Teachers as a Source of Inspiration in Catholic Schools

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Summary
Teachers are expected to pursue formative goals. The question is how teachers in Catholic schools can actively manage to form learners in the perspective of gospel and Catholic tradition while still respecting the learners’ freedom. One way of seeing this is to look at the inspiration that is supposed to emanate from the teachers. The concept ‘inspiration’ can help to identify a normative perspective on the interrelationship of education and students’ freedom.

To inspire can be defined as providing reasons for action (Searle, 1983, 2001). On the basis of their qualities teachers can be a source of inspiration for students. Inspiring teachers give students reasons to excel.

The aim of this study is to find out whether teachers in Catholic schools inspire their students. The question is which qualities are attributed to inspiring teachers, and which qualities to students who are inspired by these teachers. It is expected that teachers’ qualities relate to students’ qualities. To what extent can teachers’ qualities explain the development of students’ qualities?

The study consists in a survey of 1 179 participants. Findings show that four clusters of qualities are attributed to inspiring teachers, and three clusters of qualities to students who are inspired. Remarkably, the cluster ‘imparting sense’ relates to all three clusters of students’ qualities. Teachers’ qualities, moreover, help to explain the development of students’ qualities to a reasonable extent. The findings are put in a participatory perspective in a concluding discussion.

Keywords
inspiration, teachers, Catholic schools, formation, imparting sense

1 Introduction

School managers, politicians and parents have great — often very different — expectations of teachers. Points of agreement are that teachers will communicate social and cultural achievements to learners, contribute to their personal development and equip them for participation in society (Schuitema, Ten Dam & Veugelers, 2007). Expectations are not confined to transfer of knowledge but include educating learners, for instance by enabling them to function adequately in social interactions. Where teaching and education intersect we
speak of formation. Teachers are expected to pursue formative goals. To what end should they form learners?

Here the aforementioned parties differ. Some of the answer lies with the school. Thus Catholic schools locate their formation in the perspective of the gospel and the tradition of the Catholic religious community (Hermans, 1993; Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993). But the pedagogic relationship in which formation occurs is one which learners can either cooperate with or actually oppose. The relationship does not permit determinism or indoctrination, but presupposes freedom of choice on the learner’s part. One might ask how teachers can form learners normatively while still respecting their freedom. The normative orientation itself is not at issue, only the manner in which teachers instil it. How can teachers in Catholic schools actively manage to form learners in the perspective of gospel and Catholic tradition while still respecting the learners’ freedom?

One way of seeing this is to look to the inspiration that is supposed to fill and emanate from the teachers. Inspiration has to do with teachers’ stimulating influence on learners’ thoughts and actions. Thus teachers may be expected to inspire learners to develop such qualities as finding religious meaning and behaving in a socially responsible manner. But do teachers know how to inspire learners in these ways in their everyday didactic and pedagogic practice? In other words, do their activities inspire learners to develop these qualities? More than that, what exactly is meant by the inspiration that teachers are supposed to exude? And can one in fact speak of religious inspiration in Catholic schools? It is also not clear what teachers in these schools should inspire their learners to do and to what extent they manage to do so.

In this article we first consider what may be understood by inspiration, more particularly the inspiration of teachers. We do so with reference to religio-scientific and theological reflections on religious inspiration, as well as Searle’s theory on the functioning of the human mind and on interpersonal communication. Secondly we examine how inspiration by teachers can be understood. What is the position of theorists on this point? On the basis of the theoretical suppositions we outline our empirical research questions, followed by our research method. The study consists in a survey of 1,79 participants in Catholic education. After presenting our findings we put them in a participatory perspective in a concluding discussion.

2  Theoretical Considerations on (Religious) Inspiration

2.1 Religio-scientific and Theological Reflections on Religious Inspiration

In this section we indicate what is meant by religious inspiration in a religio-scientific and theological perspective and what it could accomplish. It may
shed some light on the inspiration that teachers in Catholic schools can possess, or that is ascribed to them.

Etymologically the word ‘inspiration’ refers to spirit. In a religio-scientific perspective religious inspiration is broadly defined as a spiritual influence that “renders a person capable of thinking, speaking, or acting in ways that transcend ordinary human capacities” (Carpenter, 2005, p. 4509). Religious inspiration is considered to be spiritual. That may pertain to its origin or source, as well as the mental effect of that source: that of influencing the human spirit. This is an important point. Inspired people can have an active spirit functioning in them like breath of life-force (ruah). How this spiritual force exerts its effect is not known at this stage (Whitlock, 2002). But inspiration need not always be involve a spirit. Physical things (e.g. eating and drinking) could have a similar effect on the human spirit, as we know from various religions (Carpenter, 2005).

The effect of religious inspiration is to trigger or motivate thought, speech or actions, and it relates to what “transcends ordinary human capacities”. This super-normal capacity is often associated with the transcendent. People are supposed to be capable of it because they are influenced by God’s Spirit. The effect of religious inspiration can also be interpreted differently, and this is our preferred interpretation: religious inspiration causes people to think, say and do things regarding the ordinary and the extraordinary. In our case it refers to the content of thought, speech and action, such as testifying to “what no eye has seen, nor ear heard” (1 Cor. 2:9). The second important point is that religious inspiration pertains to ordinary and extraordinary things, which are often associated with the transcendent.

