The teacher's calling:

A window to the teacher's motivation to teach

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Abstract: There is a growing body of literature which indicates that teachers teach under challenging conditions. It is proposed that the technocratic-reductionist view of the teacher is detrimental to teacher well-being. This article examines a counter educational discourse both in New Zealand and overseas, that advocates for the personal in teaching. This emerging discourse signals that teachers' inner lives and their sense of vocation is worthy of closer examination. Recent studies have captured a glimpse of a change in the way teachers choose to describe their work, choosing to call what they do a vocation or a calling. A closer examination of the teacher's call to teach seems to confirm the emotional, ethical, moral and spiritual dimension of teaching. It is argued that for a profession that is rooted in caring relationships, teachers' psycho-emotional well-being deserves more attention.

Key words: the teacher's calling; early childhood teaching; teacher well-being

Introduction

An examination of the current education context reflects educational policies that continue to be shaped by an economic rationalist ideology. Educational pedagogy and practices are increasingly being defined within a technocratic-rationalist language, all in the name of greater economic efficiency, regulation and accountability (Brown, 2009; Codd, 1998; Collins, 1998; O'Neill, 1998). Economic globalisation has also come to influence the content, organisation and practice of teaching (Clandinin, Downey, & Huber, 2009; O'Neill, 1998). There is a view that education has become too narrow and technicist, where content is enslaved to method (Codd, 1998; Snook, 1998). The potential problem of this technocratic-reductionist view of the teacher as a skilled technician is that it goes against a more humanistic view of teachers. This view perceives teachers as professionals who gain satisfaction from working collaboratively to create a community of learners (Giles, 2005, 2006, 2007). Education is perceived as a human experience (Collins, 1998).

Goodfellow (2008) and Brown (2009) argue the technical-rational perspective has brought an increasingly intensive regulatory environment where there is an emphasis on technical competence. The outcome of this is that teachers' practical wisdom becomes subsumed by regulation and managerial regimes (Goodfellow, 2008). Under such regimes, the teacher's sense of vocation is threatened by bureaucratisation which leads to a perceived loss of autonomy, collapse of trust, loss of meaning, loss of control and extreme exhaustion, frustration and anxiety (Chater, 2005). This over-regulation of education has translated into an increasing sense of misalignment between teachers' personal beliefs about teaching and the education system's pursuit of social and economic goals that are less humanistic friendly. All this literature suggests that this is detrimental to teacher well-being (Chater, 2005; Palmer, 1998, 2000).

There is a growing body of research thatindicates that teachers are facing challenges of burnout and stress and that this affects teacher retention.Sources of teacher burnout include personal disillusionment andloss of ideals and meaningfulness at work (Korthagen, 2004; Giles, 2006); dissatisfaction over lower wages, heavy workloads, a lack of time to fulfil multiple responsibilities and overwhelming administrative duties (Fenech et al. (2009); stress due to shifting social demographics, globalisation, refugee populations, immigration patterns, economic disparities and environmental changes (Clandinin et al., 2009)and the tension caused by a misalignment between private aspirations and personal beliefs and the prevailing challenging educational atmosphere (Chater, 2005; Palmer, 1998, 2004; Estola, Erkkila, &Syrjala (2003). Clandinin et al. (2009) pondered, "Were the ways they [the teachers]found themselves composing their teaching lives so contradictory to their imagined teaching lives that leaving was the most acceptable response?" (p. 145).

Chater (2005) drew our attention to the challenge faced by teachers who struggle with a sense of misalignment between personal andprofessional identities. There appears to be a discord between private aspirations and public realities and dominant also in teachers' conversations is how their idealism about teaching gives way to cynicism when faced with the realities ofteaching. Student teachers alsorecognise the contradiction between what they consider good and desirable and the acceptable official definition of what teacherhood is (Estola, 2003).

These are strong indicators that all is not necessarily well with the teachers' world due to external forms of control and regulation and societal changes, as well as unease due to misalignments between personal expectations of teaching and the professional requirements of the job as stipulated by policy makers.

An emerging discourse.
This changing and challenging educational context has given rise to call for a counter educational discourse, both in New Zealand and overseas. There appears to be an emerging discourse arising from a growing interest in holistic alternative education (Clandinin et al., 2009; Estola, 2003; Gibbs, 2006; Glazer, 1994; Giles & Kung, 2010; Hansen, 1995; Intrator, 2005; Intrator& Scribner, 2003; Korthagen, 2004; Noddings, 1995, 2001; Palmer, 1998, 2000, 2004; Shelby, 2003; Snook, 2003). All these writers appeal for a change in the way teachers and teaching is perceived, advocating for the personal in teaching. Educators are encouraged to provide teachers with the voice to rediscover who they are and what they stand for (Clandinin et al., 2009), and to provide a platform for their voices to be heard in public discourses on education as well as be consulted in reforms made to education (Chater, 2005; Clandinin et al., 2009; Court, Merav,&Ornan, 2009; Estola et al., 2003; Malm, 2004; Rivalland, 2007).

