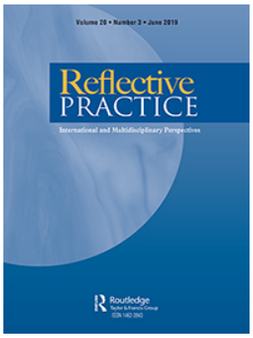

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To challenge and to be challenged – teachers collective learning in higher education

Susanne Gustavsson[a], Annelie Andersén[b] and Mia Berglund[c]

[a]Department of Education and Special Education, University of Gothenburg, Göteborg, Sweden; [b]Department of Educational Studies, Karlstad University, Karlstad, Sweden; [c]The School of Health and Education, University of Skövde, Skövde, Sweden

ABSTRACT
Critical analyzing and reflective competence are essential objectives in all higher education. In academic professional education, it is a challenge for the teacher to support and develop the student´s critical reflection of both academic and placement studies. The aim of this study is to identify the characteristics of the teacher role and the challenges of the reflective seminar within higher education. Data were gathered through group interviews and analyzed with a phenomenological hermeneutic approach. The result shows four themes; the experience of control and uncertainty, building trust and challenging ideas, the alternation between closeness and distance, and the parallel processes of supervising learning and being in a learning state. One conclusion is that the seminar teaching practice stimulates a collegial learning environment. This practice promotes the teachers pedagogical and didactical competence and an open attitude to each other´s teaching practice.

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Critical reflelection; supervising; professional education; higher education; collective learning

Introduction

Teaching in higher education is based on research and theories in order to create and develop the student's scientific competence. The education shall offer a relevant content and teaching managing a critical and analyzing competence, i.e. skills of reflection. Reflection is an active process requiring distance and perspective to one's immediate experience (Schön, 1987). Reflection in higher education means that the content or the experience should be challenged and problematized with a grounding in theory and research (Ramsden, 2003). Critical reflection requires additional perspective and complex analyses to thereby develop new knowledge (Griffiths & Tann, 1992; Ricoeur, 1976; Ricoeur & Thompson, 1981).

In professional programs, the university-based teaching must relate to theories, research, proven experience, and the student's experiences from placement (clinical) studies. Every professional education, as well as every profession, has its own context and practice. Professional knowledge is thus something that changes depending on aspects associated with tradition, culture, power and ingrained taking for granted

CONTACT Mia Berglund mia.berglund@his.se The School of Health and Education, University of Skövde, Box 408, Skövde SE-541 42, Sweden

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(Foucault, 1982; Habermas, 1984). Academic professional education and training therefore needs to make an active contribution to the conditions that students have for developing their skills of critical reflection as a useful competence in the profession.

A central issue for a course of academic professional education and training is the relationship between academic and placement studies. Historically, placement studies were considered an application of professional expertise, while today a reciprocity is sought between educational environments and the nature of content; between more academic studies and placement studies (Ekebergh, 2007; Korthagen, Loughran, and Russell, 2006). The starting point of the teaching can thus be the students' experience from placement studies related to theory and research, as well as theory and research can be foundational to placement studies. This requires teaching that processes the student's experience from placement studies and does so by means of a critical reflective approach. The teacher here has a significant role to lead the teaching on and in critical reflection. More or less conscious and explicit didactic choices constitute both a support and a requirement for achieving a teaching practice that creates conditions for intended learning outcomes.

An often used teaching format in higher education is the seminar. The seminar is given to smaller student groups with the intention of stimulating active student participation and reflection on chosen questions or problems. The seminar format can be based in literary studies or placement studies, and it is usually led by a teacher in a supervisory role. In academic professional education, the seminar is often the preferred teaching format to integrate experience-based and theory-based studies.

