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Ethics and Challenge

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Difficulties and Possibilities in Teaching and Learning Human Encounter in Professional Education

The purpose of this paper is to present and discuss the results and conclusions of my dissertation. My research interest stems from the fact that during recent years there have been noticeable shortcomings in the human encounter of people seeking health care in Sweden. To treat people in an acceptable and pleasant way in daily life can be seen as a general expression of human sensitivity. But when it concerns the exercise of a profession in the areas where human encounters are essential, for example in the caring professions, social services and pedagogic work, the question of human encounters is somewhat different.

Human Encounters – an Educational Concern

The exercise of a profession demands forms of understanding that extend beyond the family and culture-based knowledge that we use in the day-to-day. It therefore becomes clear that public expectations and the demands of society must be well managed within the field of professional education. Questions concerning knowledge, basic values and competence thus become both highly interesting and challenging.

During the growth of the welfare state and consequent multiplication of occupational groups, the responsibilities of those practising a profession have become more important. This is a fact that not only concerns the ethical responsibilities that, in practice, makes it possible for individual professionals to advise and make decisions about the people who seek their help, support and care. When professionals can decide what is normal, what is necessary and what is best, much of the criticism against their way of acting can be understood. The development of the more professional nature of the nursing vocation results in an increasing number of

courses being offered at university level, which in turn means an increase in the academic nature of the education and a scholarisation of the vocational knowledge base. This is a development that has taken place within several areas of vocational training and for different reasons. It is my view that nursing, as one of those vocations, is a interesting professional education field to look at.

Since the nursing profession is one of the oldest among those of the welfare state, it has come to have a key role in how the field of health care and nursing is formulated. Furthermore, nursing education in Sweden has been subject to many revolutionary changes during recent decades. In what can be seen as the nurses increased aspiration towards professionalism, an extensive academicisation of education has taken place. This is a change that has led to increased demands on the quality of education and on efficiency as well as on the teacher's technical competence. At the same time as these changes have taken place, nursing as well as nursing education have been subjected to organisational changes aimed at increased efficiency as well as reduced costs, which can also be expected to influence the education's didactic.

My understanding of the problem area has fashioned the ambition to study the subject in a way that emphasises, illuminates and creates understanding for the possibilities and difficulties of professionals in a wider context. The interest in the ethics of human encounters and the study of encounters has together contributed to a critical standpoint that represents a conscious attempt to question what is usually taken for granted. This is a position that needs the support of theoretical tools, since without them it is exceedingly difficult, perhaps even impossible, to understand those underlying structures which also have meaning in a familiar culture.

The dissertation's basic aim is therefore to contribute to the practical, relevant and theoretical in-depth understanding of the study of ethics in professional education. By taking nursing education as the example and focussing on the treatment of the people seeking care, it is the aim of the dissertation - by discussion of the practice and from a critical-theoretical perspective – to lay the foundation for such an understanding.

The following issues form the basis of the dissertation:

What is the knowledge that is communicated and how does it influence the study of human encounters?

Which values are communicated and how do they influence the study of human encounters?

Which study forms are used and how do they influence the type of education and the pedagogic actions within the learning and teaching?

Which organisational, cultural and social conditions influence the education of human encounters in the pedagogic practice?

Which competences form the basis of the study of human encounters?

How can the communicated knowledge, values, conditions and competences be understood in a practical as well as in a pedagogically interesting way.

A Critical and Discursive Stance – an Open Door for a New Understanding

In order to realise the critical-theoretical ambition of reaching an in-depth understanding of the teaching and learning of the ethics of human encounters, the dissertation assumes a research perspective comprising selected social philosophical theories and discourse analysis. The theoretical points of departure are represented by Mead's¹ interactional view of learning and Habermas's² critical theory of social communication. With these theories as a base, and inspired by critical discourse analysis³, it has been possible to interpret the empirical material in a more meaningful way. The discourse analytical focus means that the linguistic communication that takes place within a practice - in this case nursing education - is seen as mediation and constitutes different basic, cultural and social values. Such a use of the concept of discourse means that interest is directed towards the interaction between people, language and society, thus contributing to an understanding of how personal and social identities are shaped and reshaped. Furthermore, it means that questions about conflicts between different groups can be responded to by highlighting contrasts and changes between them.

von Wright's pedagogical reconstruction of Mead's theory structure emphasises intersubjectivity as being central to learning. Mead points out that what is created in the encounter between people is crucial for the development of both knowledge and personal identity as a whole. Mead's terminology represents two fundamental dimensions as different ways of creating understanding in relation to another person: 'seeing yourself in the other' and 'taking the other's perspective'. The first one implies to experience, interpret and

¹ My starting point in Mead's theory is mainly based on von Wright, 2000 pedagogic reconstruction of the same.

