

On Teachers' Interpretations of Responsibility in a Norwegian Language Training Programme

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate how teachers carry out their professional responsibility in daily teaching. It is conducted at a school that offers language training programs for adult immigrants and refugees. The data is based on participant observation in classrooms and interviews with the teachers. The findings indicate that a clear consciousness of the role of a teacher seems to be a “governing principle” for the practice of professional responsibility, whether the role concerns being accountable regarding the teacher’s contract with the greater society or moral considerations in the daily student and teacher interaction.

Keywords: *teachers’ responsibility, accountability, moral, adult immigrant and refugee students*

1. Introduction

Traditionally, a profession will be defined partly in terms of the responsibility it involves. The teacher’s professional responsibility includes accountability stipulated by a mandate rooted in educational laws and educational objectives. The teacher is required to be accountable to the public and to deliver educational results in line with the objectives and expectations in the curriculum (Hopmann, 2008). Additionally, a teacher’s professional responsibility involves a moral responsibility within the student-teacher interaction (Englund & Solbrekke, 2011; Kristiansen, 2005). The latter is often manifested in various daily, face-to-face meetings in the classroom. The meetings require autonomy on the part of the teacher and the exercising of discretionary

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judgment (Hjort et al., 2018). In this article I will explore two specific understandings of professional responsibility. First, the requirement to give an account of something to someone (Molander et al., 2012) and second, a challenge to be morally responsible and to respond to the various moral demands that arise in the daily interaction with the students (Buber, 1978; Løgstrup, 1971). The origin of the accountability requirements is politically motivated and often controlled by various bureaucratic standards, tests, and procedures (Grimen, 2008). While accountability is predefined and imposed, moral responsibility is guided by the profession's guidelines and the individual teacher's professional expertise and exercise of discretion (Colnerud, 2017; Grimen & Molander, 2008). To know what you are accountable for can give priority and direction to the work. For instance, a teacher could put considerable effort into producing the best student test results. However, teaching is not "... a technical machinery but an encounter between human beings" (Biesta, 2014, p. 23). In these daily encounters there are situations that call for moral considerations. Often, such considerations arise suddenly in the face-to-face interaction in the classroom and tend to disturb the planned order (Afdal et al., 2014). In a busy school day and with a diverse group of students, the teachers could feel a tension between being accountable for the purpose of the education and caring for the individual student's needs.

This study took place in a school where Norwegian language instruction was given to adult immigrants and refugee students from all over the world. The students vary in terms of age, former educational training, and stages of the learning process. They don't necessarily follow semesters from beginning to end but can start or finish at different times. A single classroom holds students who participated on either side in previous conflicts in their respective homelands. Now they are students in the same classroom with a common goal, namely, to learn Norwegian. Because this was a very international group of students, events that happened in remote geographic locations could affect the teaching and touch individual lives. A bombing attack in Somalia, for example, caused the death of a cousin of one of the students. Additionally, students with refugee backgrounds might carry traumatic experiences that could influence the learning process (Kjellberg, 2015; Thorud & Kolstad, 2006; Varvin, 2003). The school characteristics and the heterogeneity of the group of students call for educational flexibility (Hilt, 2016). In addition, many students are new in Norway and might have a small network, so the teacher becomes a vital person in students' lives (Guribye & Hidle, 2013). The school and the students' international connections and the diversity with respect to the age, previous education, cultural and religious background, and experiences might sharpen the teacher's awareness of their role and their practice of professional responsibility.

Several educational research studies underline the role of the teacher and the quality of their professional work in terms of improving the students' learning and creating a supportive classroom atmosphere (Cornelius-White, 2007; Hattie, 2009; Jackson et al., 1993; Jacobsen & Christiansen, 2003; Nordenbo et al., 2008). A positive student-teacher interaction plays a significant role in integrating students with an immigrant background

(OECD, 2019). The teacher's vital role in teaching processes and for nurturing a positive learning environment. constitutes an interesting field of investigation with an eye to examining how the teachers perceive and practise their professional responsibility. In a study conducted in a school similar to the one in this study, Guribye and Hidle (2013) present the teacher's role as a helper and describe how during the day the teacher took part in various kinds of helping operations (Guribye & Hidle, 2013). The findings may indicate a correlation between the way in which the teacher exercises his or her professional responsibility and their perception of their teaching role. The research question for this study is: How do teachers understand their professional role and responsibility? How do they weigh various concerns in different challenging teaching situations?