Considering the goal of higher education to stimulate the student's capacity for a critical analytical approach and the importance of this in teaching practices, the aim of this study is to identify the characteristics of the teacher role and the challenges of the reflective seminar within higher education. The empirical context of the study is a nursing program in Sweden that leads to a bachelor´s degree. However, its purpose is of a more general nature and can be applied to all higher education, and to professional education in particular.

Critical reflection in professional education

Reflection is a common concept in academic education. Theory, research and placement studies are central elements of professional programs. One of the aim of the education is to stimulate the student's critical analysis skills in relation to the profession's disciplinary foundation, but also as an aspect of a professional approach (Avis & Freshwater, 2006; Binding, Morck, & Moules, 2010; Tveiten & Severinsson, 2006). Placement studies give the student important experience-based knowledge (Agélii, Kennergren, Severinsson, & Bertholds, 2000; Bondas, 2010; Johansson, Holm, Lindqvist, & Severinsson, 2006; Severinsson, 2001), which needs to be described, compared to other experiences and discussed in order to promote the student's professional development.

An investigating and reflective approach is described as a cornerstone of the academic profession (Penttinen, Skaniakos, & Lairio, 2013; Schön, 1987). Reflection requires analytical skills in the form of perspective and formulating problems. Critical reflection imposes further demands on the theoretical basis of the analysis (Griffiths & Tann, 1992; Ricoeur, 1976; Ricoeur & Thompson, 1981). Making experience the point of departure for

theoretical discussion creates the conditions for critical reflection (Ekebergh, 2007). The experience at the foundation of a learning process can also be related to the lifeworld approach (Husserl, 1973; Merleau-Ponty, 2002), which can involve the visualization and recognition of an individual student's experiences as the basis for theoretical, critical analysis and the development of new knowledge. Bengtsson (1993) describes how theory-based distance may contribute to a more critical analytical reflection on the experience, but also how collegial discussion enables distancing and thereby a deeper level of reflection.

The university-based teaching enables and solidifies the student's ability of critical analytical reflection (Ekebergh, Lepp, & Dahlberg, 2004). At the same time, the normative character of a profession, the student's expectations or other influencing factors form the discourse that both produces and reproduces the understanding of a profession and its practices (Foucault, 1982; Habermas, 1984). The rules, culture and proven experience of professional practice need to be processed and in some cases questioned by deliberately and explicitly trying on perspectives and solving problems (Borglin, 2012).

The academic professional education needs to be formed from an idea of what it is that contributes to a learning environment that creates the conditions for the skills requirements formulated for the profession (Knight & Yorke, 2003). This may require teaching that both applies a reflective approach and illustrates the meaning of reflection and its different levels in the professional context, which also includes a meta-level in the learning process.

University teachers' pedagogical competence and learning

University teaching applies a number of different methods or working formats to stimulate student learning. The role and function of the university teacher emerge in different ways depending on the teaching format. The seminar format creates a communicative and interactive process that begins in some form of problem formulation, which in turn is characteristic of the social constructionist theory of knowledge and learning (Burr, 1995) and facilitates the development of knowledge at a meta level, i.e. learning about your own learning (Carnell, 2007). The teacher, as a seminar leader and supervisor, therefore bases the teaching on the stimulation of student activity, which may, for example, mean using the student's own story as the point of departure (Ekebergh et al., 2004; Leshem & Trafford, 2007). The student's story can create conditions for interaction and a critical, reflective discussion; however, this requires the teacher to adopt a deliberately didactic approach. It challenges the view of content, of the teacher's approach and of assessment (Smith, 2011). The student's experience is given a prominent role, which is not the case in education where the contents are set in advanced and regulated in detail.

