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Why become a teacher? Student teachers’ perceptions of the teaching profession and motives for career choice

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ABSTRACT
The aim of the study is to discursively identify student teachers’ perceptions of the teaching profession early in their education and their motives for this career choice. Students wrote a letter sharing thoughts on why they want to become a teacher, how they regard the teaching profession and if someone inspired them in their career choice. The empirical data consists of 259 student texts from three Swedish teacher education programmes. The study employed a qualitative method denoting different categorizations compared to previous studies, emphasising the idea of multiple motives for career choice and the link to student teachers’ evolving pedagogical identity. Major differences can be distinguished among the programmes, emphasising different main motives and shifting incipient pedagogical identities. The results indicate the value of organising teacher education programmes drawing on multiple motives, which is expected to contribute positively to completion of teacher education and teacher retention in future profession.

Introduction
Studies from European and US scholars present extrinsic, intrinsic, and altruistic motives for choosing a teaching career (cf. Balyer and Özcan 2014; Kyriacou and Coulthard 2000; Thomson, Turner, and Nietfeld 2012; Yüce et al. 2013). Extrinsic motives involve aspects not inherent in the immediate work, such as salary, status, and working conditions. Intrinsic motives encompass inherent aspects, relating to the meaning of teaching and the passion for teaching, subject knowledge and expertise. Altruistic motives entail perceptions of teaching as a valuable and important profession and the desires to support children’s development and to make a difference in society. Intrinsic and altruistic reasons seem to be more frequent in what are termed ‘developed countries’ than in developing countries, where extrinsic reasons are more prominent (Azman 2013; Watt et al. 2012). Likewise, Klassen et al. (2011) claim that motives for entering teacher education differ based on cultural background and accordingly there is no universal pattern of motives.
Altruistic and intrinsic reasons are beneficial for teacher retention (Sinclair 2008). However, on the one hand, students entering teacher training based on altruistic and intrinsic motives, may leave the occupation when they encounter a reality that does not match with their perceptions. They may experience a high workload and lack of appropriate support, which cause them to feel dissatisfied and may leave the teaching profession early in their career (Kim and Cho 2014; Manuel and Hughes 2006; Roness and Smith 2010). On the other hand, students with extrinsic motivation as primary reason for entering teacher education, may run the risk of dropping out and experience ill-health during the teacher education (Malmberg 2006). Accordingly, researchers claim that individual motives to teach can be described as a mix of all three categories, to various extents, which contributes to retaining students in teacher training and in the teaching occupation (Moran et al. 2001; Sinclair 2008). Pedagogical motives for entering teacher education have been seen as significant indicators of teacher potential (Löfström et al. 2010). A balance is suggested: altruistic and intrinsic motives as the main motivators, and extrinsic motives as complementary (Struyven, Jacobs, and Dochy 2013).

From the US, Pop and Turner (2009) present alternative typologies of motives: identity (willingness to help children, love of the subject, personal experiences, and reasons relating to different stages in life); beliefs (perceptions of teaching and teachers based on views from family, friends, and media); opportunities (engage in a family business, pursue a career related to teaching, such as a researcher or counsellor); emotions (both positive and negative feelings, levels of confidence about teaching). In studies from a European perspective, additional motives were identified: ‘helping young people to learn’ and ‘working with children or young people’ (Hobson et al. 2009). These two motives attracted the highest number of trainees, both male and female, seeking to teach primary and secondary levels (Hobson and Malderez 2005). These reasons were also frequent among student teachers for secondary level in a study comparing Norway and England, where the main motive was enjoying the teaching subject (Kyriacou, Hultgren, and Stephens 2006). In previous research, different motives for choosing a teaching career depended on what level the student aimed for teaching in the future. Prospective elementary teachers focused on children when motivating their career choice, while secondary teachers focused more on the subject (Book and Freeman 1986). Bruinsma and Jansen (2010) added the distinction of adaptive (‘facilitating deep and lasting engagement’) versus maladaptive (‘facilitating disengagement and superficial engagement’) motives (186). Their results show a relation between adaptive motives and positive perceptions of the teacher training programme. The student teachers’ motives have an impact on their general pedagogical knowledge during teacher education (König and Rothland 2012). The research on motives for choosing a teaching career is underdeveloped from a Swedish standpoint. There are only a few studies exploring the issue, focusing on socioeconomic background and previous school experiences of the teacher education applicants (Calander 2003), motives such as enjoyment working with children, working with subject skills and opportunities of being employed (Assunção Flores and Niklasson 2014). One Swedish study (Jungert, Alm, and Thornberg 2014) explored the categories of extrinsic, intrinsic and altruistic motives.