² Habermas, 1984, 1987, 1990a

³ Fairclough, 1993, Chouliarki & Fairclough, 1999

understand the other person's actions as important. The second implies that the picture you have of yourself in the other person's concept forms the basis of self-esteem and self-understanding. These two dimensions are seen to be fundamental in creating human subjectivity, the capacity for reflection and for taking a standpoint. As a result, language and discourse can be seen as the mediums that work and it becomes clear that every encounter communicates values. In this way, Mead's theory has made it possible to simultaneously identify the creation of identity as a socialisation process and socialisation as an identity creating process. This is a basic concept that several theoreticians share and that Habermas, among others, develops further.

Habermas's critical theory focuses on human reason and shows capacities for reasoning. The critical perspective forms a view that directs our interest towards authoritarian social structures. Habermas's theoretical constructions consist of several theories, one of which is termed 'the theory of communicative action'. In this part of Habermas's enormous theory construction, social relations and language are most central.

Based on linguistic communication and the rationality of social action, Habermas has developed his communicative theory in terms of 'lifeworld' and 'system'. These two concepts are intended to show two different forms of human actions and integration. The lifeworld and system should be understood as different perspectives of understanding and action, as if both are essential to a manageable society. That isn't to say that the relationship between them is free of conflict, on the contrary. Habermas suggests that social studies of the lifeworld and system perspectives create possibilities to understand the tangible consequences of late-modern social development and thus do something about them.

Habermas also bases his theory on criticism of the use of a narrow concept of rationality and suggests that different forms of human actions demand different types of rationality. The form in focus, and the aim of this dissertation, is that which Habermas describes as the practical rationality that solves practical problems between people. In order to explain the different dimensions of that practical rationality, it can be described as ethical, moral and pragmatic, depending on the type of attitudes that exist. Pragmatic problems are solved through the attitude to usefulness; ethical problems with a view to realising the good life; while moral problems are solved with a view to finding just solutions. These three forms originate from the cultural community of the lifeworld, which determines what is useful and functional, what represents the good life and what is just. But in the development of modern society, a special kind of rationality has arisen whose actions are named as – strategic action.

These strategic actions maintain the system, are adapted to the purpose and directed towards efficiency and profitability. As counterbalance to the spread of this strategic conduct, Habermas emphasises moral rationality and its communicative action as the potential for change.

With regard to this, Habermas has developed the theory of communicative action into a moral discourse theory. The moral discourse that he emphasises emerges as a procedure with whose help mutual understanding is possible on the validity and meaning of different views and thus how to solve problems. On this basis, Habermas's theory can be regarded as a critical social theory, which is also a critical analysis of the development of modern society as a normative moral discourse theory that suggests solutions to problems that are highlighted.

The choice of research perspective has introduced an understanding of human dialogue as a basis for knowledge development, both regarding my concept of knowledge in general and my attitude to the problem being researched. As a consequence, my empirical understanding of the pedagogic problems has been reached through conversations with practitioners. I have talked to ten nursing students, six teachers and five clinical supervisors about what they thought to be meaningful, creative and educative, but also what seemed to be obstructive and created conflict in the study of the ethics of human encounters. The interviews, documentation and analysis have been carried out in the light of inspiration from Kvale's⁴ descriptions of the qualitative investigative interview. Starting with the participants' descriptions and narratives of their experiences, the analysis has been carried out through sorting, concentration and deeper understanding of the content. The final analysis phase based on both Mead's and Habermas's theories, has been carried out in two interpretative perspectives, 'to experience the other' and 'lifeworld and system'. However, the result showed the lifeworld and system perspective as rather blunt interpretation tools that needed supplementing. Progressing from that to the three different forms of practical rationality, new possibilities of analysis and understanding were actually opened up.

In the work of understanding those empirical experiences supported by the interpretative perspectives, a particular 'theoretical – practical' understanding emerged. In other words, a specific context arose out of precisely that empiric and those theories. In that context, possibilities were created for an in-depth understanding of the pedagogic practice and discursive structures and the effect they can be thought to have for the teaching and learning

⁴ Kvale, 1997

of the ethics of human encounters. It is important to point out that I see the results of my study as an empirical reason to discuss some principally interesting matters, that I believe is of immediate interest in most professional educations.