The assertion that religious inspiration triggers or motivates thought or action that concerns both the ordinary and the extraordinary highlights a further aspect, namely a normative one. Inspiration prompts particular thought, speech or action and as such directs these manifestations. But not all inspiration is rated positively by a religious tradition or community. That qualifies religious inspiration substantively. Thus religious inspiration can be described as good if it orients the inspired parties to the transcendent (Gabel, 1991). Normativeness is not peculiar to religious inspiration, however: it applies to all forms of inspiration. The normativeness of inspiration can be qualified substantively from a specific (e.g. religious) perspective. That brings us to a third important point: inspiration entails a normativeness that can be substantively qualified. Here it is said to direct that which it seeks to influence, namely thought, speech or action.

Thought, speech and action as effects of religious inspiration entail mainly the creation of religious songs or poems, and prophecy. In both instances one needs to ask to what extent the influence of the inspirer (often a deity or spirit)
outweighs or marginalises the (free) will of those who are inspired. The question remains relevant even if one makes a distinction in respect of trance or ecstasy. That is evident in the way poetic or prophetic inspiration is described as ‘being seized by’. Being seized by can assume the form of a literal rendering of messages from a deity or spirit. Thus Plato refers to inspiration as possession and in *Phaedrus* he classifies both poetic and prophetic inspiration as forms of madness. Christian theology, by contrast, eschews such views and associates inspiration with the work of the Holy Spirit. Ever since Origen the general (albeit not only) view has been that the Holy Spirit does not reduce people to passive subjects. Instead it assumes freedom and active involvement on the part of those who are inspired (Gabel, 1996, 1991; Whitlock, 2002). That is another important point: inspiration does not rule out freedom but rather invokes people’s active involvement. That applies to all forms of inspiration, hence to religious inspiration as well. The same may be said about the origin of the Bible. Here one discerns a dialogical structure: the Bible is both God’s word and human words. God’s Spirit inspired the authors in their writing. In so doing it did not exclude their free will but instead activated it and thus enabled them to write (*Dei Verbum*, 1965). Carpenter (2005, 4509) notes that “human agency is transformed, but not totally displaced”. A fourth important point is that inspiration concerns a spiritual influence of a kind that both leaves people free and inclines them to think, speak or act.

Another interesting dimension introduced by Christian theological reflection is ecclesiology. Inspiration by God’s Spirit can lead people to things concerning both the ordinary and the extraordinary, not for their own sakes but for the sake of a human community. Religious inspiration in a Christian sense means that people are inspired to participate in one or more communities, for instance by first seeking God’s kingdom and his righteousness (Matt. 6:33). These communities may be seen in three ways: as a human community over the ages (historical), as a human community at a particular time (social) and as human community with God (religious) (de Jong, 2007). Gabel (1996) goes even further, maintaining that what God’s Spirit has in mind with tradition, the scriptural record and the interpretation of that testimony is in fact the establishment and promotion of a community. In the Old Testament this community is the people of Israel, in the New Testament the new Israel, the church. So we conclude with a fifth point: inspiration is aimed at promoting participation in a community in a historical, social and religious sense.

### 2.2 Philosophical Reflections

We have summarised religio-scientific and theological ideas on religious inspiration in five points. In this section we link these ideas with philosophical
reflections on inspiration so as to determine what exactly is meant by the inspiration that teachers in Catholic schools are supposed to have and exude. With the aid of Searle’s theory (1983, 2001) on the operation of the human mind and interpersonal communication we can determine more accurately what happens when people inspire others.

The first question is how we should understand inspiration in the sense of mental influencing. Inspiration causes certain psychological effects in people, but it is a special kind of causation — what Searle calls intentional causation. That means that it isn’t simply a matter of cause and effect in the scientific sense or causation according to the model of billiard balls touching each other. When teachers inspire learners by saying, doing or demonstrating certain things, or through their whole attitude and disposition, they are not adhering to causal laws such as the law of gravity that causes things heavier than air always to fall downwards as a result of that force, or like a ball that always rolls away when it is pushed. Intentional or mental causation always involves human mental processes, with radical implications. Inspiration is a typical example. Invariably learners are inspired by teachers’ psychological attributes such as humour, patience, involvement and love for their subject. The psychological effects that teachers have on learners when they inspire them include staying power, interest and diligence. In the case of physical causation there are laws governing it. In the case of mental causation there may be foreseeable regularities, but no laws in the scientific sense. People’s mental processes do not observe such laws, simply because they are subjective, at least in an ontological sense: they depend on a subject for their existence, hence cannot be separated from that person. The person is always free and in principle can choose from various alternatives. In education that applies to both teachers and learners, hence also to the former’s inspiring effect on the latter.

But that does not tell us exactly what inspiration entails. The fact that religious inspiration is normative means that it directs people’s behaviour. The question is whether and in what sense the inspiration that teachers are said to have and to exude is normative. We can answer the question with reference to Searle’s theory (1983) on interpersonal communication. He reasons as follows. People can inspire others only by communicating with them, especially by way of language. Teachers can inspire learners by what and who they are, by their actual deeds. But that can only happen if and inasmuch as there is communication. Mostly, however, people inspire others by what they say and how they say it. This represents a particular form of action, namely communicative speech acts. Every form of speech act observes certain rules in order to communicate intelligibly. For instance, when asking a question one should not make a promise or a statement. If one wants to praise a learner, one does not do so in the form of a reprimand. These are rules governing the meaning
and intelligibility of so-called illocutionary acts such as affirmations (e.g. ‘that’s true’), guidelines (e.g. ‘do your best’), promises (e.g. ‘we shall come back to that tomorrow’), emotional expressions (e.g. ‘congratulations!’) and official statements (e.g. ‘you have passed’). But when one communicates — whether linguistically or otherwise — one not merely performs illocutionary acts but other, simultaneous actions as well. Thus one may persuade, console or encourage people. These acts are not illocutionary in the sense that they are performed in words or in language. They are perlocutionary acts, performed via words, language or nonverbal means of communication. And for these there are no universally valid rules. After all, whether a person is consoled, encouraged or persuaded by other people’s words or actions depends not merely on the meaning of their illocutionary acts but also and more especially on the hearer’s receptiveness — her past history and psychological makeup, which can vary greatly from one person to the next. Inspiring via language is a typical perlocutionary act of this kind. Teachers can inspire some learners quite powerfully by what they say or how they communicate, whereas it will have no inspirational effect whatever on others.