Previous research on motives has mainly been based on quantitative methods (cf. Azman 2013; Eren and Tezel 2010; Reeves and Lowenhaupt 2016) and/or mixed methods, with large-scale surveys and in some cases, semi-structured interviews (Hobson et al. 2009; Thomson, Turner, and Nietfeld 2012). Very little research based on entirely qualitative data
has investigated motives for choosing the teaching profession (cf. Klassen et al. 2011; Pop and Turner 2009). Researchers have argued for the benefit of letting student teachers write about their motives and perceptions, as it represents a useful method of capturing their thoughts to obtain rich and nuanced findings (Azman 2013; Brookhart and Freeman 1992; Reeves and Lowenhaupt 2016). The need for in-depth and multiple information, rather than using predetermined categories, is also emphasised by Han and Yin (2016) and Klassen et al. (2011). In addition, how motives for entering teacher education differs among teacher education applicants and how the motives are developed is less researched (Malmberg 2006).

The intent of this paper is to contribute to the existing literature by exploring both motives for entering the teaching profession and student teachers’ perceptions of the teaching profession, as the perceptions can be part of the motives. In contrast to Bruinsma and Jansen (2010), who presume that pre-service teachers’ motives relate to either extrinsic or intrinsic reasons, we hypothesise that the motives represent a mix of multiple motives. Therefore, the added value of this study is the openness for the students’ perceptions and experiences, not limiting their participation to responding to beforehand defined categories relating to extrinsic, intrinsic, and altruistic motives, accordingly allowing for mixed motives and combinations of motives to be elucidated. In addition, the study also seeks to explore students’ perceptions, enrolled in different programmes, and their experiences of prior education.

The aim of the study is to discursively identify student teachers’ perceptions of the teaching profession early in their education and their motives for this career choice. The research questions are:

- How do student teachers from different programmes, perceive the teaching profession early in their education, based on their prior experiences of education?
- What are student teachers’ motives for their choice of career?

**Theoretical framework**

It can be argued that student teachers’ formulating of motives and perceptions of the teaching profession may be the first step in the development of their identity as teachers, albeit in the beginning of the process. Malmberg (2006) connects motives to teaching strategies, enjoyment in work, interest in student learning and engagement for the work, which we regard being essential parts when forming a pedagogic identity. Since motives for entering teacher education are based on prior experiences of education and former teachers’ teaching, we see a link between motives and Bernstein’s (2000) concept of pedagogic identities. It deals with how student teachers understand themselves, their history and their future, what the students disagree on, and their approach to change when it comes to their professional identity as teachers. Bernstein discerns four major positions, or pedagogic identities. These pedagogic identities make up an official arena. The student teachers enter this arena and start expressing themselves as teachers-to-be, thereby positioning themselves on that official arena of pedagogic identity. The four positions are: restricted retrospective, selected prospective, differentiated de-centred, and integrated de-centred pedagogic identities.

The retrospective identities function as stabilisers between the past and the future and the main focus of these identities is on the content of the education (role: conservative, preserving the past). The focus of prospective identities deals with different types of changes and on selective recontextualisation of features of the past (role: here-and-now oriented,
Bernstein places the de-centred pedagogic identities into two categories: the *differentiated de-centred* pedagogic identity is built on a notion of autonomy in order to allow the educational institutions to use their resources competitively (role: extrinsically responsible, market driven and neo-liberal). The *integrated de-centred* – or therapeutic – identity is ‘oriented to autonomous, non-specialised, flexible thinking, and socially to team work’ (role: progressive autonomous) (Bernstein 2000, 68).