Teaching and Learning Human Encounter –

A Matter of Communication of Knowledge and Values

The result shows how the study of human encounters can be understood as communication of knowledge and values. In the dissertation the presentation of the empirical material is intertwined with a deepened problematising that illustrates the participants' experiences in the light of the theoretical research perspective.

The students described how, although their learning of the ethics of human encounters was something that developed successively throughout life as a whole and it got its professional stamp during their nursing education. The foundation of the learning was initiated in childhood relationships and in earlier personal care experiences. The caring profession socialisation process began with those caring experiences the students had before they began their nursing education. Through these earlier experiences, learning occurred that developed an understanding of the importance of providing care in human encounters. It is also evident that their earlier experiences made a deep impression, as the students bring them into their professional education. In order to widen the understanding of the ethics of caring, I have supplemented Habermas's theories with Lögstrup's⁵ ideas. Lögstrup suggests that the provision of care is the main prerequisite for developing caring attitudes and that as people's lives are so intertwined with each other a responsibility to care about and take care of each other is developed.

The teachers' and the clinical supervisors' understanding of the concept of human encounters, possibilities and difficulties are important. The teachers and supervisors are seen to be pedagogic key people whose understanding of the pedagogic content is of great significance for teaching. Both teachers and supervisors describe human encounters in a way that can be understood as expressions of ethical, moral and pragmatic forms of rationality, which mediate different knowledge and values in the pedagogic practice. Having their starting points in different rational forms, the possibilities and the difficulties of human encounter also appear in different ways, which not only deepens the understanding of

⁵ Lögstrup, 1989

different rationalities but can also lead to a clash that results in conflicts in the pedagogic practice.

The students', teachers' and the clinical supervisors' experiences of teaching and learning about human encounters within nursing education shows that nursing education is in no way a practice without problems. The academic nature of the education and the lack of resources are described by all parties as being problematic. Contemporary society's new generation of young adults also creates problems for teachers as well as supervisors, as the 'new youth' are considered to have different attitudes and demands than previous students.

Despite this, study about human encounters occurs every day within the education that takes place at university as well as in the workplace. My interpretation suggests that learning and teaching occurs within three different forms, which mediate and constitute different knowledge, values and discursive structures. In what I describe as a *reproductive* learning, both the strong foothold of education in normative theories and the classic master-apprentice relationship are highlighted. In teaching methods such as lectures, studies of literature, observations and modelling, knowledge is reproduced. In addition, values of distance and asymmetry are mediated that can be assumed to have undesirable consequences for human encounter competences.

Even if there are many obstacles, the participants also described a *reconstructing* teaching and learning based on dialogue and different types of discussions. On the occasions when conversation-based learning was employed as part of the education it was highly valued by everyone. Talking and discussing until a common understanding about knowledge was reached, were described as situations where it is possible to talk, listen, be accepted, challenged and acknowledged at the same time. Apart from the more relational teaching that mediates closeness and symmetry, it also generates possibilities for mutual criticism and reconstruction of knowledge.

Within nursing education, learning can also be understood as *emotional*. This happens partly by the teachers' consciously having good human encounters in their pedagogic relationships. There is a belief that care is learnt when the students themselves experience good caring, in pedagogic encounters. Students that enjoy good, pedagogic relationships, where teachers and supervisors show personal interest and commitment, also confirm this. Students also learn from the feelings they experience in encounters with people seeking care and in other nursing encounters – such as feelings of pleasure or unpleasant 'cautionary examples'.

Different forms of learning and teaching carry different views of knowledge and study, which I problematise as manifestations of the conflicting relationships between lifeworld and system. One conclusion is that an educational establishment where conditions and structures do not allow people to have their voices heard does not acknowledge them as autonomous, competent people either. This often leads to undesirable consequences for learning, health and human encounters, as well as the legitimacy of the profession – now and in the future.