In an education where critical reflection is a central dimension, the teacher's didactic skills are essential. Regardless of teaching format, teachers must be able to both implicitly and explicitly illustrate various levels of reflection. This requires them to take a deliberate approach to both science and practical professional skills, and their own ability to reflect (Coulson & Harvey, 2013). Studies show the challenge that lies in stimulating the students' capacity for critical reflection (Coulson & Harvey, 2013; Solbrekke Dyrdal & Helstad, 2016). Teaching that works critically and analytically with

the student's experiences and feelings has a greater potential to stimulate critical reflection than teaching characterized by normative evaluation and statements (Harrison & Lee, 2011). Studies of supervision in placement studies show the importance of the relationship character and the ethical dimensions of the supervision (Epstein & Carlin, 2012; Hilli, Melender, Salmu, & Jonsén, 2014), which likely apply in the campus-based seminar as well.

From a didactic perspective, the contents and character of the seminar are shaped by the student group through the leadership and initiative of the teacher. The teacher's didactic knowledge is challenged when the teaching has to be characterized by the present as well as by a more long-term knowledge goal. This changes the teacher's role and leadership as compared to a more instructive approach. One way of supporting individual teachers in their teaching is to create opportunities for collegial learning, thereby building a common arena for the teachers' didactic knowledge development (e.g. Hemer, 2014; Ortlieb, Biddix, & Doepker, 2010). Collegial support for the development of supervisory skills has proven to have positive effects on both professional and personal growth (Danielsson, Sundin-Andersson, Hov, & Athlin, 2009). The collegial discussion on teaching is a way to make visible an often relatively quiet practice. By talking to teachers about their experience in leading reflective seminars, this study aims to identify the characteristics of the teacher role and the challenges of the reflective seminar within higher education.

Methods

The data consisted of two group interviews with teachers who have experience in supervising reflective seminars with the aim of stimulating students' critical reflection on the profession and on their own professional and personal development during their education. All the teachers had also participated in local supervisor training.

Reflective supervision in nursing

The three-year nursing programme (Bachelor's degree) at the local university is built on three didactic strategies. The first didactic strategy is patient-centeredness, the second strategy is to intertwine theory and practice and the third strategy is that teaching should facilitate the development of an ethically critical reflective approach (Westin, Johansson Sundler, & Berglund, 2015). This development of a critically reflective approach to oneself, to the scientific and the practical, and of the giving an account of knowledge, includes seminars called *Reflective Supervision in Nursing* (RHiO). The supervision model RHiO is characterized by learning through reflection on patient narratives constituted as the basis for the groups' reflective discussion. RHiO is carried out in groups of 8–10 students, in the second and third year of the nursing programme. The groups meet three to four times every semester.

The teacher as a supervisor in the seminar group will stimulate and challenge narratives and a reflective critical discussion. To prepare the teachers for the supervision, the University organized an internal course (30 ECTS). The training was designed to provide teachers with the skills to serve as a RHiO supervisor according to the

Supervision in Nursing, Section in the Swedish Nursing Association. After the internal course, RHiO supervisors provide continuous supervision in groups.

Data collection and participants

In the current study, RHiO-supervisors were asked to participate in a group interview. The teachers who at the time of the interviews served as a RHiO supervisor (n = 27) were informed of the study both orally and in writing. Eleven teachers were willing and had the opportunity to participate in the interviews. The participants were between 40 and 60 years old, nine women and two men, with one to five years experiences in supervising in RHiO. The interviews were conducted by SG and AA, in two groups. They were not colleagues of the RHiO supervisors. The interviews started with an open question about what RHiO is, followed by questions about the teacher's experiences of becoming and serving as a RHiO supervisor. The teachers also discussed perceptions of the RHiO students' development of their professional identity and development of a consciously critical and self-reflective approach. Finally, the teachers describe their own development as RHiO supervisors and as teachers. The interviews lasted 60 minutes and were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The collected data set consisted of approximately 43 A4 pages of written text (double space).