In conclusion, different motives may imply different identities, which may require different approaches when student teachers begin their education.

**The present study**

**Participants**

The present study included 259 student teachers from three different teacher education programmes: *primary school* ($n = 83$), *middle school* ($n = 57$), and *upper secondary school* ($n = 119$). Having included three teacher programmes in this study enables comparisons and clarifies some differences regarding discourses.

**Data**

The data for this study consist of 259 student texts, produced between 2013 and 2015, as part of the first course in teacher training at a university in Sweden. There are three parallel courses – with the same course code and essentially the same content – offered every year to all student teachers. The courses form part of mandatory core knowledge and skills for all student teachers, and focus on the teaching assignment as it is formulated in curricula, policy documents, and educational philosophy.

The student teachers were asked to write a text about why they want to become teachers. They were given the following task: ‘Write a letter sharing your thoughts on why you want to become a teacher and how you regard the teaching profession’. The students were, for example, asked if someone had inspired them in their career choice. The idea of different motives such as extrinsic, intrinsic, altruistic or multiple motives were not introduced for the students during data collection, nor were the concepts of pedagogical identities. The texts were in general one to two pages and were handed in during the first week of the courses. In 2015, the authors asked for permission to use the student texts. In accordance with ethical law (Swedish Government 2003), informed consent was obtained by the students. All participants were informed that they have the right to terminate participation in the study without giving reasons and that the empirical data was to be handled confidentially. A total of three students chose not to participate.

**Method, coding, analysis, and interpretation**

To code the data, each of us read the collected data and analysed it to set the order of discourse: *Student teachers’ perceptions and expectations of the teacher profession*. An order of discourse sets a framework for the discourse analysis and denotes ‘a limited range of discourses which struggle in the same terrain’ (Winther Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 27). In the analysis, two dimensions were in focus simultaneously: the communicative event and the
order of discourse (Fairclough 1995). This framework enabled us to identify discourses and how they are interrelated (Winther Jørgensen and Phillips 2002). After setting the order of discourse, data was analysed, individually and collectively, in order to categorise it. In brief, meaning, regularities, similarities, and contradictory elements were focused on. The researchers agreed on the distinguished discourses, and resulted in the choice of the conceptual framework included in the analysis.

The written texts were analysed using four concepts from discourse theory: nodal points, elements, chains of equivalence, and subject positions (Laclau and Mouffe 2001). Nodal points are signs, or reference points, enjoying a privileged position in the discourse; the other signs are centred on the nodal points. Elements are signs with multiple and potential meanings. Furthermore, signs can be linked together in chains of equivalence, which establish identity relationally. In discourses, subjects are created, and individuals can affiliate themselves to these subject positions. Discourse analysis therefore also takes into account the subject position – that is, the role that discourse assigns the individual. As discourses operate in a social context, their relationship to other social dimensions is dialectical (Fairclough 1992, 2003). Fairclough’s model for analysis focuses on the text, the discursive practice and the social practice (Fairclough 1992). Thus, the findings from the textual analysis constitute the discursive practice which must be discussed in the social context of the Swedish teacher education and further related to a European perspective on teacher education.

**Ethical considerations**

As we decided to do a study with our own students, we were aware of the power differential between the students and us as authors and teachers. Therefore, it was important that the courses were finished before the students were asked to participate or not. Furthermore, the results can be criticised given that we have taught the courses and designed the assignments, which may have influenced the students to write responses that would be perceived as ‘politically correct’. It seems, however, that the students expressed their views openly and in diverse ways, showing a varied picture of student teachers’ perceptions of the teaching profession and their motives for becoming a teacher.

**Results**

Four main discourses were identified, which we named (Re)creating the caring school, Creating a desirable (professional) life, Fostering the upright human being and Forming valuable knowledge. Table 1 below illustrates the discourse theory concepts manifested in the discourses and focused on in this study. When referring to the student teachers we use the term students; when referring to students in schools, we use the term pupils.