In the following, there will be a presentation of the study's "theoretical optic", namely an interpretation of professional responsibility and the function of teaching.

2. Professional responsibility: To be accountable and morally responsible

The term accountability is associated with various school reforms that took place in Norway after the 2000s (Dahl, 2016; St.meldn. nr. 030 (2003-2004)). The reforms entailed a new management rationale inspired by New Public Management and was part of an international trend (Hopmann, 2008; OECD, 2005). The intention was to improve the governing of the teaching professions' work by making it more efficient, transparent, more oriented toward goals and to assessment of the learning outcomes (Englund & Dyrdal Solbrekke, 2011; Evers & Kneyber, 2014).

The term accountability remains ambiguous and multifaceted with multiple meanings (Holloway et al., 2017). Molander, Grimen and Eriksen (2012) present accountability as a relation where someone who is "accountable" is delegated discretionary power and has an obligation to justify his or her conduct to someone who can demand justification and who is entitled to get an answer (Molander et al., 2012, p. 215). Teachers should be accountable to the public when it comes to the pupils' competencies, achievements, and learning outcomes. A consequence is a more bureaucratic control from above – from the government and the public. However, the teacher should also be loyal to the students. Dilemmas may arise between the requirements (Dahl, 2016, pp. 68-72; Smeby & Mausestagen, 2017).

The language teachers in the study are accountable for offering the students excellent language skills and knowledge of Norwegian culture and community life. According to the National Curriculum in Norwegian Language and Social Studies for Adult Immigrants (2012), the teaching should support the individual students' potentials and resources and enable them to participate in professional and community life. Some of these achievements can be tested against rather exact standards, while the measurement of other aims, such as the support of the individual student's potential, is much more challenging.

The understanding of moral responsibility is inspired by the thinking of the philosophers Knud E. Løgstrup and Martin Buber who underline the individual's

freedom to respond and their capacity to be responsible. Through phenomenological analyses, Løgstrup (1971) describes ethical phenomena in interpersonal life such as trust, care, and sincerity. Human beings live in relationships of mutual dependence, which implies that every person bears some responsibility for the quality of another's life. The ethical demand to take care is "interwoven" into human existence, and moral demands are an integrated part of social life and of human existence (Løgstrup, 1976, p. 48; Løgstrup, 1971, p. 25). From a philosophical anthropological approach, Buber (1978) attributes responsibility to human responsiveness. An attentive person will enter a situation and respond to what is reaching out to him or her. "The idea of responsibility," he writes, "... is to be brought back ... into the lived life". Responsibility is not an abstract principle; it is about responding. "Responding to what? To what happens to one, to what is seen, heard, and felt" (Buber, 1978, p. 16). Buber and Løgstrup, respectively, think that there is no formula for how to respond. In each situation the person must find out for themselves what is required (Løgstrup, 1971, p. 23). Buber writes that each situation is unique, and the reaction to what reaching out will entail, demands nothing of what is in the past: "It demands presence, responsibility: it demands you" (Buber, 1978, p. 114). The moral responsibility is not of a general character: it is situated in the present, the singular and the unique situation.

To summarize, Buber and Løgstrup's description of moral responsibility directs the attention to the daily student and teacher interaction. A situation may suddenly arise that calls for a response. There is no formula for how to respond, but the teacher bears some responsibility for the quality of life of the other. Similarly, the teachers are bound by accountability requirements such as to equip students with the qualifications required to pass their final exams. In their daily work, the teachers need to negotiate between various considerations and responsibilities.