Data analysis

The teachers' experiences of supervising in a higher education context and particularly RHiO-seminars were analyzed qualitatively using a phenomenological hermeneutic approach described by Lindseth and Norberg (2004), based on Ricoeur's philosophy of critical analysis (Ricoeur, 1976). Ricoeur maintains the movement from the manifest content to the latent meaning of the text. He further argues that understanding and explanation should not be placed in a dichotomy, but rather as being dialectically related to each other to overlap and interact in the interpretation process (Ricoeur, 1976). For a critical interpretative analysis, several perspectives of understanding are used.

The interpretation process consists of dialectic movements between understanding and explanation. The analysis process can be described as three phases; the naive reading, the structural analysis, and the comprehensive understanding. During the naive reading and structural analysis, we tried to maintain a phenomenological approach, which entails changing from the natural attitude into being open, flexible, and reflective in order to grasp and describe the meanings. In this naive reading, all three authors read the text from both occasions several times and together we formulated a naive understanding. Here we questioned our understanding and discussed it together. A thematic structural analysis was performed. Meaning units were identified, read through and reflected on against the background of the naive understanding. They were then condensed, i.e. the essential meaning of each unit was found, and after this, they were sorted into groups. These groups were then reflected on regarding similarities and differences, which gradually led to the formulation of themes and subthemes. According to the method, the themes and subthemes were reflected on in relation to the naive understanding to validate and adjust the interpretation. In the comprehensive

understanding, the themes and subthemes were summarized and reflected on in relation to theories to expand and broaden our understanding.

Ethical aspects

All teachers in the study received written and verbal information about the study's purpose. The information clearly stated that participation was voluntary and that an unwillingness to participate would have no consequences. The information also noted their right to withdraw from the study and that all data were confidential. Written consent to participate in the study was obtained from the teachers. The study was performed according to Good research practice, the Swedish Research Council (Hermerén, 2011).

Results

The study aims to identify and describe the character and challenges of the teacher role in reflective seminars within a nursing programme. The results first present with a naive understanding. This is followed by a structural analysis in the form of four themes: the experience of control and uncertainty, building trust and challenging ideas, the alternation between closeness and distance, and the parallel processes of supervising learning and being in a learning state. The final part is then a comprehensive understanding.

Naive understanding

A naive understanding is that reflective supervision challenges notions and experiences of the traditional role of the teacher. The teachers describe how responsibility and power appear differently. The interaction with the individual student as well as with the group is characterized by unpredictability. An essential aspect is to create a framework and a stability of how the supervising teachers have approached one another. The supervision that they themselves receive creates a context in which their own experience from the RHiO seminar can be discussed. A parallel can be drawn between the learning process during the RHiO seminar and the process they themselves experience in the teacher group.

Structural analysis

Experience of control and uncertainty

The stories told by the supervising teachers illustrate differences between a traditional teacher role and the role of supervisor in the RHiO seminar. The traditional teacher role is characterized by control of content and structure, where the teacher communicates the content to the students. The teacher has thus contributed, through the planning of their teaching, to an order and a format that is expected to be maintained during the session. In the case of the seminar, however, the teacher needs to create a different type of leadership control, which is based on an uncertainty about what content will be dealt with.

> During seminars, lectures and similar situations, I am the one leading, but not at all in the same way during RHiO. I think 'that was an interesting question, I never thought of it before'. (2)

In the reflective seminar, it is the student's story and question that determines the content. The teacher's preparation before the seminar and approach during the seminar requires them to be open to new questions and prepared to lead a discussion about an issue that has not been addressed in the planning phase.

> It's more open and improvised for me as a supervisor, the unprepared. I don't know what will happen there. I may have an idea of how to do it, but no more than that since I don't know what the students will bring to the situation. (2)

Supervising teachers must be able to face the unpredictable, to 'handle different situations' (1). The students' experiences and needs in the specific situation therefore determine what will be brought up. Even if the students' stories come from a professional practice that is known to the teacher, it is the student's experience that is highlighted and processed. The teacher experiences a reduced level of actual control and a sense of uncertainty compared to teaching whose content is decided by the teacher's own planning. On the other hand, they describe a preparedness and a feeling of being able to handle the unexpected. In this situation, the teacher's own professional experience and subject knowledge constitute a tool.