Snook (2003) and Giles (2008) advocate for the personal side to teaching and the ethics that support this. Snook (2003) draws our attention to a growing body of literature thatendorses the belief that the personal is pivotal to the act of teaching. He points out that in reality the teacher's personality intrudes on teaching experiences and interactions at every point. He examines what he calls the "ethic of being" or "virtue ethics" which places an emphasis on the personal qualities (kindness, honesty, gentleness and humility) of teachers rather than their judgements. He concluded that personal relationships are an intimate part of teaching.

Goodfellow (2008) explores the phenomenon of "presence" as a key component of quality childcare. She proposes that engagement with children translates into a presence that has a

relational nature in which one is available to children, actively attends or listens to the other. This notion of being present, meaning being engaged and attentive,is endorsed by both Palmer (1998) and Gibbs (2006).Noddings (1984) maintains teachers who are presentare engrossed and receptive to another. Goodfellow (2008) clarified that being present involves the heart and soul of the teacher's professional practice. All these writers endorse the personal dimension to teaching.

In advocating for the personal in teaching, Palmer (1983, 1998, 2000, 2004) consistently encourages teachers to imprint their identity on teaching and rely on self-knowledge above the use of techniques.Korthagen (2004) arrived at the same conclusion that teacher education needs to begin by exploring the "teaching self". He referred to studies done by both Tickle (1999, 2000, as cited inKorthagen, 2004) and Nias (1989, as cited inKorthagen, 2004), which concluded that self-concepts and core values are a source of stability for teachers, through which a sense of purpose and mission in their work is maintained.

Chater (2005), Estola et al. (2003) and Hargreaves (2001) concur that teaching is an emotional endeavour.This emotional aspect of the teacher's life is captured in the language teachers use when describing their work life.In their narratives, teachers refer to the pleasure of working but also acknowledge that they have to search for joy underincreasingly difficultconditions (Estola et al., 2003). Estola's (2003) study concluded that there is a connection between hope and student teachers' experiences of teaching. This is in keeping with Hansen's (1998) call that hope is a central aspect of teaching and that one of the aspirations for teachers should be to hear the voice of hope.

This emerging discourse appears to affirm the view that teachers' inner lives, including their sense of vocation, and their emotional state are what counts in transforming the profession.There is an appeal to open up "storied spaces"whereteachers cantell their personal lived experiencesin teaching (Clandinin et al., 2009; Palmer, 1998; 2004). There is also an increasing callto listen carefully to teachers' voices (Estola et al., 2003) because tuning into the teacher's own language gives access to a better understanding of the essence of their teacherhood from teachers' perspectives

An Emerging Discourse from the Past: Calling
Recent studies have captured a glimpse of a change in language in teachers' discourses about their work. There appears to be an emerging discourse, echoing a voice from the past, with teachers describing their work as a vocationor a*call to teach*(Cammock, 2009; Buskist, Benson &Sikoski, 2005; Casbon et al., 2005; Hansen, 1995, 2001, 2002; Joldersma, 2006; Mayes, 2005; Palmer, 1998; Sykes, 2003). There is a suggestion that if teachers choose to describe their work as vocation, researchers need to take this into serious consideration (Chater, 2005; Cossentino, 2006; Estola et al., 2003; Game & Metcalfe, 2008; Palmer, 2000), endorsing a closer examination of a teacher's call to teach(Chater, 2005; Cossentino, 2006; Court et al., 2009; Estola et al., 2003; Game & Metcalfe, 2008; Hansen, 1995; Mayes, 2002, 2005; Palmer, 1998, 2000). Palmer (2000) forewarns that this requires a paradigm shift in current perceptions of the teacher's choice of profession and a need to refigure teaching as a *calling*.

Calling: Definitions and meanings.
Calling as a construct is multifaceted and complex. Cammock (2009) suggests that it has two distinct components: one being an individual's discovery of theirunique gifts and talents, and the second recognising means by which they canuse these gifts and talents toserve others. He concurs with Palmer (1998, 2000, 2004) when he advocates for an alignment between doing things that feels right for both *self* and the world at exactly the same time. This service-oriented dimension of a

calling is echoed in the findings of Court et al.'s (2009) study, where participants perceived the teacher's role as helping children fulfil their unique personal potential, which will in turn lead to the creation of a better society.

