

Linking aspirations, emotional intensity, and focus with wellbeing and learning

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Teaching is not only a moral enterprise but located in a profession that is anchored in aspirations for a better future. Such aspirations are nurtured by teachers whose commitments to students and learning are fuelled by a deep emotional passion and purpose constructed on trust and mutual respect. Linking all of these elements together has been a focus of the Quaglia Institute for School Voice and Aspirations (QISVA) for several decades. The Quaglia approach is based on research from the voices of teachers and students indicating the benefits of expressing and encouraging individual and collective aspirations.

What links the QISVA's approach together is the idea that positive relationships increase when everyone is willing to express their thoughts and ideas to others. This requires a combination of beliefs that someone is willing to listen and a degree of self-awareness of aspirations as a key to personal growth, resiliency, and sustainability. Humans are not always aware of the disconnect between their beliefs and their behaviours (Donohoo & Katz, 2020, p. 82) and, therefore, they may continue to behave or practise in incongruent ways. Striving towards a goal is vital to achieving fulfilment as it supports positive relationships and mental wellbeing (Fraser, 2020). It is a life-long journey and not some sort of "quick fix." The interaction and interdependence of emotions, behaviours, aspirations, and goals not only create the complexity of the teaching profession, but also indicate the potential of energy that can be directed towards an improved yet imaginary future.

Interviews with thousands of teachers and students formed the basis for the development of an Aspirations Profile (see Figure 1) (Quaglia Institute Voice & Aspirations, 2020) which is a model and language to understand human aspirational tendencies. The model depicts behaviours that support or hinder success. It has two dimensions: dreaming and doing (Quaglia Institute Voice & Aspirations, 2020). The model has been used in schools to foster current approaches to learning, individual subjects, or events, providing a shared language of a state of mind or current mode of thinking. The creation of a common language is fundamental to shared decision making and using feedback data positively. The model, which is explored in this paper, can help teachers and students express their thoughts, ideas, and behaviours and, by doing so, enable them to articulate and action their aspirations.

Aspirations Profile model

The Aspirations Profile model consists of four categories. These categories may be considered a state of mind, a recurring context, or even a continuing human predicament. They are meant to be heuristic which means they are able to promote reflection and deeper thinking rather than representing some "pure" state. These are now briefly described.

Hibernation

Hibernation means many things, including some sort of deep natural sleep. In the Aspirations Profile Model, hibernation refers to a state of fuzziness, personal ambiguity, or lack of clarity or effort for the future (Quaglia Institute Voice & Aspirations, 2020). Hibernation is sometimes pursued as a safeguard from trauma or observed as an indicator of isolation, low self-esteem, or lack of connection (Quaglia et al., 2020, p.45). Teachers stuck in hibernation may feel professionally frozen, stuck, and lacking meaningful connection with colleagues and the school vision and purpose. Students in hibernation may lack connection with peers or family, withdrawing from others and feeling disenfranchised. Possible ways to motivate and move someone out of the state of hibernation is to connect with the individual on a personal level. Perhaps a teacher could talk with a student about prior successful learning or something that they have achieved as a contributing member of their community. Listening is a key activator here, helping the individual see themselves as someone who can contribute to others and how they are valued for their uniqueness and individuality. It may require mentors or individuals whose experiences and interests align with the individual in hibernation.

Deliberately going into hibernation may be a time for focused reflection, relaxation, or rest. Everyone needs time to stop and reflect every now and then. But hibernation is also a time to recognise belonging, that everyone is valued, and has something unique to offer. Taking time to recognise unique contributions and potential is important. This allows an opportunity to be inspired and to engage your imagination.

Figure 1: Aspirations Profile Model



From *The Aspirations Profile: Second in a Series of Four Aspirations Briefs* by the Quaglia Institute Voice and Aspirations, 2020, p. 2. (https://quagliainstitute.org/dmsView/Aspirations_Profile#:-) Copyright 2020 by the Quaglia Institute. Reprinted with permission.

“The Aspirations Profile helps individuals articulate a balance of both dreaming and doing.”

Imagination

Imagination is characterised by people who can articulate who or what they want to be and are able to share their future plans with others (Quaglia et al., 2020, p. 51). Unfortunately, much of what is expressed by people stuck in the imagination state fails to come to fruition. There is a disconnect from reality. Individuals stuck in this category fail to follow through on their ideas and plans. Students may be described as “... dreamers, disconnected from reality and impractical about real life situations” (Quaglia, et al., 2020, p. 50). The pathway to success needs to be clearly articulated with specific steps and actions for individuals stuck in imagination. Teachers in imagination can be productive and creative, encouraging others to step up and try new things. Students in imagination can work beyond expectation and seek alternatives to a current methodology. While all of us need to be imaginative at times, we also need deliberate, actionable plans and a firm understanding of current reality if we are to achieve success. Collaboration and defined roles and responsibilities can help turn imagination into inspiration.