Another aspect of control and a feeling of uncertainty is the teacher's simultaneous responsibility for the individual student and for the entire group. In addition to each student's story and reasoning, the teacher must consider the contents process, the group process and each students learning conditions.

> On the one hand, there's the need to maintain focus, that we have a framework, there's an examination element that requires us to have it on, to keep to a structure, but then the group might not be that adaptable and how much do we step in, and then I feel there's all this about group processes. And then maybe we have someone in a group that you had, who was really quiet, and how should I deal with her? Then I have someone else who talks a lot. What do I do to tone her down? How do I make sure that everyone gets to talk? Did everyone get to say something now, or what do I do to draw them out? So it may look like I'm just sitting there doing nothing, but my brain is at full speed, so to speak. (1)

The teacher describes the parallel processes created during the seminar of taking part in the discussion while also guiding it forward. Not only do the students determine the contents of the dialogue, the teacher also needs to consider the students, each student's opportunities, as well as their responsibility to let everyone speak, their responsibility for the group and their responsibility for the examining function of the seminar. One teacher mentions letting go of their 'need for control' by asking 'open questions'.

> Even if I feel like now I have begun to be able to handle and loosen the framework a bit, and just like/…/is saying, work more with open questions, I was still really nervous and felt tense about the meeting with the students, seeing how it was a new role for me. (1)

The teacher needs to handle the uncertainty and create a functioning level of control over the discussion, for example by prioritizing, distributing, setting issues aside and providing detail. One teacher describes their experience of letting go of the uncertainty by 'trusting the process' (2). The teacher is thus not the one deciding the contents of the

discussion, but rather the person in control of the process and responsible for the seminar discussion being meaningful to all the students. This can mean that the teacher needs to trust that their questions and comments will allow the students to find a way to process their experiences and perceive the seminar as an occasion to develop a deeper knowledge. Control of the contents lies with the student group, while control of the discussion process is the teacher's responsibility.

Building trust and challenging ideas

The teachers describe how the seminar discussion challenges students when their own story is the point of departure. The student needs to feel comfortable with the group and the teacher. At the same time, the teacher's role is to challenge normative ideas and presumptions. In some cases, the teacher also needs to challenge their own convictions or experiences. Consequently, an interaction is created between the student's experience-based story, the discussion in the seminar group and the teacher's knowledge, which allows experiences to be both examined and challenged.

Another aspect of trust is the teacher being able to contribute to the students' social experience within the group, or as one teacher puts it: 'a sense of "us", at least' (1). The seminar group differs from other teaching formats in the closeness and the relationships it creates. The discussion is characterized by an open' and 'unprepared' atmosphere (2) and a high level of integrity. The discussion is also to reach beyond the group. The teacher should both inspire and maintain a positive group process, but also be able to challenge the discussion to reach a more reflective level. The alternation between trust and challenge is a part of the supervisory situation, but also part of the teacher's own perception of their role.

One teacher describes their experience of a group that has difficulty reaching the sense of trust. 'The group I'm working with at the moment has me constantly frustrated' (2). It becomes a challenge for the teacher to understand the cause of the group's development and the actions of individual students, as well as to handle this in the given situation. It may be a case of individual students not finding their place, of students who do not let other students in or of leading the group over time.

During the seminar discussion, the student's choices and actions within a described situation may be questioned. The term 'exposed' (1, 2) would indicate that the student perhaps reveals things that would not be expressed in another context and which could be perceived as intrusive and private.

> I think about that/../was just talking about how hard it is for the students to do RHiO. It's not easy. You can't just show up, but it actually requires something of you, since it could actually be my case that is brought up for discussion, and then both presenting, and in a way it reflects 'Who am I?' and 'Who am I as a care provider? ' and there's this fear that you may not actually cut it. (2)

The student's story can reveal less positive situations. When this happens, the teacher's task is to contribute to the processing of a story. When the story is about the experience as a patient or family member, the challenge is to stimulate students to shift perspectives from their own personal experience of care to the development of their knowledge of care.