What can be said is that all inspiration is considered to be a particular kind of causation (of a particular kind of perlocutionary effect). By and large it refers to a specific form of motivation, that is to say, it gives those who are inspired reason to act in a particular way, or at least to choose among different possible actions. In this sense inspiration is normative and offers guidelines. This concurs with our earlier religio-scientific and theological reflections on religious inspiration. In the case of inspiration the directive is always open. Inspiring someone does not mean that the person will act or choose in precisely the same way as the person inspiring him, although it does prompt a similar kind of action or choice. What is peculiar to inspiration, however, is that it motivates very powerfully and very positively because of the remarkable character of its source, at least in the eyes of those who are inspired by it. What makes a person inspiring to someone else is always a quality or set of qualities in which the inspirer outshines others, at any rate in the estimation of those she inspires. The effect of inspiration is that one wants — very much — to excel in the same way. That is why inspiration is referred to as animation, enthusiasm and passion.

There is another (and new) consideration that has received little attention from scholars of religion and theologians so far. People’s inspirational impact lies not only in their excellence but also in the other’s aptitude. After all, inspiring others implies ‘awakening’ them to ideas or desires and intentions for which they have a special propensity. A learner without a flair for language will never be inspired by a teacher, however able and enthusiastic, to specialise in
language. But a learner who has a sensitivity for plants and animals may be inspired by even the dullest biology teacher to specialise in that subject. Here it should be noted that aptitude, sensitivity, competence and propensities are a special kind of mental state. In an important respect they differ from things like perceptions, memories, beliefs, desires, plans and intentions. What the latter have in common is that they are directed to specific objects or actions in the real world and represent these mentally. When one sees a flower or one wants to pick one the perception includes a mental representation of either the flower or the act. Aptitude, competence, sensitivity or propensity does not represent anything in this sense. They are mental states that are not (yet) directed to any particular object or act, hence they are non-representational. They belong to that part of the human mind that Searle (1983) calls background. All kinds of assumptions and truisms that people take for granted belong to that domain. Just as one may be made aware of an assumption through confrontation with people who do not share it or who question it, so a particular aptitude can be aroused or kindled by the inspiration exuded by another person. Inspiration is in fact to kindle, elevate and bring to life such propensities, potential and other background elements in the sense of transforming them into representational mental states.

3 Inspiration of Teachers in Catholic Schools

We have established that inspiration may be regarded as mental causation of perlocutionary effects that, through the outstanding qualities of the source of inspiration, may motivate people, on the basis of suitable aptitudes, to have certain thoughts and desires and to perform certain actions. Because inspiration provides clearly defined reasons for thoughts, desires and actions it is normative.

What does this imply for the inspiration that is supposed to operate in, and be exuded by, teachers? Teachers can be a source of inspiration to learners by showing how their subject relates to them personally. By connecting their personal views with the subject matter they can give learners normative reasons for actions. Yet to date there has been little scientific theorising on the inspiration that should emanate from teachers. There have been attempts to explore the teachers’ own inspiration, for instance in terms of a dynamic interaction between identity and professionalism (Theunissen et al., 1998). But this has yielded only limited insight into the qualities in teachers that inspire learners. Enthusiasm, it seems, is a major factor, as well as personal interest in learners, patience and a sense of humour. It is commonly assumed that empathy and
concern are positive qualities of teachers. Research into what makes for good, effective teaching has focused mainly on didactic styles. The study that offers most helpful leads is probably that of Levy, Wubbels, Den Brok and Brekelmans (2003), which examines interpersonal qualities. They devised a model for teachers’ interpersonal behaviour, which indicates that among teachers and learners alike there are two types of ideal teachers. The first type, which the researchers call the dominant ideal, is marked by a high degree of cooperative behaviour and a fair measure of leadership and strictness. The second type, the learner-oriented ideal, links teachers’ cooperative behaviour with a focus on learners’ responsibility and freedom (Levy et al., 2003).

Yet qualities like friendliness or cooperative behaviour are not necessarily what inspire learners. What set of qualities teachers should have in order to inspire learners is at this stage a moot point. We can probably find clues to these in studies of inspiring leadership (den Hartog, 1997). To this end we assume that in a sense the teacher’s task is one of leadership and requires attributes that are at least partly comparable with those needed for inspiring organisational leadership. Den Hartog (1997) identifies the following characteristics of inspiring leaders: (1) vision, by articulating a vision of future opportunities; (2) charisma, by projecting a powerful, dynamic, magnetic presence; (3) intellectual stimulation, that is challenging others to think about old problems in new ways; (4) individualised consideration, by listening to personal concerns; (5) motivating and projecting performance expectations by motivating subordinates to work harder and better; (6) role modelling, by setting a good example; (7) manifesting trust in subordinates by showing confidence in people’s ability to contribute to organisational goals; and (8) team building by creating a climate of trust among team members. Are these qualities ones that can be ascribed to teachers as a basis for inspirational potential?

