Worldview Education: Promising Perspective on the Moral Dimension of Professional Development

Keywords: worldview education, religious education, moral dimension of professional development, reflection

Précis (128 words)
This presentation informs about the preliminary findings of a qualitative research into the exploration of a personal worldview of students in Higher Professional Education in The Netherlands and its relation to the moral dimension of their professional development. The articulation of the moral dimension is complementary to the instrumental dimension which is an alternative to a slightly violent and dominant preoccupation with the instrumental dimension.

Main concepts
This study is designed to describe the role and the possible support worldview education might bring to reflection processes on the moral dimension of professional development. Worldview education aims to explore a personal worldview in relation to organized worldviews. This broader concept of worldview allows to discuss secular worldviews as well. The concept of worldview contains four elements: asking existential questions, influence of worldview on thinking and acting, moral values and its role in meaning-giving in life (Kooij, 2013). These elements are in close relation to the moral dimension of professional development.

The study of the moral dimension of professional development is a relatively new perspective in studying the process of reflection in Higher Professional Education. We assume that the moral dimension is not opposed to the instrumental, and measurable dimension of professional development, but that both dimensions should be discerned in order to integrate the moral aspects and professional aspects of professional training (Bakker, 2013). The moral dimension concerns the interpretation process of a professional on the basis of personal values.

Biesta (2012) states that we live in an age of measurement and tend to forget the ultimate objectives of education. In education he discerns three functions: qualification, socialization and *subjectification*. Crucial is the function that students learn to speak freely with their own voice and take their authentic role in society. This so called subjectification coincides with the four characteristics of worldview education and helps to explore the moral dimension of professional development.

Methodology for addressing the topic
Students from different departments like Education and Social work participated in this study on a voluntarily basis. They chose to attend our half-year course on Philosophy, World Religions and Spirituality. In this course students are asked to describe their own personal worldview by answering relevant open questions. Three times during this course students are asked to elaborate on their description. These triple reviewed descriptions are analyzed with the help of NVIVO software, according to the constant comparison method (Boeije, 2002).

Reflecting on the reviews of the drafts visualizes their development in terms of worldview and moral dimension of professional development. In our analysis we have three steps. First of all,

we focus on the personal wording students use in answering existential questions. Secondly, we precisely describe the development in vocabulary students explore in their personal worldview. Thirdly, we analyze the relation between this personal world view and its impact on the professional life.

Our goal is not to demonstrate that worldview education has a direct effect on the moral dimension of professional development. We choose in this stage of our research to describe what students have explored so far in their personal worldview descriptions.

Sources grounding the presentation

The interest for the moral dimension of profession is rooted in the theory of Habermas (1981), articulating the confrontation of the system and the life worlds of professionals. This idea of confrontation is elaborated upon by Kunneman (2006) resulting in a conceptualization of the moral dimension of profession. This moral dimension is situated in the interaction between the personal well-being, the professional context and the societal context. This interaction brings about moral and existential questions which are not part of dialogue within the system world like for example institutions of education, and welfare work. Kunneman (2006) states that in these institutions professionals should construct a new narrative, a common ground to discuss these questions. Asking and discussing these questions is the beginning of an existential learning process and of giving sense.

This existential learning as form of reflection is theoretically linked to what is called the personal aspect of professional development. Previous researches on reflection, articulating the personal aspect, reported that personal competencies, skills and attitudes are closely related to the beliefs, the identity and spiritual dimension of a person (Korthagen 2004). Central in this approach of reflection is the assumption that professional behavior is connected to deeper layers within a person (Meijer, Korthagen and Vasalos 2009). In another way Illeris (2004) showed that transformative learning is an extensive type of learning regarding cognitive and emotional dimensions. Both approaches try to conceptualize transformation in reflection processes.

Personal backgrounds (Bullough 2008) and biographical perspectives (Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe 1994) play a pivotal role in daily practices of professionals. Parallel to this insight is that professional development should go along with student's reflections concerning their biography, their values and a worldview-in-progress constituting their overall identity, according to the Dialogical Self Theory of Hermans (2010). This identity can be conceived of as being continuously (de- and re-)constructed and composed of different I-positions. This dialogical approach of the concept of identity facilitates students facing and exploring moral dilemmas or tensions in their work (Akkerman & Meijer 2011). These studies show in different ways the complexity of processes of reflection in professional development.

It could be argued that, based on our pilot study, worldview education adds a promising perspective on the way reflection stimulates aspects of transformative learning in both dimensions of professional development in a slightly violent context focusing on the instrumentality of education.

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