

## THEME: Educating towards civic and professional responsibility

### The future of higher education?

This special issue of *Education & Democracy – Journal of Didactics and Educational Policy* (in Swedish: *Utbildning & Demokrati – tidskrift för didaktik och utbildningspolitik*) is dedicated to the challenges raised by current conditions in higher education when it comes to promoting civic and professional responsibility. The four articles emerged from a collaboration between research centres in Örebro and Oslo, initiated at the NERA Conference in Copenhagen in 2003, which has been followed up with seminar meetings and presentations, most recently at the NERA Conference in Copenhagen and the ISA Conference in Oslo, both in 2008 (see below). Our shared ambition has been to interrogate and critically discuss central aspects of the recent development of mass higher education, with regard to its role in educating towards engaged citizenship and professional responsibility. The cases are situated in a Scandinavian context, yet discussed in relation to the influence of European higher education policy.

At a time when the dominant language concerning the functions of our universities emphasizes economic development, and the primary vision is that higher education institutions should be adaptive to consumers and give priority to entrepreneurship and market orientation (Olsen and Maassen 2007), questions related to the cultural and normative dimension of such institutions are seen by many as rather outdated and of restricted relevance to higher education today. Market behaviour, as Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades point out, has come to “permeate almost *all* aspects of colleges and universities from research to instruction, including administration” (2004, p. 305). Furthermore, in the European context, employability has become the primary quest of higher education (Karseth 2006).

However, there are voices that critically dispute this development and advocate that higher education should serve the public good by

creating an educated citizenry (NCPI 2002). As writers such as Ronald Barnett (2003), Gerard Delanty (2001) and William Sullivan (2005) argue, the role of higher education should be to educate towards critical citizenship and civic professionalism. The authors of this special issue share that ambition. We support the role of higher education in shaping both civic and professional responsibility, as well as in cultivating technological and cultural forms of citizenship, by stressing the need for universities to be key actors in the public sphere. In that respect, we think it is worth revisiting the classical ideas of professionalism and considering in what ways values such as civic engagement and social responsibilities, as defined in social trustee professionalism, may be adapted to the demands of contemporary democratic societies (Brint and Levy 1999). Reviving the moral base of professionalism (Sockett 1993, May 1996) in terms of “social trustee” values (Brint 1994) implies that we must critically examine and reconceptualize its meaning under today’s conditions of plurality and fluidity (Barnett 2003, Bauman 2000). There may be merit in returning to the ideas of Durkheim and Parsons on the normative dimension of solidarity and collectivity orientation, without indulging in feelings of nostalgia for the traditional ideas of professionalism. Thus, it might be of value to reinvent old orthodoxies, but in new and creative ways that both resonate with and enlighten contemporary discourses and deliberative judgements in more vital and vibrant ways, beyond “slide-rule” decision-making (Solbrekke 2007).

This implies that institutions of higher education need to create spaces of disagreement and dissensus as well as critical reflection, and calls for a capacity to be open to multiple understandings and to engage, though critically, with them. Furthermore, enabling students to engage in active argumentation, thereby fostering judgement ability, requires arenas that stimulate the active formation of new narratives of individual and collective identity and responsibility. Such an approach is relevant to professional as well as liberal programmes, and assumes a perspective on teaching that emphasizes student formation and pedagogies of engagement (cf. Sullivan & Rosin 2008). More tangibly, professional education has to cultivate the individual’s intentionality of actions by articulating a profession’s moral purposes and linking moral action and reasoning with the responsibility for knowing and using such knowledge in the service of public interests (Hoshmand 1998).

The four articles in this issue approach higher education’s role in educating towards civic and professional responsibility through both theoretical/conceptual and empirical prisms. In PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION – AN INQUIRY

FROM A STANDPOINT OF PRAGMATISM AND DISCOURSE THEORY, *Carsten Ljunggren & Ingrid Unemar Öst* discuss and analyse different notions of professional responsibility in higher education. In the first part of their article, the authors construct a theoretical conception of professional responsibility, which is later used as a basis for an analysis of Swedish educational policy. This theoretical conception suggests that professional responsibility can be understood in terms of self-reflexivity and personal responsibility, which is to say that individuality and personal aspects of acting and judging are decisive aspects of professional responsibility. Critically based research, referred to in the article, indicates that such a conception is opposed to conceptions of professional responsibility and to the recent instrumental development of higher education policy. Ljunggren and Unemar Öst's analysis, performed in the second part of the article, is an attempt to answer questions about whether Swedish educational policy is contributing to such an instrumentalization. They answer these questions by discussing four different educational discourses within the policy domain during the period 1992–2007 – the classical academic discourse, the discourse of *Bildung*, the discourse of democracy and the discourse of economic globalization. The authors pay particular attention to the guidelines for action which these discourses provide; the different cultural lifestyles which life in higher education refers to, and what being at university means in terms of responsibility within each discourse. At the beginning of the 1990s and the 21st century, the authors observe a discursive domain filled with variations in language use, giving rise to both conflicts and openness regarding the meaning of higher education and professional responsibility. The closer they get to 2007, however, the more this variation in language use is reduced, and the narrower the conceptions they find – largely owing to Swedish educational policy adopting the language use of the Bologna process. Consequently, according to Ljunggren and Unemar Öst, there is an evident tendency for the discourse of economic globalization to hegemonize language use within this domain.