In the following, the teachers' negotiation of the various considerations will be elaborated upon in further detail, with reference to how teaching can be understood and organized.

3. Professional responsibility and the function of teaching

In his book *Good Education in an Age of Measurement* (2010), Biesta suggests three different but overlapping and intertwined functions of education: qualification, socialization, and subjectification (Biesta, 2010, p. 26). The first is the function of qualification, which involves providing the students with the knowledge, skills, and understanding needed for the world of work, and skills required for citizenship (Biesta, 2010, p. 20). For students in this study, it is about achieving sufficient qualification to enable them to succeed in the Norwegian society. The teachers are to provide qualifications in oral pronunciation, reading, writing, and listening to and interpreting messages. For the students, the curriculum requirements serve as a quality assurance that they will receive the instruction to which they are entitled.

The second primary function of education is socialization. According to Biesta (2010) the socialization function has to do with the many ways in which, through education we "... become part of particular social, cultural, and political 'orders'" (Biesta, 2010, p. 20). The socialization process could be explicit by inviting students on various excursions to parks, museums, and institutions. Additionally, there is a hidden curriculum in what happens "between the lines," where education has an implicitly socializing effect. This is expressed, for example, through the way the teaching is organized or how the teachers communicate with the students.

The third function, in contrast to the second, is not about the insertion of "new-comers" into existing orders; it is a process of subjectification. The subjectification process allows the students to become autonomous and independent in their thinking and acting (Biesta, 2010, p. 21). It is a challenge in the educational setting to provide enough space for students to cultivate and develop their humanity and resources (cf. Biesta, 2006, pp. 2, 143–144; Biesta, 2010, p.21).

The teacher's accountability role appears to be most prominent in the first teaching function and partly in the second. However, since teaching is often an interpersonal activity, moral dilemmas and considerations will be involved in all the functions. For instance, a teaching sequence in which the teacher checks the students' language skills could suddenly take a new turn and call for the teacher's moral considerations based on what happens there and then.

3.1 The atmosphere in a classroom

Originally, this theme was neither on the theory nor the research agenda, but it emerged in collection and interpretation of the data. The participatory observation contributed to an awareness of several details in the classroom which could not be directly linked to the exercise of the three teaching functions, such as teaching organization, manifestation of various structures, student and teacher interactions, or how the teacher moved in the classroom. The various manifestations created what I will describe as an atmosphere that surrounded and framed the teaching activities and vice versa. The term "atmosphere" is partly inspired by Olson and Moss (1980), who propose a link between interpersonal processes and individual motivation. Any learning atmosphere will be enhanced to the extent that motivational (individual) and interactional (interpersonal) processes are linked. Positive cognitive and affective individual motivation linked to positive interpersonal interaction lead to learning (Olson & Moss, 1980, p. 391). In this context, it is supposed that the term atmosphere should also include organizational aspects. Nevertheless, the interpersonal interaction appears decisive when it comes to creating a supportive learning atmosphere.

4. Research approach

The research approach employed in the study is participatory observation in the classroom and interviews with the teachers. Participatory observation is considered relevant with respect to improving the researcher's awareness and sensitivity to the

cultural context and the teachers' work (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Further, the field notes from the observation could reveal questions and situations relevant to the research themes, which could be followed up and elaborated upon in the interviews with the teachers (Fangen, 2010).

The first contact was an email to the principal. He forwarded the request to the teaching staff and three teachers volunteered to take part in the study. They were all teachers in the two most advanced language classes. One of the classes had two teachers since the students had work training as part of their programme. The three teachers consented to be interviewed and accepted that participatory observation could take place in the two classes for which they were responsible.

In the processing of the project, various ethical considerations are considered in line with the recommendations of the Norwegian Data Protective Services. Data that could serve as identifiers have been anonymized and the voices on the audio recording have been erased. Data has been stored safely during the processing of the project. The field notes are treated as confidential. In the following presentation the three teachers have been assigned fictive names – Nora, Nina, and Kari. Nina and Kari are the two teachers who are working together. They all have specific qualifications in the field and several years of experience.