Cammock (2009) and Palmer (1998, 2000, 2004) have acknowledged that an understanding of a teacher's calling requires the ability to identify one's strengths based on an understanding of who we are, what we value, and our place in the world. The importance of connecting with self and others and the world iswell endorsed by a growing list of educators (Gibbs, 2006; Giles, 2008; Giles & Kung, 2010; Palmer,1998) who concur that teachers need to weave meaningful connections between self, subject matter, the students and the world at large. They, too, agree the premise of such connections lies in the teacher's ability to access their "inner self"as a means of engaging relationships with their learners. It would appear the teacher's ability to access their inner self is foundational to the recognition of one's callingto teach.

Calling: Origins –internal promptings, external invitations.

There have been attempts made at examining the origins of a teacher's calling (Cammock, 2009; Hansen, 1995; Mayes, 2002). While there is a claim that a calling represents an inner urge or prompting that compels an individual to undertake a specific course of action (Buskist et al., 2005), others believe a calling arises from something outside the teacher (Court et al., 2009; Estola et al., 2003; Mayes, 2002). There is also aperception of calling as an intersection of a personal response from within and an invitation from without (Cammock, 2009). A call to teachis deemed to arise from an internal desire to use one's uniqueness and passion in response to an external invitation to a particular type of vocation, life or destiny. This external invitation is anticipated by a sense of duty that links a teacher to the larger world community where self-interest takes a back seat and a spirit of common good prevails. The calling thus understood acts as a crucial connection between the individual and the public where one's innate gifts and talents are used in the service of others (Cammock, 2009).

Calling: Contextual influences to a teacher's calling.

The teaching profession appears to draw some people to it (Buskit et al., 2005; Cammock, 2009; Hansen, 1995; Mayes, 2002). Preschool teachers are considered altruistic individuals and the teaching vocation provides them with the opportunity to express their personality and their personal style of interaction with the environment (Roe, 1957, as cited inCourt et al., 2009). Hansen (1995) examines how a person perceives or hears the call to teach in the first place, and concludes that the teaching practice is the caller, inviting the person to meet his or her obligation. Buskit et al. (2005) concur when they suggest that the call represents a prompting, urging the individual to respond and experience the call in practice, and for some this response is seen as a duty or obligation to serve others (Cammock, 2009).

Some teachers perceive their calling as a response to a call by children, and those teachers need to learn how to hear the children's call (Estola et al., 2005), while others perceive the call as their desire to love, educate and nurture the children under their care. This perception of the essence of the teaching role indicates that there is an altruistic motivation in their response to teach (Court et al., 2009).

While contextual influences might act as a mediator for choice of profession, further examination of a teacher's calling needs to take into account. Snook's (2003) suggeststhat each individual's response to the call to teach is unique and very personal to the individual and there might be no universal features of a teacher's perception of theircalling.

Calling: An emotional endeavour.

When teachers spoke of being called to teach, they speak with energy, enthusiasm and passion of a love for teaching. It appears that those who view teaching as acalling derive abundant rewards from the activities associated with it. Most of these rewards involve the effects that teaching has on students (Estola et al., 2003). These teachers appear to be altruistic and making a positive difference in students' lives affirms teachers' belief that they are called to teach (Buskistet al., 2005; Casbon et al., 2005; Intrator& Scribner, 2003;Palmer, 1998). Estola et al. (2003) confirms that teaching involves feelings and that a teacher's connection with her students, and their successes, appear to validate the choice of profession. This emotional link between the teacher and learner must not be underestimated. Estola et al.'s (2003) study shows that success shown in learners gives rise to joy and pleasure, while failure leads to feelings of disappointment, sadness and sometimes anger.

Calling: Ethical and moral dimension.

There is a rising assertion that there is an ethical and moral dimension to the teacher's calling. Estola et al.'s (2003) study on teacher's vocation concluded that vocation is a moral voice and this is translated into a form of caring profession (Estola et al., 2003). This foundational belief that teaching is a caring profession and includes the ethics of relationship is supported in the literature (Ayers, 2001; Elbaz, 1992; Gibbs, 2006; Giles, 2007, 2008; Giles & Alderson, 2008; Giles & Kung, 2010; Noddings, 2001; Palmer, 1998, 2000, 2004; Shelby, 2003; Snook, 2003). The moral responsibility to care is translated into a duty to serve and this orientation to work is made visible in practice as a moral responsibility to defend children (Estola et al., 2003).

