Formation in higher education: Towards professional responsibility as deliberative praxis. Paper presented at NERA 2014
Network: Higher Education

Tomas Englund, Örebro university, Sweden tomas. englund@oru.se &
Tone Dyrdal Solbrekke, University of Oslo, Norway t.d.solbrekke@iped.uio.no

Abstract: There is a current trend to see higher education primarily in terms of its utilitarian and economic role and its ability to deliver employable candidates to society. In this paper we seek to challenge such narrow understanding. Drawing on a previous analysis on how the current expansion of the New Public Management ‘logic of accountability’ increasingly intruding the governance of higher education, is threatening the moral dimension of professional responsibility – we will suggest ways to change and qualify the inner work of higher education in two directions to meet this threat: 1) to make (more) use of deliberative communication giving room for argumentation on issues seen from different perspectives and 2) to apply the use of deliberative communication not only in the theoretical, higher education seminars but also in the in-service practice of how to act in line with professional responsibility.

Introduction
In this paper we will provide a theoretical and conceptual development of a pedagogical/didactic approach that encourage a broad understanding of the purpose of higher education with regards to qualifying for professional work.

Educating for the professional mandate of today
The manner in which highly educated professionals understand their professional mandate and live out their professional responsibility in practice has an impact on everyone (Scott 2005). Thus, the choices made for and by higher education, and the direction in which these societal institutions move, can hardly be considered inconsequential. The future of higher education is essential, not only to students and academics, but to society at large –
particularly at a time when the identity of higher education institutions, as individual entities and as a group, is somewhat “fluid” (Bauman 2000, Sugrue 2008).

Both nationally and internationally, the most visible change in higher education institutions is the shift from an elite to a mass higher education system. There is also a structural and functional merging between the foci in graduate programs in research-oriented universities and the undergraduate programs at polytechnical colleges/universities (Brint 2002, Karseth 2006, Skodvin & Nerdrum 2000). The universities are more obviously geared towards the needs of professional work and business life, and university colleges are more influenced by academic values and research claims (Terum 2006). Another emerging characteristic in the field of higher education is the need for each institution to appear as unique and attractive in a highly competitive higher education market. In the same way that individuals in our time are given the freedom to construct their own individual learning trajectories, realize themselves and transform themselves into an interesting commodity for the work market, higher education institutions must create interesting profiles in order to attract enough students as well as public and private funding for research (Kumolainen 2006; Rinne, Jauhiainen & Koivula 2013).

The ability to act in a professionally responsible manner in complex, unique and uncertain situations with conflicting values and ethical stances should be at the heart of professional practice (May 1996, Sockett 1993). This also implies that the individual professional, when encountering risk and uncertainty in his or her daily tasks, must employ his or her own capacity for critical reflection and take immediate moral and responsible decisions, while at the same time linking his or her personal specialized knowledge to a collective commitment (Bauman 2000). However, we know that it can be difficult to convince the “good forces” to work together. Examples of the ignorance of the moral and social component embedded in professional responsibility abound. International as well as national fraud scandals in business as well as science remind us not to take for granted that all professionals live up to the responsibility implied in their contract with society. There are physicians who take active part in doping of athletes, and central leaders in business who, spouting a market-oriented rhetoric, legitimize sky-high salaries and options contracts that are perceived by many as unethical. How, then, do we as a society ensure that we have qualified professionals with
the kind of intellectual and cultural capital necessary to make *wise* decisions in light of the challenges of the 21st century (Scott 2005, Sullivan & Rosin 2008)? Higher education has a specific responsibility in this context – a responsibility which is reflected in the politically defined goal for higher education (Bergan, Harkavy & van’t Land 2013 (eds)).

We mean that professional responsibility must be based in a reflective, responsible, professional and competent ability to act; the ability to collaborate with others; being open and willing to listen to multiple and contesting meanings while also being able to critically engage in and contribute to disciplinary and public discourses. This implies that faculties with professional programs must be responsive to the requirements of the wider society and work life, while also encouraging reflective and critical dialogues about the scientific and moral bases of professional practice including the broader societal and civic responsibility (Barnett 1997, Sullivan 2005). They have to emphasize actions that stimulate students’ ability to evaluate critically disciplinary knowledge, but also the underlying ideas and norms of this knowledge. Additionally, students must be given the opportunity not just to develop his or her critical thinking, but also to live out a critical attitude in practice (Barnett 1990). They should be helped to see and make up their minds about the implications of the societal contract of a professional mandate; the unwritten *contract* with society that depends on reciprocal trust and good faith between the professionals and the public, which obliges the professionals to dedicate their special and esoteric knowledge to the services of the members of the society before their personal economic interest (Durkheim 1899, Bertilsson 1990, Christoffersen 2005, Freidson 2001, Sullivan 2005). Developing such a critical consciousness of professional responsibility requires arenas in which articulation and qualitative assessments of the nature of the moral obligations in professional responsibility are regularly included in the agenda (Barnett 1997).