The collected data consist of field notes from three-week periods and transcribed interviews with the three teachers responsible for the daily language training programme in the two classes. The participatory observation began with the researcher sitting on a chair in the back of the two classrooms to examine the lived life of teachers and students during an ordinary school day. Each class consisted of roughly 20–25 students, aged between 25 and 40 years. The students quickly invited the researcher to take part in various group work and exercises. When using participant observation as a method, there is a dilemma regarding the appropriate level and type of involvement (Fangen, 2010). In this study the invitation from the students was regarded as a kind gesture and an opportunity to reflect and to deepen the understanding of what was going on in the classroom.

The field notes contained detailed descriptions of various daily events and practices and this broad information base played a fundamental role and forms the basis of the description of the atmosphere in the classroom. The process of interpreting field notes was conducted using an abductive process. The analytical work entailed movement between the distance that the theory of the project offered and the reading and rereading of the field notes (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018). Through this interplay some themes of relevance to the research question were selected. The themes were broadly formulated, which could permit further elaboration in the interviews. The following five themes formed the starting point for the interviews: the school's uniqueness and particular challenges, the organization of the school day, teaching methods and teaching content, teacher and student relationship, and reflections on teacher role and teaching philosophy. In addition, some relevant situations from the field notes were presented for further reflection in the interviews. The interviews were semi-structured.

Therefore, it was possible to repeat and elaborate on questions that were not immediately understood (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Ryen, 2002). As such, the conversation went back and forth to provide as much clarity as possible. Each interview lasted about 45 minutes and was taped and transcribed. To strengthen the credibility of the project, the respondents read through the transcripts looking for misunderstandings and misconceptions. No comments were received afterwards.

In the interpretation of the transcripts, an important tool in the analytical process was Biesta's description of the three functions of teaching. The functions help to organize the material and to interpret various practices of responsibility in relation to teaching. As above, the analytical process was abductive. The researcher moves forward between theory and empirical data. The transcripts are read and reread in light of the theory of the two forms of professional responsibility and Biesta's description of teaching.

Overall, participatory observation together with the interviews provided rich empirical materials. The many observations, particularly of interactions and motivation, indicate what could be described as an atmosphere. This interpretation is based on how the teachers were acting, moving, and interacting with the students and how the students responded to this. However, the idea of "atmosphere" goes beyond the individual activity and constitutes a sense of the framing of the various activities.

5. Findings and discussion

The presentation of the research results is based on both the data from the observations and the interviews. The following section is an attempt to present the atmosphere in the two classrooms.

5.1 The atmosphere in the classrooms

The observation data shows that teachers take a leading role in both classes. They are the unifying focus of the students' attention. The methods employed by the teacher-led community shift frequently to provide the students with experiences of the various skills required for the examination. This active environment seemed to be supported by the teacher's physical movement around the classroom, helping and guiding the individual students. The movement fulfils various functions; it helps to make the teacher available and maintains the students' attention. Besides this, each student gets an opportunity to ask questions. "The interaction with the student," Nina says, "gives us energy." It is reasonable to believe that this positive teacher experience could motivate the students to continue learning (Olson & Moss, 1989).

The observational data show various sorts of structuring "mechanisms", such as week plans, day plans, homework, and textbooks. Kari and Nina stress the importance of structure. Kari says:

Many of our students have a very chaotic everyday life. Small tasks, like finding the right book, can, for some, be a challenge. As teachers, we can provide a clear structure and thereby help liberate the students' energy so they can concentrate on their learning.

Another structuring mechanism that occurs more indirectly is the definitions of roles. Instead of being a soldier, Buddhist monk, refugee, migrant worker, Christian, Muslim, etc., in the classroom they share a collective identity as students. This meta-identity can help establish a different self-perception, which can make the teaching experience less turbulent. When asked to what extent previous conflicts surface in class, Nora answers that this can vary from one class to the next, but in general terms, she explains:

In my experience, most of the students consciously put this aside. Most of them do not want to bring this into the classroom However, when it comes to participating in a group together, I feel that the vast majority see each other as people.