The next question is what teachers motivate learners to do. There are various possibilities, but they are not on a par. In other words, which perlocutionary effects may be considered inspirational? They are mainly mental states that are rated positively, for instance because they contribute to personal well-being or good social behaviour. They are also positive states of a fairly lasting nature. Such mental states may be called virtues. To determine which lasting mental states are induced or motivated we need to classify virtues as exhaustively possible. Peterson and Seligman (2004) distinguish between six clusters: (1) wisdom and knowledge, for example creativity, curiosity, thirst for knowledge, critical thinking; (2) courage, like bravery, enthusiasm, staying power and integrity; (3) humanity, such as love, friendliness and social intelligence; (4) justice, such as social responsibility, honesty and leadership;
(5) temperance, such as mercifulness, sensible behaviour, modesty and prudence; (6) transcendence, such as a sense of beauty, gratitude, humour and spirituality. Theoretically teachers can inspire learners to practise all kinds of virtues. What qualities/virtues can be instilled in learners by way of the inspiration that teachers are supposed to have and exude?

Finally we note that the inspiration teachers are supposed to exude is co-determined by the school in which they are employed. The expectation that teachers in Catholic schools will inspire learners is often accompanied by an underlying expectation that the inspiration the teachers themselves draw from the gospel and Catholic tradition will infuse the inspiration they offer their learners. In other words, it is assumed that the normative inspiration of the gospel and Catholic tradition will spill over into teachers’ inspiring influence on learners. But in a secularised culture like ours that assumption is hardly tenable. We have mentioned already that people can only inspire others if the latter are sufficiently amenable to the arousal of certain ideas, desires and intentions. However, many West European youths come from highly secularised, a-religious backgrounds (Ziebertz & Kay, 2005). That probably makes it difficult, albeit not impossible or undesirable, to inspire learners in a religious sense. Firstly, people’s background and amenability do not amount to cultural determinism. Background also includes strong personal proclivities. Even in a secularised culture people with a strong religious propensity may be inspired at that level. Secondly, secularised cultures in fact (re)awaken religion in people through the religious inspiration of others. What concerns us is, firstly, whether teachers in Catholic schools have inspirational powers and what effects these have. Here we assume the inspiration to be normative, and that this directs its effects. The next question is to what extent the inspiration is religious.

These considerations lead us to formulate the following research questions. Firstly, we want to determine what qualities are typical of inspiring teachers. The research question reads: What qualities are ascribed to inspiring teachers, and to what extent? Commonly mentioned qualities are enthusiasm for the subject, humour, patience and involvement. We expect this to apply to Catholic schools as well, along with qualities like intellectual stimulation and role modelling (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993).

Inspiring teachers can motivate learners’ ideas, desires and actions. What they inspire in learners is subjective and cannot really be planned. An inspirer does not automatically influence the person she inspires to develop her own qualities. The inspired ones remain free to choose among different possibilities. This also means that inspirational effects may differ from one person to the next. Yet we expect certain regularities to be discernible in the form of
particular qualities. Secondly, and for this reason, we explore possible inspirational effects of inspiring teachers. The second research question reads: *What qualities are ascribed to learners as inspirational effects of the teacher’s inspiring influence, and to what extent?* We expect these qualities to be mainly ones like knowledge and wisdom, enthusiasm and socially oriented characteristics like justice and social responsibility. Teachers in Catholic schools may also be expected to motivate learners to appreciate beauty and spirituality (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993).

Thirdly, we want to know how certain qualities are developed in learners. The acquisition of qualities is influenced by various factors. In the first place we assume that teachers’ qualities enable them to develop similar qualities in learners. Their constant interaction with learners enables them to motivate the latter to acquire qualities on the basis of qualities that they themselves possess. In addition we surmise that contextual background factors may affect the ascription of qualities to teachers and learners. Factors that could influence the ascription of qualities to inspiring teachers and learners include such social developments as individualisation, loss of transcendence, secularisation and de-institutionalisation (Ester, Halman & De Moor, 1993; Bruce, 2002; Beyer, 1994). These factors may either promote or impede acquisition of qualities. We shall investigate the influence of contextual background factors on the ascription of qualities to teachers and to learners as inspirational effects of teachers’ inspiring influence. The third research question reads: *To what extent is the ascription of qualities to learners influenced by the influence of inspiring teachers’ qualities and contextual background factors respectively?* We expect the qualities of inspiring teachers to affect the development of such qualities in learners, and that contextual background factors will have a significant effect on ascription. At all events we expect people who describe themselves as non-religious (individualisation) and who do not subscribe to God’s existence (loss of transcendence) to ascribe less awareness of transcendence to learners than those who describe themselves as religious and agree that God exists. However, this influence will be less marked than that of teacher qualities like charisma and role modelling.

4 Method

The research we undertook in order to answer our research questions took the form of a survey (De Jong & Van der Zee, 2008). In the spring of 2006 we submitted a questionnaire to people engaged in Catholic education. It comprised three sections. The first covered respondents’ personal characteristics
The second pertained to contextual background factors, aimed at identifying factors that could influence the ascription of qualities to inspiring teachers and learners. Here we operationalised the following aspects: (1) individualisation, with items on religious or ecclesiastic affiliation, participation in religious activities, religious upbringing and active involvement in a church or religious community; (2) loss of transcendence, with items on firmness of belief in God, certainty of a transcendent reality, and mystical experience; (3) secularisation, with items on the role of religion or worldview in personal life and notions about pain and suffering; (4) de-institutionalisation, with items on the conjunction of school and church, acceptance of ecclesiastic authority and trust in institutions, more specifically the church.