The students' understanding of what human encounter entails and what it is in practice in the field of health care presents in terms of competence and qualifications. To a great extent the students' understanding of professional human encounter concerns aspects of equality. They understand that the person seeking care finds him or herself at a disadvantage so that a good human encounter can contribute to counterbalancing this. The perceived weak position exists partly because the person seeking care is ill and therefore in a vulnerable position and partly because they lack the knowledge and information that the professionals have. For this reason the students see themselves in many respects as both spokesperson as well as defence counsel for those seeking care. This is an attitude that in most cases affects all those seeking care, although certain problems appear with those of ethnic origin other than Swedish. In addition, the student's competence can be understood in the terms of care and respect – with main emphasis on respect. Through my analysis I came to understand their use of the concept *respect* in two different ways – one is to create mutual understanding and participation. The other way is an exaggerated respect for the autonomy of the other, which could be interpreted as nonchalance by the care seekers. The students' understanding of the concept *care* involves great responsibility and sometimes taking over responsibility for the treatment. The good human encounter is also perceived as a professional field of responsibility that the students plan to implement in their responsibility of leadership in the future. In some cases it was impossible to ignore the fact that the student supports good human encounter for their own benefit. It is also obvious that the students be of the opinion that good encounters demand good organisational conditions. To sum up, the students' understanding is problematised as a competence that is subject to change – in the direction *towards* and *from* social integration. The different directions will certainly have different effects on the human encounter as well as on professional legitimacy.

Discursive Understanding – a Foundation for Challenge and Change

My results and the problematisations aimed to be a theoretical reconstruction that shows how pedagogic actions, learning and competences can be understood as communication in and by contextual discourses. The purpose is to show that a deepened and discursive understanding, which ties together all the connections, is required for challenge and change. Based on the empirical as well as the research perspective, the following questions have needed to be answered:

What discourses are involved in this pedagogic practice, how are they expressed and what knowledge do they mediate?

Which values are they centred on?

And – what influences can they be expected to have on the study of the ethics of human encounters?

From these issues six discourses crystallised as different ‘basic value types’. The different discourses thus consist of golden threads that run through pedagogic practices and tie together the participants’ descriptions by their practical connection and their cultural and social significance.

The six discourses, which are mutually related to each other, are named as: ‘the efficiency-related discourse’,

‘the expert-related discourse’,

‘the care-related discourse,

‘the communicative-related discourse’,

‘the egocentric discourse’

‘the ethnocentric discourse’.

These inter-discursive relationships contain tensions as well as possibilities for change. The analysis is based on a web of understanding about how practice and theory appear as important parts of the inter-discursivity and therefore stand out as comprehensible in the light of Habermas’s descriptive and critical connections between lifeworld and system. According to Habermas, it is from this starting point in the lifeworld perspective that the system appears as oppressive and must be criticised. But with an understanding of the empirical material it is clear that it isn’t enough just to focus on and criticise the system’s strategic structures. It is

also necessary to be conscious of, criticise and challenge the discourses that are connected to the lifeworld perspective, which in itself forms the basis of a lack of understanding and leads to actions that are offensive.

With an understanding of practice, both the efficiency-related and the expert-related discourses set up conditions and frames that seem preventive to the understanding-related communication that is represented by the caring and communicative-related discourses. Those actions that are efficiency-related counteract the chances for understanding-related communication to succeed and thus favour neither learning nor the human encounter, since much of that which is emphasised as being essential takes time and requires continuity. In a similar way, actions that are governed by the power of knowledge and the departmentalisation of work also have a similar effect, so that they obstruct a learning that is built on relationships, community and symmetry. There is reason to say that both the efficiency and the expert discourses undermine study of the ethics of human encounters within the arenas of nursing education – not least because the possibilities for integration between teaching and supervision are prevented. When teachers and supervisors start out from two different traditions of knowledge, which are not integrated, it follows that the students encounter duplicity in their education that can give rise to both anxiety and frustration.

In addition, the efficiency and expert discourses seem to prevent learning, which also leads to tense inter-discursive relations between the egocentric and the ethnocentric discourses. This is because they represent values of inequality, injustices and self- and group centring that are not in tune with a solidarity that should embrace everyone. Besides that, the discourses in question undermine the education and often mediate and constitute values that have undesirable consequences for both learning and the human encounter.

What is therefore serious is that the values that are considered to be favourable and dynamic and which are basic for intended understanding are obstructed and undermined. That is not to say that care and communicative discourses are totally repressed, as this is not the case. In every practice under the influence of strategic structures, understanding-related forms of action also occur as a counter-balancing power. Such actions challenge and obstruct the strategic structures in a way can be seen as an attempt to reconstruct the lifeworld-based communication. This challenging and obstructing can appear in different ways and it is important to remind ourselves of the impossibility of dealing with more than one discourse at

a time. It means that in every action, a choice of priority is available as an inter-discursive change.

The different discourses contain different dynamics for such a challenge and the one that accommodates more of those qualities is the communicative discourse. In saying this I don't mean that the care discourse lacks qualities for challenge – but it doesn't have the same 'built in' potential for challenge as the communicative discourse. At the core of the communicative discourse lie the seeds of challenge that are based on respect and the recognition of other people, which doesn't exclude that certain patterns of action must be criticised.