Accepting the student role contributes positively to the learning drive in the classroom.

The intention to make the school day a well-planned and well-organized experience can easily be disturbed by unexpected events that the teacher must tackle as they occur. An example of such an event happened one morning when Nora entered the classroom to find that the curtains were closed, and the desks had been arranged in a long line. On the desks were soda, candles, and two large cream cakes. One of the students had received permanent residence in Norway, and his classmates wished to celebrate. For such a happy event, Nora thought there ought to be a tablecloth to cover the desks and ran back to her office to fetch one. Her immediate response and care contributed to enhancing the joy and positive atmosphere (Buber, 1978; Løgstrup, 1976). There was singing and conversation, but after a while, Nora began to teach Norwegian by using the words connected to the various activities involved in having a party. This shift to more typical educational proceedings seemed to be well received by the students.

The observational data, as well as the interviews with teachers, indicate an awareness of the classroom as a place of learning and the teacher's responsibility for achieving this. This awareness influenced many of the teachers' choices. Nevertheless, this focus did not prevent Nora from responding with care when the surprising event occurred.

The teacher's moral responsibility is expressed by Nora. She says that she is very concerned about building a trusting environment in the class and she continues:

I emphasize cultivating an atmosphere of trust in the classroom ... Being a teacher at this school involves both being a professional teacher and a leader in the class. To nurture trust and build relationships is fundamental. These are things that one must cultivate or build up every day. As a teacher, I, too, need to develop my trust in the students. It's a mutual process ... In a way, I think it is a fundamental value to meet the student with respect and recognition.

Nora leads her group of students not only from the standpoint of implementing the curriculum, but by nurturing good relationships in the classroom. In the interview,

Nora does not express that there is a tension between teaching in preparation for the final test and nurturing trusting relationships. What she underlines is the importance of flexibility. Situations do arise where she wants to change the scheduled program, if something that occurs fits better, or if the students need more time to accomplish a task. She values these spaces of freedom which make it possible for her to practise her professional discretionary capacities and contribute to making the job enjoyable.

Several factors can collectively contribute to creating a supportive learning atmosphere: The effort to create a trusting learning community, the desire to establish a safe and well-structured learning environment, a student-teacher interaction that gives energy, the importance of flexibility and teacher autonomy, the ability to care and share the joy with students when a happy event occurs. The emphasis on structure varies slightly between the teachers in the two classes. However, common to all three is that they are apparent leaders in the eyes of the students. The classroom observations do not give reason to doubt that the students like this somewhat strict teaching regime. They listen to the instructions, and most of them start solving the appropriate tasks relatively quickly. When divided into groups, it is popular to be in the same group as the most accomplished students. As a result, it is not surprising that the qualification function of the teaching process is the most prominent in the classroom, and the function is supported by the teachers, as well as the students.

In the following, we will discuss how professional responsibility and accountability may play out in the three functions of education.

5.2 The functions of education and the question of moral responsibility and accountability

The first function to be presented and discussed is the qualification function. Biesta (2010) thinks this is the major function of organized education and constitutes an important rationale in support of state-funded education (Biesta, 2010, p. 20).

5.2.1 *The qualification function of education: accountable teachers and students willing to learn*

The qualification function of education can most clearly be related to the exercise of accountability such as to provide students with good language qualification and with various forms of knowledge needed for citizenship (Biesta, 2010, p. 20). The findings from the participatory observations show that in some situations the teacher could justify the contents by referring to the requirements of the test and the students seemed to accept the justification. Nevertheless, according to Løgstrup (1971) all communication is interwoven with a tacit and ethical demand to take care of the other person's life (Løgstrup, 1971). If so, the demand will apply in situations when accountability is the most obvious professional responsibility. The realization and manifestation of this requirement could go hand in hand with preparing the student for the test. However, unexpected situations arise and call for a particular moral response. If the teachers have their eyes too strongly fixed on the final tests moral challenges could be overlooked or given less priority.