The third section contained questions about inspiring teachers. The first item asked the respondent to name an inspiring teacher. Then they had to answer two questions with that teacher in mind. The first concerned the qualities of the inspiring teacher. On the basis of the study by Den Hartog (1997) we believe that the following eight dimensions of qualities are most relevant to possible inspiring influence: (1) vision; (2) charisma; (3) intellectual stimulation; (4) motivation; (5) role modelling; (6) imparting sense; (7) competence; (8) learner-involvement and altruism. We defined some indicators for each dimension, which appear in table 1. The indicators were incorporated into the question about the qualities of inspiring teachers. Keeping their chosen inspiring teacher in mind, respondents were asked to answer these items on a Likert-scale (1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree).

The second question concerns learner qualities. On the basis of the aforementioned clusters of Peterson and Seligman (2004) the following qualities strike us as most relevant: a. wisdom as such, plus creativity, critical thinking, a thirst for knowledge and curiosity; b. courage, especially bravery, staying power and enthusiasm; c. humanity, especially friendliness, love of others and social intelligence; d. justice as such, including honesty and social responsibility; e. temperateness, especially sensible behaviour, modesty and mercifulness; f. transcendence: hope, sense of beauty, gratitude, humour and spirituality. To determine what inspiring teachers inspire learners to do we submitted a list of such qualities to respondents and asked them to indicate to what extent the relevant teacher manages to develop these qualities in learners (range: 1 = not at all, 2 = somewhat, 3 = strongly).

The research population comprised parents and teachers in Catholic primary schools and learners and teachers in Catholic secondary schools throughout the Netherlands. A national random sample was drawn from all primary and secondary Catholic schools. Schools in this sample were contacted telephonically to find out if they were prepared to participate in the study.
## Table 1: Dimensions of inspiring teachers with indicators

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| **1. Vision** | This teacher inspires me mainly because he/she  
  – seems to know quite well what she/he has in mind with her/his teaching  
  – shows clearly what objective he/she is pursuing |
| **2. Charisma** | This teacher inspires me mainly because he/she  
  – knows how to capture learners’ attention through her/his teaching style  
  – has an original teaching style  
  – radiates love for his/her subject |
| **3. Intellectual stimulation** | This teacher inspires me mainly because he/she  
  – gets learners thinking  
  – says things that stimulate thought |
| **4. Motivation** | This teacher inspires me mainly because he/she  
  – stimulates learners to perform  
  – stimulates learners to work harder and better |
| **5. Role modelling** | This teacher inspires me mainly because he/she  
  – stimulates learners to emulate her/him  
  – sets a good example |
| **6. Imparting sense** | This teacher inspires me mainly because he/she  
  – demonstrates what he/she sees as the sense of life  
  – demonstrates her/his approach to life |
| **7. Competence** | This teacher inspires me mainly because he/she  
  – is very good at her/his subject  
  – explains things clearly |
| **8. Learner involvement and altruism** | This teacher inspires me mainly because he/she  
  – pays special attention to weak learners  
  – is always there for learners  
  – spends time on learners  
  – devotes more time to less gifted learners  
  – is prepared to sacrifice leisure time when appealed to  
  – effaces herself/himself for the sake of learners |
Of the Catholic primary schools 39 indicated their willingness to participate; 12 secondary schools agreed. These schools were then sent a letter with two questionnaires. Primary schools received a questionnaire for parents of grade 5 learners and another for teachers; secondary schools received a questionnaire for teachers and another for grade 10 and grade 11 learners. The total number of respondents in the four groups came to 1179. It was made up of 307 parents, 432 learners, 274 primary school teachers, and 166 secondary school teachers. There were 34% males and 66% females. The youngest respondent was 13 years old and the eldest 63, with a mean age of 33. Of the respondents 57% saw themselves as Catholics, 4% indicated membership of some Protestant church, 3% said they were Muslims, 5% claimed adherence to some other religion (Hinduism, Buddhism or other), and 31% said they did not belong to a religious community.

5 Results

To determine what qualities respondents ascribed to inspiring teachers and to what extent, we first conducted factor analyses to identify clusters. The results of these analyses appear in table 2.

Of the 21 original items 17 remained, which formed four clusters that we labelled as follows: (Factor 1) subject matter (good at subject, explains clearly); (Factor 2) imparting sense (demonstrates sense of life; stimulates thinking); (Factor 3) attention (time and attention devoted to weak pupils); and (Factor 4) motivating performance (stimulating hard work and performance).

In how far do inspiring teachers possess these four qualities? From descriptive analyses the mean score for subject matter turns out to be 4.13 (scale 1-5, s.d.= .52), for imparting sense 3.65 (scale 1-5, s.d.= .62), for attention 3.61 (scale 1-5, s.d.= .79), and for motivating performance 3.90 (scale 1-5, s.d.= .72). From this we gather that on average all four clusters, but mostly subject matter, are ascribed to inspiring teachers. That implies that inspiring teachers are mainly credited with proficiency in their subject and explaining it clearly. Correlation analyses reveal a fair correlation between the four ascribed qualities: inspiring teachers possessing one quality also possess another to a reasonable extent (.37 < Pearson’s R< .56).