Teachers who find themselves stuck in imagination need clarity and explicit connection to the focused area of school wide improvement. They need clarity around their role and responsibility towards the common good. Co-created protocols, norms, and agreed expectations are ways to understand how the action will take place. Students stuck in imagination also benefit from clear guidelines, rubrics, progressions, and learning continua. The aim is to capture the creative enthusiasm of people in imagination but also hold them responsible for carrying out agreed actions. Working collaboratively with others can combine the enthusiasm of the imaginative teacher or student to the effort and perseverance of those in the perspiration quadrant.

Perspiration

Perspiration describes someone who consistently works hard but lacks a sense of purpose. They are diligent in their efforts, timely, and organised and do all that is necessary and sometimes more (Quaglia et al., 2020, p. 47). Teachers in perspiration work incredibly hard but may struggle to connect their current actions with the school's vision or their own sense of professional purpose. Some students too may put huge effort in each day, but often rely on the teacher or peer to tell them if they are successful. This can lead to a feeling of frustration as the individual in the state of perspiration relies on limited strategies to achieve success. Individuals stuck in this quadrant may not be sure what they are working towards. Teachers stuck in the perspiration quadrant can become directionless, failing to see the light at the end of the tunnel or using strategies that are no longer relevant for modern educational needs. Students in perspiration may stick to tried and tested prior learning strategies, failing to see that a different learning strategy is required to advance the learner in new and evolving situations.

Individuals stuck in perspiration need to make connections to their personal ambitions, intended learning, and purpose of their work. Clarity using worked examples and a variety of learning strategies are needed by people stuck in the perspiration quadrant. They need support to connect the dots, to see how an action connects with an outcome. Opportunity to celebrate their own and others' progress and improvement may support someone stuck in perspiration. Leading



others based on their strengths may celebrate the successful efforts of an individual in perspiration. This may heighten self-awareness and offer diverse pathways to achieving success. Teachers need to model adaptation and appreciate diversity in a complex, evolving society. The ability to be self-aware, think critically, and adapting to the needs of diverse students and changing contexts are signs of an adaptive expert (Grotzer et al., 2021). If school communities can cultivate a community of adaptive experts, their knowledge, skills, and hard work can be used strategically for the good of the whole organisation. Connecting their work ethic with individual and collective aspirations, will move these individuals to the aspiration quadrant; a place where dreaming and doing come together.

Aspiration

Quaglia and Fox (2003) define aspirations as “the ability to dream and set goals for the future, while being inspired in the present to reach those dreams” (p. 42). People in the aspiration quadrant, then, are likely to connect their current actions with their intentions and future dreams, both personally and professionally. They tend to have a good idea of potential options and a realistic view of their context (Quaglia et al., 2020, p. 52). Teachers in the aspiration quadrant are driven educators, never seeming to be satisfied with the status quo and continually seeking learning and growth opportunities. Students in aspiration may appear to be high achievers. Individuals in aspirations still need assurance that they are doing a good job, they are being successful, and their efforts and actions are appreciated. They thrive on challenge and can be asked to stretch themselves to try new challenges or take on new responsibilities. However, there must be a balance, as these individuals can become burnt out as they are always willing to go the extra mile. They may put themselves under immense pressure as they are driven to continually grow and succeed (Quaglia et al., 2020). Being aspirational can be learned. Everyone needs to plan, monitor, and review their own progress and achievement, and celebrate personal goals and progress. Individuals stuck in the aspiration quadrant need time to relax, share responsibility, and collaborate with others to distribute the workload.

They could lead others and teach new strategies. They could listen and learn from the hopes and dreams of others, to see the variety of pathways to success. Or perhaps they need to hibernate, to slow down, and just breathe for a while.

Concluding thoughts

Being able to monitor and improve one's own wellbeing is made possible by the state of one's self-awareness. For this reason, making others aware of our state of mind or thinking helps build relationships, supports positive self worth, trust, and respect. The Aspirations Profile provides a shared language and opportunity for individuals to articulate and conceptualise their thinking and actions. Using the Aspirations Profile, teachers and students can share and discuss their thoughts, ideas, and feelings in a way that fosters trust and shared understanding. Used frequently, the profile provides an opportunity to stop and think and to recognise that both dreaming about the future and the actions of the present are connected. The Aspirations Profile helps individuals articulate a balance of both dreaming and doing. Used in schools as a self-reflection tool, it may embolden teachers and students to use their voice to express their hopes and dreams. It may also encourage clarity in the approaches and strategies that help achieve goals. Ongoing research from QISVA with schools around the world highlights the importance of deliberately activating both voice and aspirations in schools. Voice is an amplifier for aspirations in schools (Quaglia et al., 2020, p. 55).

There is no doubt that teaching is an incredibly complex job. Although emotionally intense, teaching and learning are both inspirational and aspirational. By connecting voice, aspirations, and actions, we can inspire students to achieve their potential and contribute to the world around them. Listening to and learning with and from students is a teacher's gift to humanity. Although the hopes and dreams for every student are often unseen, they are encouraged and held within the heart and mind of the teacher. All of us need encouragement to voice our hopes and dreams and be supported to work hard towards those dreams.

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