**(Re)creating the caring school**

(Re)creating the caring school relates to both positive and negative experiences from students’ own schooling and former teachers. Irrespective of their experiences, students commonly expressed that school should be a place for growth and development. When having positive previous experiences, students wrote that they wanted to recreate the caring school, where pupils’ needs are acknowledged and attended to. That is the nodal point of the discourse.
Table 1. The table shows discourse theory concepts exemplified in the discourses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourse</th>
<th>(Re)creating the caring school</th>
<th>Creating a desirable (professional) life</th>
<th>Fostering the upright human being</th>
<th>Forming valuable knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nodal point</strong></td>
<td>School as a place for growth</td>
<td>Profession</td>
<td>Society</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elements</strong></td>
<td>Motivation, meaning, fun, inspiration, guidance, safety, security, help, support</td>
<td>The learning teacher, self-improvement, university degree, job opportunities, salary, bright future, make a difference, freedom, variation, status</td>
<td>People, community, respect and understanding, future generations, prepare students for professional careers or university studies, student ‘development’ as much as possible</td>
<td>Interest, enthusiasm, subject skills, importance, arena for knowledge, learning process,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subject positions</strong></td>
<td>Role model, guide, helper</td>
<td>Competent professional, happy and healthy human</td>
<td>Reformer, educator</td>
<td>Academic, educationalist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students having had negative previous experiences wanted to change the conditions, and create a caring school for their future pupils.

For the upper secondary school student teachers, the caring school is characterised by positive words in a visionary tone: ‘It is important that the pupils come to school and feel security, a will to learn and joy. It is important to me that the students view the school as a place for growth.’ Elements such as ‘safety’ or ‘security’ – as well as ‘meaning’ and ‘motivation’ or ‘growth’ and ‘development’ – form chains of equivalence; the school must offer the pupils these in order to qualify as a ‘caring school’.

Some students refer to personal experiences of educational achievements that implicitly resulted in a better, more caring school environment. Several students stated that they wanted to become teachers because they ‘loved being in school’. They believed that they have developed through former positive learning experiences. Former teachers were mentioned as role models: ‘I always admired my dance teachers so much and they were my only idols. They were so talented, cool, and self-confident.’ The admiration expressed in the quote above can be linked to the discursive subject positions, in this case as a role model. Within the discourse, other subject positions included the teacher as a ‘guide’, or a ‘helper’.

Negative experiences were often diametrically opposed to descriptions of the caring school that the student teachers envisioned: ‘No pupil should experience the bullying that I was the subject of. Pupils should be able to learn at the pace suitable for them. They should be able to develop their self-esteem and self-confidence.’

Statements made by students who intend to teach middle school revealed a relatively mixed picture in this discourse. The most frequent comments were that school should be ‘interesting’ and ‘inspire pupils’. Present, but not to the same degree, were ideas of a ‘creative learning environment’ and that school should be ‘fun’.

The chain of equivalence made up by statements such as ‘establish a good relationship with my pupils’, ‘radiate love’ and ‘ensure that no one is left out’ showed the importance of creating social relations that go beyond the state-sanctioned teaching assignment for these students. There were many reflections on the sanctioned professional role too, but in this initial stage of the teacher training the students mostly used general statements such as ‘get a balanced teaching’, ‘help people to learn’ and ‘practice the right learning’ to discuss what is meant by a caring school.

A shift in the discourse can be distinguished among students who intend to teach primary school. Here the number of comments about making school interesting and inspiring the pupils decreased. Instead, aspects associated with ‘fun’ in school were more common. Also, aspects of caring relationships in school, especially between teachers and pupils, were clarified. For example, the teacher was perceived as ‘the pupils’ friend and teacher’ who is supposed to ‘create trusting relationships with their pupils’, but school should also ‘prevent exclusion’ and provide a ‘safe haven for pupils who have a hard time at home.’ Comments about ‘teachers who have neglected their role’, ‘becom[ing] the teacher I always wanted’ and a desire to ‘change the negative perception of teachers’ can be found in texts by several students. Although positive role models and examples from school contexts were mentioned, in this group it seemed as though there is an ambition to improve schools.