The second research question concerns positive qualities that inspiring teachers develop in learners. To answer the question we first conducted factor analyses. The results appear in table 3, yielding a structure with three factors.

We labelled the three clusters as follows: (Factor 1) social virtues like justice and social responsibility; (Factor 2) spirituality and transcendence like sense of
Table 2: Results of factor analyses — qualities of inspiring teachers (PAF, eigenvalues > 1, list-wise deletion, n = 966, oblimin rotation, factor loadings <.35 not recorded)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>item</th>
<th>factor 1</th>
<th>factor 2</th>
<th>factor 3</th>
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<tr>
<td>knows how to capture learners’ attention with his/her teaching style (C)</td>
<td>.77</td>
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<td>.51</td>
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<td>is very good at her/his subject (N)</td>
<td>.67</td>
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<td>.53</td>
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<td>radiates love of his/her subject (Q)</td>
<td>.66</td>
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<td>.49</td>
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<td>explains things clearly (E)</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td></td>
<td>.52</td>
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<td>seems to know quite well what she/he has in mind with her/his teaching (A)</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td></td>
<td>.42</td>
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<td>shows clearly what objective he/she is pursuing (U)</td>
<td>.50</td>
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<td>.44</td>
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<td>has an original teaching style(S)</td>
<td>.47</td>
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<td>.24</td>
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<td>gets learners thinking (F)</td>
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<td>demonstrates her/his approach to life (I)</td>
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<td>.79</td>
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<td>demonstrates her/his view of the sense of life (L)</td>
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<td>.75</td>
<td></td>
<td>.58</td>
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<td>says things that stimulate thought (O)</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td></td>
<td>.46</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sets a good example (J)</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td></td>
<td>.42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stimulates learners to emulate him/her (M)</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td></td>
<td>.23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pays special attention to weak learners (R)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>devotes more time to less gifted learners (D)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stimulates learners to perform (K)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stimulates learners to work harder (H)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Alpha.85 .76 .82 .73

R² .36 .10 .08 .06

R² total = .60

items removed in successive analyses (factor loadings< .35):
- is always there for learners (P);
- spends time on learners (G);
- prepared to sacrifice leisure time when appealed to (T);
- effaces herself/himself for the sake of learners (B)

beauty and gratitude; (Factor 3) knowledge and insight like curiosity and a thirst for knowledge.

To what extent do respondents feel that inspiring teachers instil these qualities in learners? Descriptive analyses yield the following mean scores: social virtues 2.53 (scale 1-3, s.d. = .48), spirituality and transcendence 2.10 (scale 1-3, s.d. = .53), and knowledge and insight 2.50 (scale 1-3, s.d. = .39). From this we infer that inspiring teachers inculcate social virtues and knowledge and
Table 3: Results of factors analysis — learners’ qualities (PAF, eigenvalues > 1, list-wise deletion, n = 946, oblimin rotation, factor loadings <.30 not recorded)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>item</th>
<th>factor 1</th>
<th>factor 2</th>
<th>factor 3</th>
<th>(h^2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>justice (N)</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social responsibility (M)</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>honesty (H)</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>love of others (J)</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>friendliness (F)</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social intelligence (L)</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sensible behaviour (O)</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sense of beauty (R)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.67</td>
<td></td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gratitude (S)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.56</td>
<td></td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spirituality (V)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.56</td>
<td></td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mercifulness (T)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.54</td>
<td></td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>modesty (P)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.39</td>
<td></td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>curiosity (Q)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thirst for knowledge (K)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enthusiasm (I)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>staying power (G)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>critical thought (C)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wisdom (E)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>creativity (A)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>humour (U)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[\text{Alpha} = .88\] \[\text{R}^2 = .41\] \[\text{R}^2\text{ total} = .54\]

Items B (bravery) and D (hopefulness) were removed because the correlation with other items was too low or because they had a factor loading of <.30.

Insight (to a great extent), and spirituality and transcendence to a lesser extent (somewhat). The three qualities correlate closely (.58 < Pearson’s R < .71). That means that teachers who inspire one quality do so to a considerable extent in the case of other qualities as well.

The third research question concerns the influence of the qualities of inspiring teachers and of respondents’ contextual background factors on the qualities ascribed to learners. To answer the question we made analyses with the aid of a structural model using the LISREL statistical program (version 8.80).
We combined our initial hypotheses (see section 2) in a structural model, which we tested. Our hypothesis was that contextual background factors influence both the qualities of inspiring teachers and qualities ascribed to learners. We also hypothesised that contextual background factors and qualities of inspiring teachers combine coherently to influence qualities ascribed to learners. The results of the analyses are discussed in the perspective of the dependent variable, qualities ascribed to learners. Contextual background factors that displayed little or no influence in the analyses were omitted from subsequent analyses. In this way we arrived at a final model, reflected in figure 1.

The results of these analyses reveal a perfect fit \( \chi^2 = .00, \ p = 1.0, \ df = 0 \). The coefficients appear in table 4.