5.2.2 *The socialization function of education: accountability, professional responsibility, and loss of trust*

According to Biesta (2010) the socialization function has to do with how we become part of particular social, cultural, and political “orders” (Biesta, 2010, p. 20). The following story from the interview with Kari and Nina might reveal a problem related to the socialization function. A student wished to pray during school hours and at the day-care centre where she received work training. In the student’s opinion, this should be respected. At the school, the teachers tried to explain the potential challenges this might create for the day-care centre. During the interview, Nina reiterated her responses to the student regarding this issue:

You would like to pray during the breaks and at the day-care centre; ok, you can ask about that. However, I will now tell you what your boss will think about it. And I am telling you this because I respect you and because I want you to get a job afterward.

The teacher’s arguments are based on both what she assumes to be the day-care centre’s perspective and the programme’s general objective. Nina responds to the situation at hand and remains in the situation even though it is uncomfortable. Nina’s conduct is a combination of showing accountability and exercising moral responsibility. She refers to the education’s objective while exercising her accountability as a teacher by highlighting the various potential implications of the student’s wishes, based on her assessment. She exercises her professional discretion based on her professional knowledge, experiences and understanding of the situation (Grimen & Molander, 2008). The use of discretion and educational objectives seem to go hand in hand and thus reinforce each other.

During the interview, Nina and Kari reflect on the past year’s teaching experiences based on trust. They share the opinion that when it comes to Norwegian language and grammar, the students trust them as teachers. However, when it comes to gender equality and understanding of society, Kari is unsure about whether they trust them as much. Other authorities are actively involved in matters of values and lifestyle such as a father, the family in the respective students’ home countries, or the local imam. According to the teachers, some students’ trust in the teachers is limited to the teaching’s qualification function.

In the example, Nina appeared both accountable and morally responsible. Due to the lack of trust, explanations and arguments had little validity, even though the teacher referred to the education’s objective in her argumentation. Loss of trust makes it difficult for the parties to listen to each other’s reasoning and tune in to what is said.

5.2.3 *The subjectification function of education*

Subjectification is associated with an aspect of action – an opportunity for the student as a unique “being” to become involved and thus reveal himself as a person and agent (Biesta, 2006, pp. 149–150). Subjectification often arises in unplanned situations

where the individual student is given space to act and receives a response, often from the teacher (Buber, 1985).

In this particular school, tragedies happen suddenly such as a terror attack in one of the students' homeland resulting in the death of a family member. Everyday life in school holds a seriousness that the teachers must come to terms with. A relatively strict teaching structure helps to keep things together. Teachers who hear these individual stories must be able to bear their weight and possess values that make it possible to handle their impact. A particular support system has been put in place at this school, involving individuals with expertise within the field. This support system enables the teachers to guide the students moving forward, all the while still feeling the weight of the responsibility.

In general, Nina says, a teacher would know a great deal about the private life of many of the students. She continues:

A teacher may hear numerous stories. If you are somewhat open and listen, you can feel the weight of responsibility ... and this can become very hard ... Through working here, I have become aware of the need to set boundaries for myself ... I am a teacher. It is crucial to be aware of this, both when it comes to the person concerned (the student), out of respect for him or her, and to protect myself!

Nina and Kari think that the ability to set boundaries is something the teachers must be trained in. They are teachers, not psychologists. Kari says:

My job is to be the best possible teacher for them. If they bring too much of their private lives into the classroom, it affects everyone.

All three teachers mention in their interview that their job is to be the best possible teacher. When the teacher is practising professional responsibility, she balances between the care of the individual student and the concern for the whole class. There is a moral dilemma here, according to Nina. For instance, a student's lack of money for food. It would not be a big deal for her to give the student NOK 200. She continues:

But I cannot do it, because I am the teacher, and what would the other students think? 'She helps only her'.