In this discourse, the subject positions range on a scale from role model, to guide and helper.
Creating a desirable (professional) life

Creating a desirable (professional) life encompassed different ways of perceiving the conditions of the teaching profession. The nodal point of this discourse is profession. Students described different experiences – both positive and negative – that shaped their view of the teaching profession and their motives for becoming a teacher. In this discourse, however, the students adopted an individual perspective rather than a collective one. Among students who intended to teach upper secondary school, the motives to become a teacher were getting a university degree, securing full-time employment, teaching as meaningful work, and professional development. These motives can be said to constitute elements of the discourse, and the chains of equivalence include university degree – job – bright future – making money.

In this discourse, students also stated pragmatic reasons for their choice of career. They admitted that they actually want to be a professional dancer or a musician, but they chose job security instead: ‘I want to raise a family of my own, ensure full-time employment and a home – a sound economic basis to build on.’ Job security was connected to rational thinking and the possibility of getting a job after completing their education, due to the current teacher shortage:

I must admit that the desire to get a well-paid job, and the fact that there is a shortage of teachers, and thus the chance to get a job as a teacher is high, are the first things that pop up in my head when I think about why I want to become a teacher.

The students often viewed themselves as future role models, not least in the subject they are going to teach: ‘I want young people to look up to me and be inspired to consider a future within [the field of] music.’ Their understanding of the teaching profession was based on previous teaching experiences and former teachers, as shown in statements about paying the passion forward and the understanding of teaching and learning that they have experienced.

Focusing on the middle school student teachers, there was a shift within the discourse. The importance of ‘working with people’, and especially children, was accentuated and became the most prominent reason for choosing teacher education. This gave an emphasis to a profession that is primarily about teaching, but rather to teach children than to teach subjects. It is noteworthy that among middle school student teachers there were relatively few comments about being a part of children’s development, or about changing or making a difference. More frequent, however, were indications that ‘self-development’ is part of a desirable professional life. This discourse also contained several comments about different social aspects. For example, it involved ‘laugh[ing] and hav[ing] fun with the students’ and being someone with whom the pupils can ‘feel confident.’ Occasionally, middle school student teachers expressed more pragmatic reasons for becoming a teacher desire to create a desirable life for oneself:

I was losing confidence and prepared for unemployment. Then one day, I heard that a friend had been offered a job at a local school, but she was not going to take the job. I cheered up and sent an e-mail … In the e-mail [reply], I was told that the school would get in touch if there was a short-term job. And less than a week later, I got the first phone call.

Even within the group of primary school student teachers, a desire to work with children appeared as a distinctive element within this discourse. What distinguishes the group and separates it from the middle school student teachers, however, is that the reason for their
choice of education very much indicated that they ‘love children’. An additional number do not specify children, but say they want to work with ‘people’. Within this programme a desirable professional life is associated with children rather than teaching.

Another frequent reason that belongs to this discourse concerns development. ‘Learn[ing] something new’ and ‘constantly evolv[ing]’ are a few of many examples of the importance of the students’ own development, but an equally important reason was monitoring pupils’ progress. For example, statements such as ‘help[ing] them develop ... is happiness’ occurred in the data.

One motive, slightly more frequent here than in the other groups, was the desire to change something, however seldom specified: ‘I want to make a difference’ and ‘I want to be able to influence our future.’ However, the subject positions in this discourse are those of the competent professional and the happy and healthy human.

Fostering the upright human being

Fostering the upright human being manifested the student teachers’ wishes to make a difference for human beings and, in the long run, to make a difference in society. The nodal point of the discourse is therefore ‘society’. Among the elements of the discourse, we distinguished ‘people’, ‘community’, ‘respect’, and ‘understanding’; verbs such as ‘educate’, ‘influence’ and ‘develop’ form an important chain of equivalence in the discourse.

Several students who intend to teach upper secondary school reflected on the impact teachers have on other people:

I have been looking for an environment where I feel that I will have an impact on society… To form a society of open-minded people, who dare to try new things, who dare to fail, and who achieve their full potential.