To find out by which factors the ascription of qualities to learners can be explained, we discuss some important results. As expected, we found reasonable influences of subject matter quality ascribed to inspiring teachers on the quality of learners’ knowledge and insight \( (\beta = .32) \), and of the quality of teachers’ attention on learners’ social virtues \( (\beta = .19) \), as well as on the quality of learners’ spirituality and transcendence \( (\beta = .20) \). There are also remarkable influences of teachers’ imparting of sense on learners’ social virtues \( (\beta = .26) \), on spirituality and transcendence \( (\beta = .37) \), and on knowledge and insight \( (\beta = .13) \). Influences of contextual background factors on learners’ qualities are (Kline, 2005).
significantly weaker. It appears that being a Catholic, church attendance, mystical experience, and institutional Catholicism influence qualities developed in learners, although to a limited extend. Here there are striking influences of respondents’ institutional Catholicism on their ascription of social virtues (γ = .11), spirituality and transcendence (γ = .11), and knowledge and insight (γ = .12). Next, we show the results of the analyses as regards explained variance. These show that explained variance in ascription of social virtues is 24.5%, 29% for spirituality and transcendence, and 26% for knowledge and insight. 8.7% of variance in ascription of social virtues is explained by the direct influence of respondents’ contextual background factors, 11.2% of variance in spirituality and transcendence, and 6.9% of variance in knowledge and insight. From this we infer that 15.8% of explanation of ascribed social virtues, 17.8% of explanation of ascribed spirituality and transcendence, and 19.1% of explanation of ascribed knowledge and insight are a result of the qualities ascribed to inspiring teachers. In short, qualities ascribed to inspiring teachers contribute appreciably more than contextual background factors to the explanation of ascription of qualities developed by learners.

On the basis of the established correlation coefficients and explained variance we conclude that the influence of qualities ascribed to inspiring teachers on the qualities ascribed to learners is significantly greater than respondents’ contextual background factors like Catholicism or mystical experience. In

Table 4: Results of LISREL analyses (standardised solution: γ and β coefficients) on the basis of the structural model (dependent variables: learners’ qualities)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Social virtues</th>
<th>Spirituality and transcendence</th>
<th>Knowledge and insight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>.07*</td>
<td>.09*</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church attendance</td>
<td>−.01</td>
<td>−.05</td>
<td>−.08*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active member</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious upbringing</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>−.02</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firm belief in God</td>
<td>−.05</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>−.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mystical experience</td>
<td>.06*</td>
<td>.09*</td>
<td>.07*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salience of faith</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Catholicism</td>
<td>.11*</td>
<td>.11*</td>
<td>.12*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject matter</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.32*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imparting sense</td>
<td>.26*</td>
<td>.37*</td>
<td>.13*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>.20*</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivating performance</td>
<td>.10*</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
other words, contextual background factors associated with such phenomena as individualisation, loss of transcendence, secularisation and de-institutionalisation have less influence on the extent to which respondents credit teachers with inspiring learners to develop certain qualities. These findings confirm our hypotheses.

6 Conclusion and Discussion

What new insights do our findings provide for theory building on inspiring teachers in Catholic schools, and more specifically for the theoretical premises outlined in section 2?

The first finding concerns the qualities ascribed to inspiring teachers. Firstly, the clusters identified by Den Hartog (1997) feature only partially in our analyses. Our first cluster, subject matter, coincides with his clusters of vision, charisma and competence and includes an item of his intellectual stimulation cluster. Our second cluster, imparting sense, coincides with his clusters of role modelling and imparting sense; our third cluster, attention, with his clusters of learner involvement and altruism; and our fourth cluster, motivating performance, with his motivation cluster.

The composition of the first cluster (subject matter) is particularly striking. It combines various clusters identified by Den Hartog (1997). A possible reason may be that teachers’ professional activities are largely linked to their subject. Put differently, expertise and lucid explanation of a particular domain of knowledge relates closely to teachers’ objectives for their teaching. Secondly — as anticipated — inspiring teachers are credited pre-eminently with command of subject matter and motivating learners to perform. Teachers inspire mainly by teaching their subject expertly and interestingly and by stimulating learners to exert themselves in this respect. The qualities of attention (to weak or less gifted learners) and imparting sense are ascribed to a lesser extent. A possible reason is that teachers are primarily expected to master their subject as experts in that field. Further research may show to what extent attention and imparting sense are qualities ascribed to teachers in relation to the qualities of mastery of subject matter and motivating performance. Such research could also show whether attention and imparting sense are less common qualities in all teachers, or whether they are less commonly ascribed to inspiring teachers in particular.

The second finding pertains to the qualities that inspiring teachers develop in learners. Firstly, we note that not all of the six clusters of Peterson and Seligman (2004) were found in our analyses. Our first factor, social virtues, largely
coincides with their clusters of humanity and justice. The second factor, spirituality and transcendence, coincides with their transcendence and two items of temperance. The third factor, knowledge and insight, fully covers their cluster of wisdom and knowledge but also includes two items of courage. A possible reason why temperance and courage do not feature as separate clusters may be that learners are not really explicitly challenged to develop these qualities in an educational context, which tends to motivate them to develop qualities like knowledge and insight rather than courage and temperance. Further research could show to what extent these virtues feature explicitly in education, for instance in comparison with other contexts like leisure time activities, work, sport and play. Secondly, we found that teaching is not restricted to developing knowledge and insight. Social virtues and spirituality are also stimulated. Social virtues like justice, social responsibility and honesty rank among what are known as civic virtues. They are ones that are generally considered important in contemporary society (Ten Dam & Volman, 2007). Considering the social importance of these virtues it is not surprising that learners are encouraged to develop them. By the same token, albeit in a negative sense, it may be that our secularised context makes it difficult to develop the qualities of spirituality and transcendence. That raises a question: in how far does the educational context permit the development of the latter two qualities? ‘Permit’ should be read as having or as offering a possibility. Further research at a longitudinal level could determine in what ways teachers can help learners to develop a sense of beauty, gratitude, spirituality, mercifulness and modesty.