The role of the institutions of the welfare state is to professionally manage the duplicity in pursuing human-based education and care in public auspices. In order to meet the demand for cognitive understanding-based actions and at the same time act in accordance with the norms, rules and demands that the social system has instituted, there is a risk that the actions of pragmatic rationality will have undesirable consequences. An awareness of inter-discursive relations and their potential for change can be juxtaposed to this. In starting out from the inter-discursive relations, it also appears that the discourses must co-operate and support each another. At the same time as no-one expects that institutional activities in late-modern society can work without structure and efficiency, it is neither possible nor desirable to think in terms of some form of de-professionalism or de-academising of nursing education in Sweden. What can be hoped for is a reconstruction that allows conditions that can facilitate all the activities within professional education. What is especially hoped for through this dissertation is a reconstruction or re-theorising of the 'pedagogy of the ethics of human encounters' into an integrated and critical professional education.

A Deliberative and Challenging Pedagogy in Human Encounter

In considering that different discourses represent different values, some can certainly be regarded as being better than others to form a basis for the study of the ethics of human encounters. It is with this understanding that I suggest that the care-related – and the communicative discourses together become the linchpins of an education that leans towards good professional encounters. Both discourses are central and important and caring and respect make up complementary values that can be brought together with help of the concept of solidarity.

For long time, both Dewey⁶ and Durkheim⁷, have emphasised the importance of education in enhancing people's prospects for solidarity and democracy. Even if Habermas hasn't been explicit about the pedagogics, it is possible to see how his thoughts about communicative action, moral discourse and deliberative democracy, together with the ethics of care, can form the basis of solidarity and new conditions in the education of professionals. In the pedagogic context, the act of solidarity is a practice that affirms, pays attention to, safeguards and challenges and thus leads to creativity and a legitimacy of pluralism. To encourage and challenge each other means to be engaged, take responsibility and exercise solidarity in pedagogic practice. In this way the pedagogic actions that contribute to interesting, encouraging and challenging education can also be seen as actions that, apart from contributing to new experiences, also mediate and constitute care, solidarity and responsibility. This is a pedagogy that in its actions, choices and priorities also supports solidarity and constitutes a continuous challenge to those discourses with completely different values or that seem to be a hindrance to the understanding of the ethics of human encounters.

To conclude, you can say that a 'deliberative pedagogy' with solidarity as its base, makes it possible to integrate life experiences, professional experiences and scientific theoretical experiences in a way that is relevant within the field of professional education. By talking, listening, narrating, questioning, answering, conversing, consulting, discussing, arguing and trying to reach a mutual understanding of knowledge and values, solidarity can consequently be realised. A pedagogic practice that affirms uniqueness, safeguards plurality and brings about encounters where people are invited to develop their viewpoints, discard judgements and create meaning, is also a pedagogic that works towards the form of collective solidarity that Durkheim called social solidarity.⁸ It will be seen that it is mainly through its form that deliberative pedagogy is so pioneering, partly because it depends on being able to manage, dissect and integrate different knowledge content in a qualified way and partly because the form of learning in itself mediates and constitutes solidarity.

With a competence that is based on deliberative learning, it becomes easier (less difficult) to balance the difficulties that professionals are often confronted with. A competence that embraces many perspectives and experiences is a better base for both considering and taking a stand in difficult situations. A panorama of experiences and confidence in the potential of

⁶ Dewey, 1916 / 1997

⁷ Durkheim, 1957 / 1992

⁸ Durkheim, 1957 / 1992

understanding-based human encounters give quite different possibilities to problem solving than being compelled to start out from individual notions. In the long run, students that undertake a professional education must also stop seeing themselves as defence counsellors. Instead, ambitions ought to be directed towards bringing about a professional culture where nobody needs to be protected from the organisational system. It should rather be the case that the organisational conditions work in a way that supports and stimulates care, respect, solidarity and democracy. The suggestion for a challenging deliberative pedagogy creates possibilities, that besides giving a better learning and teaching environment, also seriously challenge the tendencies and discourses that oppress and abandon people. A challenging and deliberative pedagogy thus creates possibilities for people to develop solidarity judgements in a society that demands just that.

To conclude, I would like to see that my suggestion for a deliberative and challenging ‘pedagogy of the ethics of human encounters’ shows that ideals can be realistic. Normative recommendations do not have to be abstract visions of the future, but can be looked upon as prioritising- and action alternatives, that despite the difficulties are possible to realise – here and now.

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