*Towards professional responsibility through deliberative communication*

We point to the responsibility faculties have for creating learning situations in which both students and themselves, develop abilities to handle multiple conflicts by arguing for the ‘best practice’ in their work. This kind of abilities is not learned and encouraged by merely adapting predefined authoritative knowledge and act in accordance with standardized rules. Rather, professional codes of conduct have to be articulated and critically deliberated on in higher
education as well as in social practices; examined, deconstructed and reconstructed on the basis of moral implications of current professional mandates (Englund & Solbrekke 2011, Solbrekke & Englund 2011, Sugrue & Solbrekke eds 2011). Our understanding of professional responsibility is inspired by our elaboration of the normative obligations of professionals’ in current societies starting from Durkheim’s ideas in Professional Ethics and Civic Morals (1899/1957) posing the problem of how to locate the professionals, Parsons’ (1951, 1968) emphasis on the adequate education of being able to fulfill their ‘normative obligation of professions’ as well as more recent perspectives on the implications of professionals’ moral and civic responsibilities in current societies (Barnett 1997; May 1996;, Sullivan 2005; Sullivan & Rosin 2008, cf. Englund 2002, Solbrekke 2007).

Thus, we are primarily interested in and focused upon the moral dimension of professionalism and wish to indicate the need of giving professional education both a broader humanistic and social science-based foundation and to give room for dissensus and deliberation on controversial issues related to professional praxis and in higher education (Delanty 2001; Nussbaum 2010). The main contribution in our paper will be a pedagogical approach that contributes to formation of students for the requirements of current professional work and implied responsibilities. For this purpose we build on Englund’s idea of deliberative communication (2006, 2008).

Deliberative communication stands for communication in which different opinions and values can be set against each other. It implies an endeavor by each individual to develop his or her view by listening, deliberating, seeking arguments and valuing, coupled to a collective and cooperative endeavor to find values and norms which everyone can accept, at the same time as pluralism is acknowledged. We hereby present a characterization of deliberative communication (originally developed in Swedish 2000/2001, in English in 2006 in Journal of Curriculum Studies):

Deliberative communication implies communication in which

a. different views are confronted with one another and arguments for these different views are given time and space and are articulated and presented (cf. Habermas 1987, 1996, Gutmann & Thompson 1996);
b. there is tolerance and respect for the concrete other and participants learn to listen to the other person’s argument (Habermas 1987, 1996, Benhabib 1992);
c. elements of collective will formation are present, i.e. an endeavour to reach consensus or at least temporary agreements and/or to draw attention to differences (Habermas 1987, 1996).
d. authorities/traditional views (represented, for example, by parents and tradition) can be questioned and there are opportunities to challenge one’s own tradition (Gutmann 1987, Nussbaum 1997);
e. there is scope for students to communicate and deliberate without teacher control, i.e. for argumentative discussions between students with the aim of solving problems or shedding light on them from different points of view.

According to the intention, deliberative communication may encourage students to reason and argue for their own stances beyond merely referring to an authoritative teacher or literature/textbook, and they learn to listen to the viewpoints of others and their moral considerations. Dilemmas in future work practice may be put on the agenda and discussed in light of a broader societal responsibility. Questions like; what does it imply when we say that professional work is based on trust from society? What does it mean to say that the relation between the needs of an individual and society has to be taken care of? What do we mean by “whistleblowing”? How should a whistleblower act and what should we expect from each individual professional? In approaching such issues, we may create an atmosphere and strategies for looking “behind” the implications of the normative ideals of professional responsibility (Solbrekke 2007).