The third finding relates to the influence of inspiring teachers’ qualities and contextual background factors on the qualities ascribed to learners. As we expected, the influence of qualities ascribed to teachers on those ascribed to learners is significantly greater than that of respondents’ contextual background factors. From this we infer that interaction between teachers and learners may be considered more important than contextual background factors when it comes to inspirational effect on learners. The latter promote or impede ascription of qualities to learners to a limited extent only. From this we deduce that even in the present individualised climate interaction between teachers and learners is highly pertinent to the inspirational impact of teachers.

A few comments on some outstanding influences are called for. Imparting sense has a fair influence not only on the quality of spirituality but also on knowledge and insight and social virtues. This influence may be considered causative, since respondents were asked to keep a particular inspiring teacher in mind: the same person is the criterion in the case of inspiring teachers’ qualities and the qualities developed in the learners. Hence we can say that
teachers who demonstrate what they see as the sense of life and their approach to life stimulate learners to develop not only qualities like spirituality but also qualities like knowledge and insight and social virtues. A possible explanation is that these teachers are able to convey what is truthful meaningfully. In other words, they show that the development of qualities (not only those of spirituality) is full of sense and can actually happen. Of course, the teacher’s notion of the sense of life and approach to life need not correspond with the views of the (Catholic) school (Bakker & Rigg, 2004). Further research could indicate whether this is so. At any rate, our study shows where the respondents look for normative authority. Another significant finding is that institutional Catholicism does have some influence on the ascription of social virtues, spirituality and transcendence, and knowledge and insight. Parties involved in Catholic schools who consider the link between church and school important are somewhat more inclined to ascribe these qualities to learners on the basis of inspiring teachers than those who set less store by the connection. The fact that the former ascribe these latter qualities more than the latter could be because they feel that church and school should share the same normative orientation: that of the gospel and Catholic tradition, which affects the importance attached to the inculcation of virtue (Hermans, 1993; Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993). And because of the importance they attach to it, these people could be more likely to ascribe virtuous qualities to learners.

Finally we consider the sense of our findings for theory building on the inspiration exuded by teachers in Catholic schools. Our study does not permit us to say much about any religious inspiration possessed and exuded by teacher. The fact that qualities like a sense of beauty, gratitude, spirituality, mercifilness and modesty are ascribed to learners on the basis of inspiring teaching could be seen as an indicator of religious inspiration. But we need to be cautious, since substantive qualification of these qualities is still lacking. Further research could indicate whether there is any correlation with transcendence.

What we can say is that according to respondents teachers do exude inspiration, and that the quality of imparting sense is focal in this regard. Because inspiring teachers motivate learners in respect of particular ideas, desires and actions, imparting sense implies giving reasons for these. That is to say, inspiring teachers orient learners to the sense of their thoughts, desires or actions by way of sound reasons. Sense should not be interpreted as assigning significance to something. Imparting sense of something requires both placing it in a larger whole and realising that the relation to that whole consists in the possibility of success. Thus the sense of something refers actually to its chances of success. Hence imparting sense to an intention or a desire and its fulfilment or
realisation is an estimate of its chances of success. Such an orientation would be pointless if one expects it to fail and is full of sense if one thinks that it can succeed. Thus the sense of ascribing inspiration to teachers in Catholic schools consists in the possibility that the ascription is true. If one wants teachers to be inspiring, the sense of that desire is that it will be fulfilled. The normative orientation of the inspiration should be viewed in the same perspective, namely as giving sound reasons for the possible sense of thoughts, desires and actions. Put differently, by imparting sense inspiring teachers stimulate learners to develop qualities. That implies that teachers can give them reasons full of sense to place their qualities in the larger whole of society, just as their justice can contribute to a just society. By imparting sense one can also show that the development of qualities has a chance of success, for instance that they can actually be enabled to appreciate beauty. Conversely, if teachers fail to impart sense one cannot really expect learners to contribute to larger wholes or to know that they will be able to develop their qualities. Thus imparting sense appears to be a key concept if one is to understand the inspiration exuded by teachers in Catholic schools. The concept can be qualified more closely. If inspiring teachers orient learners to their contribution to a whole by imparting sense, that whole should be defined more precisely as a whole in a historical, social and religious sense. Teachers should be able to show learners how they can contribute to the course of the history of the group or community to which they belong, or to its welfare or its relation to God. When teachers speak about sense they invite learners to contribute to it. By discussing sense in the classroom teachers also give learners a realistic opportunity to practise it. In other words, by participating in the classroom community and making a contribution there inspiring teachers can teach learners that developing qualities for the benefit of the larger whole of society is full of sense, meaning that it has a chance of success.

It may well be that teachers in Catholic schools can realise formative goals by inspiring learners to pursue qualities like knowledge and insight, social virtues, and spirituality and transcendence. Our study, however, was confined to Catholic schools in the Netherlands. Further research in other schools and other countries could indicate whether inspiring teachers can achieve formative goals in those contexts as well. Our study indicates that imparting sense is a key concept in the realisation of formative goals in Catholic schools. By imparting sense inspiring teachers help learners to commit themselves to a larger whole such as society, and to see that they can actually do so successfully. The question is whether research provides evidence that imparting sense is as important in non-Catholic schools, and also whether our understanding of this concept, which is basically Catholic, can be used to interpret the findings.
(cf. Gilkey, 1975). Further research could show how inspiration can orient us to conceive of formation in schools in a normative perspective, with due regard to learners' freedom. This study is a modest contribution to that enterprise.

References