The impact students envisioned goes beyond an individual here-and-now perspective, making a difference at a societal level. Frequently, the statements in this discourse reflected either a political commitment, or utopian and reformist ambitions.

The students regarded imparting knowledge as a motivating factor:

It’s fun to learn – to know how it cuts to the brain when you understand something and even better to see this in someone else ... see the learner getting into gear and suddenly share the light of understanding in another person’s eyes.

Becoming a teacher can also be rooted in a wish to pay forward what the students felt they received. It seems as if students valued being able to teach and watch other people reach an understanding. Students wished to work deliberately with fundamental values in their teaching, contributing to the creation of upright human beings: ‘I want to pass on a strong focus on empathy and co-operative learning, and to, in practice, be able to work with fundamental values expressed in the curriculum.’

Fostering the upright human being did not appear to be very strong among the middle school student teachers. As for the students in the upper secondary school programmes, they had a desire to ‘make a difference’, both at an individual and at a societal level. However, the most distinctive discourse of this programme concerns fostering and shaping. Typical examples of this are teachers’ missions to ‘foster the building blocks of the future’ and ‘raise citizens’. These statements can be linked to the basic values and rights expressed in the curricula of Swedish schools, both compulsory and upper secondary.
Close to this is a frequent view of the profession of teaching as a means to ‘lead people forward’ and to ‘guide in the best way.’ This guidance also makes it clear that it is the teacher who should ‘be a role model for the pupils.’

This discourse was more prominent in the programme oriented towards primary school. Similar chains of equivalence occur here as for the middle school student teachers, but the data also showed a greater emphasis on the fostering part of the professional role. Many of the students expressed that ‘having an impact on children’ and ‘fostering them into good people’ are part of what it means to be a teacher.

Data from the primary school programme also showed a concept of ‘making a difference.’ Above all, it was about making a difference for the individual pupil, but in a few cases, there were examples of reasoning that linked the individual to social change. Typical examples of how to make a difference, were helping pupils to ‘self-knowledge,’ ‘being upright people’ and ‘function[ing] in the social environment.’

In this discourse, the subject positions are those of a reformer or an educator.

**Forming valuable knowledge**

*Forming valuable knowledge* related to students’ wishes to convey knowledge to pupils in the subjects they will be teaching. Subject and knowledge merge into one nodal point: valuable (subject) knowledge.

The students who intend to teach upper secondary school focused on their subjects and on knowledge: ‘My motives for becoming a teacher are subject-focused… I have a passion for dance.’ They also presumed that the knowledge they are going to teach will be useful for students, now and in the future. The teacher’s skills and abilities, ranging from technical and practical aspects to personal and experience-based aspects, were therefore considered crucial. Central elements of the discourse are ‘interest,’ ‘enthusiasm,’ ‘subject skills,’ and ‘importance.’ The chain of equivalence of this discourse is subject – transfer – knowledge development.

The importance of certain school subjects was reflected on, as shown in this quote regarding the aesthetical subjects: ‘I believe that it is important that the aesthetical subjects have their place in school. So one can explore oneself, formulate standpoints and not only be governed by logical thinking or the grammar found in languages.’ In the following quote, the student described how dance in school affect pupils’ human development: ‘I believe that creativity in dance can involve a good opportunity to help people’s creativity to grow … which I believe promotes health and produces more harmonic, open people.’ Other students stressed the importance of teaching history, in order for future generations to avoid repeating the mistakes of previous ones, and of inspiring young people to discover their learning potentials for Mathematics, or English. Teaching a subject encompasses development of diverse skills and abilities, where some relate more to knowledge in a certain area and others to human development embedded in teaching the subject.