In her republished article *QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS FOR THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA: A NEW INSTRUMENTALISM OR "MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING"?* *Berit Karseth* explores the development of qualifications frameworks as a key element in the Bologna process. By setting up descriptors of learning outcomes, a European qualifications framework is intended as an instrument that will enable Europe to coordinate and exchange qualifications. Karseth concludes that the idea of a qualifications framework based on measurable learning outcomes represents a turn towards an instrumental curriculum approach in higher education, in contrast to a traditional curriculum approach

which foregrounds disciplinary content and its mastery. Karseth also analyses the proposal for a national qualifications framework in Norway and institutional responses to it. Despite general support for the idea, the analysis shows that institutions question the possibility of a qualifications framework that fits all types of educational programmes. Drawing on institutional theory, the author doubts the possible impact of qualifications frameworks in higher education. This article was first published in the journal *Learning and Teaching: The International Journal of Higher Education and Social Sciences (LATISS)* 2008, vol. 1, no. 2. The cited special issue of *LATISS*, which contains three articles and an interview, is a contribution to a critical assessment of the Bologna process as it nears its target date for completion. It looks at how the Bologna process came about, and how it works as a new form of governance in Europe. We are grateful for the generosity of the publishers Berghahn in giving us permission to republish Karseth's article.

The discussion followed up in *Tone Dyrdal Solbrekke's* article *EDUCATING FOR PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY – A NORMATIVE DIMENSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION* proceeds from the politically defined purpose of higher education institutions: to educate prospective professionals for both practical and technical knowledge *and* civic engagement in public welfare. The author argues that, through its implementation of the Bologna process and an “eagerness” to make Norwegian higher education more efficient in order to provide society with technical expertise and “employable” professionals, there seems to be a neglect of the second of these responsibilities, that of fostering civic engagement in public welfare. While more structured learning processes, closer follow-up of students, and more varied forms of teaching and assessment are considered an improvement in terms of students' learning outcomes, modularization of programmes and overload of compulsory tasks push students towards instrumental learning for the purpose of recalling and reproducing the knowledge needed to pass exams. Activities such as critical reading and non-compulsory group discussions on issues concerning the moral and societal dimension of professional responsibility are given lower priority. Other studies show, however, that many students express a wish to learn about the moral implications of future professional responsibility. The challenge for higher education, then, is to ask how academics can help students to keep their motivation alive and also to further develop it into a continuous motivation to make moral and societal contributions that is robust enough to endure in the face of the complex and contesting claims of professional work. How can we balance the more instrumental need for a “productive”, skilled, flexible and competitive vocationally oriented student, and the

need to foster the moral consciousness of professional responsibility? It is suggested that a teaching approach based on the “model” of deliberative communication provides an appropriate means of increasing moral consciousness of professional responsibility.

The model of deliberative communication is elaborated in *Tomas Englund's* THE UNIVERSITY AS AN ENCOUNTER FOR DELIBERATIVE COMMUNICATION CREATING CULTURAL CITIZENSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY. The education of professionals in higher education institutions is a focal point for the different interests and social forces behind the role of the universities in societal change. In the light of rapid and far-reaching changes in society, such as changing conditions for communication, a growing need for reflexivity etc., together with the evolution of higher education into a mass education system aimed at producing a suitable labour force and faced with the pressures of an “academic capitalism”, we may ask what kinds of tasks are given priority in the higher education system. One question that can be raised is whether the university should have a major role to play in developing “professional ethics and civic morals” or, to put it another way, should university studies be a kind of citizenship and moral education and, if so, how? Recently the idea of deliberative communication has been brought into focus, standing for communication in which different opinions and values can be set against each other in educational settings. The concept implies an endeavour by each individual to develop his or her view by listening, deliberating, seeking arguments and valuing, coupled to a collective and cooperative endeavour to find values and norms which everyone can accept, at the same time as pluralism is acknowledged. Within higher education, deliberative communication might explicitly be used to develop professional responsibility and to analyse consequences of different ways of solving problems. To what extent are and can universities become public spaces for encounters addressing controversial questions of how to solve different problems and analyse different ways of professional acting?

As mentioned above, the four articles have – in addition to the regular peer-review process of the journal – been discussed at two international conferences, with commentaries by the three critical readers, who also present their responses in this issue (see presentation below). The papers were first presented and discussed at the annual NERA (Nordic Educational Research Association) Conference in Copenhagen in March 2008, within the network on Higher Education and Professional Development, and then at the 5th Interim Conference of the International Sociological Association: “Sociology of Professional Groups. Challenges to professionalism: Limits and benefits of the professional model”, at Oslo University College in Oslo, Norway,

in September 2008. The last conference also deserves particular mention, in view of the pioneering work undertaken for many years at the Centre for the Study of Professions at Oslo University College. The Centre was formally opened in 1999 to promote research and critical reflection within the study of professions, and has recently published an anthology (in Norwegian, 450 pages) on studying professions (Molander and Terum eds 2008).

We, the authors of the four articles in this issue, are very glad to be able to present commentaries on our articles from three especially invited commentators. In our view, they enrich the perspectives of the articles and, by introducing critical comments, underline the need for a debate on the purposes of higher education. *Per Gerrevall* from the Department of Education, Växjö University, has worked with questions of professionalism and professional competence from a variety of angles over a period of many years. *Monika Nerland* from the Institute of Educational Research, University of Oslo, Norway, has for many years worked within the recently completed Pro-Learn Project (Professional Learning in a Changing Society). *Ciaran Sugrue* is currently employed as a Reader in School Leadership and School Improvement at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, and was most recently Director of Postgraduate Studies in Education at St Patrick's College, Dublin City University. He has also participated in a number of EU-funded international comparative research projects. The highly informed and critical readings and comments of our three commentators are of immense value and a great stimulus to us as researchers. Inspired by their insights, we are encouraged to engage in further studies of the goals and dynamics of the 21st Century's higher educational institutions as intellectual, moral and political civic institutions actively engaged in the maintenance and development of a genuinely deliberative democracy.

*Tomas Englund, Berit Karseth, Carsten Ljunggren,  
Tone Dyrdal-Solbrekke & Ingrid Unemar-Öst*

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