find the constant expression of passion. It is defined as memorable educators' commitment to teach to the best of their abilities, and beyond (Day, 2012). Since passion finds its way into all stories and memories of what good teachers (should) know (Amez & Dobboletta, 2017), do, and feel, it should be fostered in teacher education programs.

Finally, narrative and poetry, used as new forms to carry out and report research, create texts that allow us to understand and to learn while we retell lived experiences and share them. These experiences can be created and performed digitally, in print, in classrooms, or in live or video conferences and meetings (Denzin, 2016). In this contribution, my poetic inquiry concentrated on participants' voices and meanings, summing up the narratives they composed to express what makes (future) teachers great.

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Biodata:

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Teacher low points: A qualitative study into experiences of demotivation in ELT

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Introduction

This study into the demotivation of English language teachers stems from a personal experience of demotivation and a subsequent desire to learn more about similar experiences that fellow teachers may have had. As demotivation can affect teachers regardless of setting, background or experience, this study is not specific to any one English language teaching context. Instead, the aim is to explore experiences of demotivation among a diverse group of English language teachers, investigate factors which caused their demotivation and the impact this had, and outline steps they recommend for overcoming demotivation. This article also includes a strong emphasis on research methods employed in the hope that they will be of interest to other teacher-researchers.

Methodology

Research design

Due to the emotive nature of the topic, a qualitative research approach which could facilitate the exploration of respondents' views (Dörnyei, 2007) was chosen. This took the form of a questionnaire with open-ended questions, which can "lead to a greater level of discovery" (Gillham, 2000, p. 5) and which "resemble what people actually say in response to such questions in interviews" (Lynch, 1992, p. 75), while ensuring respondents remained anonymous.

Questionnaire development: Drafting & piloting

As the aim of this study was to discover more about teachers' experiences of demotivation, the first item on the questionnaire addressed this directly, asking respondents to describe a specific time they had felt demotivated. Subsequent multiple-choice items aimed to discover how long this experience had lasted (item 2) and how long into their teaching career this experience occurred (item 3). In addition, open-ended questions were posed regarding the perceived causes, as well as what action respondents had taken, or what action they would recommend, to overcome demotivation.

This draft questionnaire was piloted with four colleagues. While the average response time of 21 minutes suggested survey fatigue would be unlikely – Dörnyei

(2007) recommends a maximum of 30 minutes - feedback from the pilot led to three changes:

- 1) items two and three were redrafted from multiple choice to an open-ended format to allow for greater flexibility (for example, for respondents who had taught for longer than ten years),
- 2) items three and five were rephrased to include the possibility of an ongoing experience
- 3) the introduction was clarified to invite respondents to write in note form if they so wished.

Data collection

As with much research in English Language Teaching, this questionnaire relied mainly on a population of convenience (Brown, 2014) as it was shared within a number of teacher groups on social media as well as emailed to a number of teaching contacts. While the online nature of the questionnaire removed some geographical limitations on the potential population, it did limit it to those active in professional groups on social media and my acquaintances. In an attempt to counter these limitations and encourage snowball sampling (Dörnyei, 2007), those viewing the questionnaire were encouraged to share it with teaching acquaintances. In total, 30 responses were received from countries as diverse as Australia, Japan, and Spain, and from a wide range of teachers including those teaching Young Learners, Business English, General English, and English for Academic Purposes.

Data analysis

In analysing the data, Brown's seven steps for qualitative data analysis were followed (2014, p.102). All data was collated in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet in order to more easily identify emergent patterns and themes. At this stage, six responses were disregarded as they provided insufficient information to be deemed insightful for the study. The remaining responses were mapped out into a smaller matrix based on key term "emotion codes", advocated by Miles, Huberman and Saldaña for qualitative studies into "experiences,...perspectives...and life conditions" (2014, p.75). These codes were then organised and reorganised until clearer patterns were formed. These were discussed with a colleague to gain fresh insights before the data was analysed for any testimonies which "directly contradicted" these trends, in "negative case analysis" (Brown, 2014, p.108).

Findings

Main themes

The main findings of this study are divided into three main areas: the causes of respondents' demotivation, the impact it had, and suggested steps to overcome demotivation. An overview of these three aspects is provided in Figures 1, 2, and 3.