*Forming the valuable knowledge* was nearly non-existent among primary school or middle school student teachers. Only a few students make references to school subjects – for example, a middle school student teacher talks about the need for teachers to have ‘sound subject knowledge.’ It is therefore not possible to determine a discursive view of what *Forming valuable knowledge* is in this group. There were, however, considerably more comments about knowledge not linked to school subjects, such as giving pupils ‘a steady and joyful
foundation crammed with knowledge’ and ‘awaken[ing] an interest for knowledge.’ One aspect that clearly stood out in the primary and middle school groups, but was lacking in the upper secondary group, was how valuable knowledge is formed in relation to the individual pupil. Being able to ‘find solutions that suit each pupil’ and ‘being able to see each individual and their different needs’ were examples showing how this discourse touches (Re) creating the caring school but with a clear focus not only on how the teaching should be organised, but also on valuable knowledge as something individual.

The subject position in this discourse must therefore be that of an academic or an educationalist, that is, primarily as a person with a special knowledge, or a person with a special knowledge of the principles and methods of teaching.

Discussion

The most important findings of this study are the close relation between the perception of the teaching profession and motives for choosing teacher education, the wide range of motives expressed by students and the differences in motives between the programmes. To discuss the implications of these findings, we will use Bernstein’s (2000) model of pedagogic identities.

The motives for becoming a teacher were often closely linked to their views of the teaching profession. How they speak about these two aspects as student teachers in the early stages of education, and by doing so subsume themselves in an order of discourse, are important for how well they succeed in their teacher training and ultimately graduate (Jungert, Alm, and Thornberg 2014). Thus, the developing professional identity is influenced by the prevailing discursive power relations, but is also simultaneously discursively constructed in the students’ utterances concerning the profession.

Among the students, intrinsic and altruistic motives for choosing a career in education are frequent, but extrinsic motives also show. The results indicate that the students are having multiple motives for entering teacher education. It is therefore likely that a combination of recruitment strategies rather than focusing on individually selected strategies, such as a higher starting salary in the teaching profession, will attract students (Sinclair 2008; Struyven, Jacobs, and Dochy 2013). In contrast to Bruinsma and Jansen (2010), the openness for students’ motives in our study, rather than using predefined categories, results in a more complex image appearing. Meanwhile, it is worth noticing that some motives are more frequently expressed by – and in some cases, exclusive to – students in certain programmes. This is an important finding, since it differs from previous research by Hobson and Malderez (2005). We also identified different entry characteristics between the programmes, for example, the focus on children or subject which Book and Freeman (1986) brought forward as main motives. However, we found additional differences between student groups. On the one hand, compulsory school student teachers (primary and middle) highlighted the caring mission of school, intrinsic motives were the main reason and they were more negative to previous school experiences. On the other hand, upper secondary school students underlined the learning experience for students, extrinsic motives were more common and they were more positive to earlier school experiences, especially related to subject content (cf. Book and Freeman 1986; Kyriacou, Hultgren, and Stephens 2006).

The students’ own school experiences were the basis for the expressed feelings concerning teaching (cf. Pop and Turner 2009) and have great significance for the construction of
their pedagogic identities. A reasonable consequence of the difference between the teacher programmes is that the future upper secondary school teachers will try to recreate their positive experiences to a greater degree while compulsory school student teachers will seek to create a somewhat different school than the one they experienced. Thus, the pedagogic identities of the former group will function retrospectively and conservatively, and the pedagogic identities of the latter group will function progressively and autonomously, in a de-centred manner (cf. Bernstein 2000).

The positive subject-related school experiences that upper secondary school student teachers held resulted in putting a personal value on passing them forward – a retrospective identity of conserving the past– while compulsory school student teachers more frequently expressed a desire to make a difference in children’s lives (cf. Book and Freeman 1986), which could be considered an integrated de-centred identity, focusing on progression and change. Similarly, among the upper secondary school student teachers – especially those focusing on the arts – knowledge was coupled with the subject content. For the compulsory school student teachers, on the contrary, the needs of the single pupil were in focus. There was also a shift between the various teacher programmes relating to the perception of school as an institution. Upper secondary school student teachers focused on the learning experience which, when placed in relation to the pedagogic identities that emerge, became a part of assimilating a given teaching content. Compulsory school student teachers instead talked to a greater extent about the caring school as a stimulating physical and psychosocial environment – that is, from an integrated de-centred identity with focus on flexibility and team work.