Mayes (2005) offers an alternative view of the ethical teacher but still concurs that the ethics of teaching are rooted in care. He proposed that caring teachers are expected to share the struggles, pain and challenges of their learners. They must also be willing to face their own suffering and pain, to restore themselves so that they may help others do the same(Mayes, 2005). Hansen (1994) points out that this perception of vocation has a religious undertone because it requires self-sacrifice. Palmer (1997, 1998,2004) also advocates for an empathetic connection between teacher and learner because this allows the teacher to be acutely caring in their calling.Noddings (1995) agrees with Mayes (2005) when she advocates for the notion of teaching as "ontological care" and goes a step further to declare that teachers are not only called to teach but their role invariably means a *call to heal*.

Snook (2003) provides a refreshing view into the moral responsibility of the teacher when he seeks for authenticity in teaching and a move beyond mere articulations to an attitude of "walking the talk". This requires an alignment between one's articulation of values and one's actions (Palmer, 1998, 2004. While Snook (2003) places a value on the ethics of personal freedom and rights of the individual, Vanderstraeten and Biesta (2006) advocate for educating learners towards freedom in general. Korthagen (2004) moves the teacher's moral responsibility into the public arena by adding that the teacher is not only responsible for the development of a strong sense of self-worth in learners, but they are entrusted to promote the development of great human beings who contribute to society by having deep feelings of love and respect for people.

Calling: The spiritual dimension.

There appears to be a spiritual dimension to a teacher's call to teach. Marshall (2009) examined the relationship between spirituality, choice of profession and spiritual preparedness for the profession.

This study is significant because it raises awareness that teachers do feel called to teach and seem to have an internalised spiritual framework for thinking about teaching which includes spiritual concepts like meaning, purpose, connectedness and care. Teaching understood as a spiritual endeavour is complex and it signals the need for a greater concern for the deeper needs of a teacher's soul, which includes their perception of being called to help others (both learners and community). This ultimately brings meaning, purpose and satisfaction (Marshall, 2009).

Mayes (2002, 2005) and Marshall (2009) call for a closer examination of the spiritual side of a teacher's decision to teach, their way of teaching, and their goals as teachers. Mayes (2002) asserts that major archetypes of the spirit in teaching are all rooted in care, with an ultimate concern about those who look to them for guidance, insight and awakening.This spirit of care extends beyond relationship with students. Teachers see the spiritual side of their calling as a call to surrender themselves to something larger than themselves and to become what they were destined to be. Cammock (2009) suggests that it is the spiritual aspect of a callingthatprovides teachers with an opportunity to connect with their unique purpose in life and a calling defines the path to that connection.

While it is clear that the teaching profession entails a spiritual element to it, and current literature seems to indicate that it translates into religious notions of healing, sacrifice and serving others, there is also literature that describes spirituality in less religious undertones.

Calling: An evolving, dynamic nature experience.
Some would suggest that a teacher's professional practice is influenced by the changing nature of this call to teach (Intrator, 2005; Noddings, 2001; Palmer, 1998, 2000). There appears to be an ebb and flow in the calling. The language of calling seems to imply that a teacher's vocation evolves over time, is dynamic in process, and is shaped by practice (Estola et al., 2003). Some speak of a teacher's call to teach as having a beginning alongside a deepening experiential sense of ownership and understanding (Sykes, 2003). While some teachers appear true to the calling, there are others who lose sight of their calling when their calling seems unfulfilling (Casbon et al., 2005). The teachers viewed their teaching life moving through twists and turns and reported doubts and crises over the course of their careers which are related to practice (Estola et al., 2003).

How do teachers sustain this call to teach in the complex, dynamic and uncertain world of professional practice? The dynamic nature of a teacher's calling is captured in Buskistet al.'s (2005) recommendation that to gain a better insight into teaching, we must have enough courage to explore and analyse the concept of vocation as a living concept instead of rejecting it as an obsolete and religious construct of the past.

Conclusion
A consistent theme emerging from the literature is that the changing educational landscape has had huge impacts on current teacher discourses, the teaching profession, and the teacher's perception and experiences of a call to teach. There appears to be a renewed sense of the word calling in relation to teachers'perception of their vocation, as shown in a growing number of personal narratives and in evidence captured in research studies. There is also a rising call for teachers to re-examine their call to teach. The origins of teachers' calling indicate that a teacher's choice of profession is prompted from both inner motivations and external circumstances. From that initial response to teach, literature indicates ebbs and flows in a calling as it evolves over time.

Early childhood education is a profession which attracts unique altruistic people who are prone to burnout, not only due to the demands of an increasingly regulated and bureaucratised work environment but because their motivations for teaching are personal and emotional in nature. It is anticipated that the knowledge and deepening appreciation of this notion of calling as it is experienced by early childhood teachers and teacher educators, will not only aid conversations on the teacher's motivation to teach but may also throw light on what keeps them in the profession and how best to support their well-being, given that early childhood teaching is a profession rooted in caring relationships.

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