The teachers describe a moral dilemma between the exclusive encounter with one person and the need to consider the group. The exclusivity is interrupted by the arrival of a third party – in this case the whole group of students. Holding on to the exclusivity would constitute an injustice to the others. In general, when a third party arrives, the question of justice arises. The movement from compassion to justice limits the priority of the one (Aasland, 2009). The teachers are feeling the “weight of responsibility” between, on the one hand, being responsible “enough”, and on the other, being aware of the individual demands and all the potential challenges in the student group.

The exercise of moral responsibility becomes particularly evident to a person who is in need. However, it may be questioned whether this example connects to what Biesta calls the subjectification function of education. This function is about becoming autonomous and independent in thinking and acting (Biesta, 2010, p. 21). On the one hand, the student who wanted to pray could better demonstrate a subjectification process than a student in need. On the other hand, receiving help in a difficult situation could provide support and reassurance. In a long-term perspective, it could allow the student to better concentrate on the teaching.

6. Being the best possible teacher: Some concluding remarks

This article investigates how the teacher's professional responsibility, in the form of both accountability and moral responsibility, could be expressed in the teachers' teaching methods in a challenging school context. Inspired by Gert Biesta, the functions of teaching are presented as qualification, socialization, and subjectification.

In the data material, no findings indicate that the teachers perceive their professionalism and discretion as threatened by an imposed and rigid accountability system. Instead, the impression is that they almost use this to draw boundaries around their mandate and moral responsibility, which also leads to a clear and conscious teacher role. However, in the interviews, they emphasise the importance of having a space for flexibility and improvisation in their everyday pedagogical practice. This could imply that when it comes to their moral responsibility, the teachers perceive enough space to exercise this responsibility and make discretionary decisions.

A dominant qualification-oriented focus in everyday teaching proved to have somewhat unexpected implications. The collective "student role identity" among the students can prevent friction and conflicts in the group now that they are working together toward the same goal. Identifying a role has positive ripple effects in the learning environment and may indirectly support the teaching process's qualification function.

It is also apparent that trust and lack of trust play a decisive role in teaching. Nina and Kari assumed that the students' trust was limited to the teachers' role as qualification agents, not as authorities on religion and values. In the previous example, even though Nina persists in her responsibility as a teacher and refers to the aims of the education, this has little impact. A further socialization process might come to a halt due to an undermining of trust through the conflict that arose.

The student who wants to practise her religion at the day-care centre could demonstrate the subjectification function of teaching although the action could be dictated by authorities such as the imam and the parents. Nina shows moral responsibility in her response as she accepts the student's right to do so while giving reasons for why this can be challenging. The teacher reminds the student that she is a subject by appealing to her freedom and taking a stand.

In a particular way, the meeting with the individual student seems to activate teachers' moral responsibility. The teachers share a student's joy or pain, but they continue to act "teacher-like" and behave in accordance with teacher-assigned responsibility and what characterizes an "educational space". There is a potential for the teachers to move out of the role, but they responded within the purview of responsibilities that they believed the teacher assignment provided. Implicitly, their way of responding also defined the other person in a student role and contributed to him or her being "held accountable" in this role. It is also within the "educational space" that a conditional trust can prevail.

Not surprisingly, the teachers often feel a weight of moral responsibility that could go beyond their teaching-related accountability. The encounters with individual students and listening and responding to their stories will challenge the teachers, not only as teachers but as fellow human beings. What characterizes the teachers in the study is that they tried to help, but the help took place within an educational context. However, the demarcation of a teacher role and an educational context is not written in stone and is open to interpretation.

The review of the data and the discussions based on the data indicate that the three teachers' interpretations of their responsibility are governed by a conscious teacher identity and a clear understanding of the task. A "best possible teacher" is attentive to each student's situation but in a "teacher kind of way". A clear consciousness of the role seems to appear as a "governing principle" for the entire practice of responsibility; it is about being accountable or practicing professional considerations in the daily student and teacher interaction. A condition for being "the best possible teacher" is a space that allows for flexibility and deliberation when it comes to addressing and balancing various professional moral considerations.

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