Important qualitative differences between the programmes were shown also within the intrinsic motives. Based on Bernstein’s (2000) approach, upper secondary school student teachers’ retrospective oriented identities will produce a limited, conservative history, while to a greater extent the compulsory school student teachers’ statements show a differentiated identity oriented towards neo-liberal characteristics, such as independence and flexible thinking.

Both Assunção Flores and Niklasson (2014) and Hobson et al. (2009) have shown that working with children and adolescents is a prominent intrinsic motive for choosing the profession of teacher. This is consistent with our findings regarding compulsory school student teachers. Among these, a picture of the teacher as a helper, including therapeutic functions in the teacher role, emerged, again suggesting an integrated de-centred identity. This result is worth paying attention to, since the teacher as a helper-identity can be difficult to reconcile with the stated teaching towards learning goals in different subjects. This relates to Bruinsma and Jansen’s (2010) discussion about adaptive and maladaptive motives. Over time, when student teachers meet the reality as teachers, it may be the case that, in contrast to Bruinsma and Jansen’s conclusions, intrinsic motives and the helper-identity turn out to be maladaptive to teachers’ remaining in the profession, due to unrealistic expectations of the professional role (cf. Kim and Cho 2014; Roness and Smith 2010). Upper secondary school student teachers instead speak of themselves as role models, connoting a more static identity. A tendency can be discerned that this wish will also become an altruistic desire to create a better world. Since this desire mainly is based on passing forward a subject content, the identity should be considered neo-conservative prospective, focusing on recontextualization of the past.
Another shift that the discourse analysis has made clear concerned the existence of extrinsic motives, such as a stable income. These reasons for choosing a teacher career were evident among upper secondary school student teachers, while among compulsory school student teachers’ intrinsic motives were a priority. Although extrinsic motives do not exclude de-centred identities, they are not likely to encourage such identities either. They rather tend to be pragmatic and here-and-now oriented, implicating a view on identity as prospective, according to Bernstein’s concept.

**Final word**

We found similarities with previous research when also identifying extrinsic, intrinsic, and altruistic motives and that mixed motives are beneficial for a teaching career. In addition, we also identified discursive and, through Bernstein’s (2000) concept of pedagogic identities, ideological differences between the programmes. Therefore, a distinct implication of our results is that students within different programmes would benefit from different starting points concerning the teacher profession. To be informed by more than one motive is expected to lead to better teacher retention. If one motive is not fulfilled in the profession, a teacher can rely on other motives and still remain in the profession.

Increased knowledge of motives and beliefs, and of the differences among student teachers, helps teacher educators to adapt teacher education to these factors (cf. Kyriacou and Coulthard 2000; Sinclair 2008). We concur with Roness and Smith (2010) who argue that teacher education must reflect a realistic and not an idealised picture of the teaching profession, accordingly creating the conditions for useful competences needed in everyday teaching practice. This could eventually help students create realistic expectations of their studies and make them even better prepared for the teacher profession. In teacher education, we find it is important to acknowledge and incorporate the multiple motives of career choice students hold, as well as their previous school experiences and the incipient pedagogic identities these resulted in. In addition, the results indicate the value of organising teacher education programmes drawing on multiple motives, which is expected to contribute positively to completion of teacher education and teacher retention in future profession.

**Notes**

1. Since the last teacher education reformation in 2011, the teacher programmes are perceived as separate programmes, with separate study programmes, though some courses included in all teacher programmes have similar content, but with adjustments towards the intended level of teaching.
2. The *middle school* in Sweden should not be mixed up with the middle school in the US (grade 6–8).
3. Agewise, the youngest participant was 17 and the oldest was 52. A large majority was between 20 and 30 years old.
4. The discourse analysis used in this study is essentially a qualitative method, but to create the possibility of comparing the significance of the discourses between the different programmes, a categorization that suggests quantifiable elements is used in the results section. The frequency of participants is not expressed in precise measure, but as a chain of concepts with relative significance: non-existent – a few – several – many – almost all.
Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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