As Sullivan (2005) notes, there are three clusters of values in professional education: (1) the values of the academy, (2) the values of professional practice and (3) the ethical-social values of professional identity. This third set of values emphasizes the professional’s integrity, sense of direction, and ability to assume responsibility for the quality of his or her own work and the standards associated with the field of practice. These values ground professional education in a broader conception of the purpose of the profession and the ideals to which it aspires, connecting professional education directly with the field’s social contract … “this blending of the normative and the technical is of the essence of good work” (Sullivan 2005, p. 29). But, as Sullivan notes, it is also this third dimension of professional education that generally receives the least attention in
the formal curriculum. As we understand the problem, this third set of values has to be integrated with the other two, first by giving ethical-social values a (more) prominent place within the academy and secondly by promoting encounters between professionals in practice and students in professional programs – in concrete terms, by creating arenas in academia where representatives of these two groups meet each other for deliberations. Giving ethical-social values a more prominent place within academia is of course a challenge to the often rational courses, but this also has to be supplemented by the encounters mentioned: where and when professional practitioners can come back in to the university and where and when they can confront the students and of course the university teachers.

By iterative deliberating over crucial issues, mutual and carefully-balanced consideration of different alternatives in professional education and professional practice, students – and from time to time together with professional practitioners - will be given opportunities to create, pronounce and develop their meanings, challenge the meanings of each other and perhaps also change their meanings persuaded by deliberative communication. Students (and practitioners) will also be given the chance to develop their judgement abilities and thereby learn that there always are possible different ways of performative language settings and thereby categorizing with different consequences, different evaluations, different interpretations in many cases and that these situations have to be handled with professional responsibility.

*Professional responsibility in deliberative praxis*

To specify what we are aiming at, and what we define as formation of and for professional responsibility, we draw on and elaborate arguments developed in the article *Bringing professional responsibility back in* (Solbrekke & Englund 2011) and the book chapter *Professional responsibility under pressure* (Englund & Solbrekke 2011). We argue that current practices of New Public Management have thrusted higher education institutions into practices that favor the logic of ‘accountability’ at the expense of professional ‘responsibility”. In this paper we move the focus to how students can be stimulated to understand and practice the tension between these two logics. We suggest that deliberative communication may support students (future professionals) to become knowledgeable and aware of tensions and dilemmas in their work as professionals - not least the tension between the two logics of accountability and professional responsibility that
current academics and other professionals must live with (Sugrue & Solbrekke (eds) 2011).

Conscious of the risk of oversimplifying, we have nevertheless, in Table 1, summarised the two concepts, indicating their logics and implications in use. For the purposes of analysis and our ongoing discussion, we construct two categories which are polarised, yet not to be comprehended as static and final definitions. They should be understood, rather, as evolved and evolving in different systems of logic that may change over time.

Table 1. The logics and implications of professional responsibility and accountability. (Solbrekke & Englund, 2011, p. 855):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Responsibility</th>
<th>Professional) Accountability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>based in professional mandate</td>
<td>defined by current governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>situated judgement</td>
<td>standardised by contract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trust</td>
<td>control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>moral rationale</td>
<td>economic/legal rationale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>internal evaluation</td>
<td>external auditing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negotiated standards</td>
<td>predetermined indicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>implicit language</td>
<td>transparent language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>framed by professions</td>
<td>framed by political goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relative autonomy and</td>
<td>compliance with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personally inescapable</td>
<td>employer’s/politicians’ decisions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We argue that becoming aware of and capable of deliberating and analyzing the consequences of these different logics seems to be one necessary component of a future professionalism. Professional responsibility asks for no less. We argue for ways of working that encourage a praxis captured in Greek conceptualization of praxis and its close relative phronesis as something more than mere enactment of a professional role. Elaboration of praxis and praxis artistry by Higgs, Mcallister & Whiteford’s (2009) are particularly useful in this regard as they combine critical and ethical reflection with other essential ingredients such as expertise, humanity, morality and finesse, all of which are embodied in high-quality professional practice.
We will argue that if higher education of professionals and professional development welcomes and encourages practices of deliberative communication, as sketched out, professional work, by what might be called discretionary specialization involving subjective judgement and tailored decisions to different circumstances will have higher chances to fulfil the highest levels of professional responsibility to be reached (Freidson 2001, cf. Englund & Solbrekke 2011). Thus, students may in this way develop capacities to live out professional responsibility in practice – a practice that reaches beyond a narrow understanding of employability.

References
Englund, Tomas (2008): The university as an encounter for deliberative communication. Creating cultural citizenship and professional responsibility. Utbildning & Demokrati 17(2), 97-114