> In order to become a really good care provider you *have to* be able to switch perspectives and you *have to* be able to see exactly what you described; that what I bring in terms of my personal experiences, I can use them to some extent, but I can't, I have to understand that they are *mine* and that they are private and that, as a nurse, other demands are made of me. (2)

The shift in perspective is an essential aspect of the discussion, for example between personal and professional experiences and opinions. One teacher also talks about RHiO as a 'preventive measure' (2) that gives the students the tools to handle their own emotions and take control of the situation; a skill that is described as important in their future professional role. The teacher's responsibility thus relates to the student's direct experience of the discussion in the group, and to their knowledge and understanding of their future profession. The teacher balances between building trust and challenging the students by 'throwing some fuel on the fire' (1) or 'shifting the perspectives' (1) in order to support and reinforce a critical discussion and reflection.

The alternation between closeness and distance

The alternation between closeness and distance means, on the one hand, utilizing the student's story and experience and, on the other, getting some distance to observe and discuss the described situation. With some distance, it becomes possible to question and process presumptions, experience, and knowledge. The alternation between closeness and distance also means that teachers must distance themselves to see the student's development during the discussion and over time. The teacher should support the student's knowledge development while at the same time formatively evaluating the student's performance.

Alternating between closeness and distance allows the students to reach a new understanding and new solutions. The teacher describes how the story makes the experience visible to the student and to the others in the group. Expressions like 'open up' (2) and 'out on the table' (2) are used. By sharing their experience and putting words to what has previously been unsaid, it becomes possible to process the experience. The role of the teacher is to guide the students and help them in the alternation between the closeness of the story and the distance needed to process it. The teacher lets the students be confronted by their experiences, 'the students face themselves' (1), and helps them to handle their experience as part of their knowledge development.

While attempting to get the students to alternate between closeness and distance, the teacher must also alternate in a similar way between closeness to the students and their experiences, and to their own experiences, and distance in various theoretical perspectives. The teacher talks about the responsibility to make a 'theoretical connection' (2) or the need to 'also be prepared to bring out a suitable theoretical complement that you can base the discussion on' (1). One teacher describes how they create distance by referring to theory:

> You have a certain responsibility as a supervisor to highlight the theoretical connection, because that's kind of the reason we are sitting there as teachers, to help them with that. And that's the thing, to create words for what this theory means to me, and that's not always so easy (1).

Another of the teacher's roles is to illustrate the student's development. In order to see the students' development, teachers must be able to distance themselves from the ongoing discussion. This is a matter of being able to look beyond the student's story and approach the quiet experience and the underlying development in the situation.

> It's hard too, because it's this subtle thing, I feel like the students are expressing that things have happened, but it's also a bit tricky for them to capture, I think; this development is so gradual that all of a sudden you realize that you're, that something has happened maybe.. and it can be hard for them to capture what's what. (2)

The teacher is saying that it can be hard for the student to see their own development. But the teacher, who is watching the student regularly over time, can see it.

The relationship between closeness and distance thereby has at least two dimensions. On the one hand, the closeness and distance to the student's story in order to facilitate critical reflection. On the other hand, the closeness and distance to the student as a person and their professional and personal growth. For the student, the discussion becomes a way of processing an event, but also a way to develop on a professional and personal level through the teachers guiding of the discussion.

Supervising learning and being in a learning state

The studied teacher role entails continuously supervising a group of future nurses based on their experiences from professional practice and with the aim of developing their critical reflection skills. The teacher has participated or is participating in training to prepare for the task of leading seminar discussions. The teachers describe the parallel processes that emerge from being a supervising teacher while also being in the middle of their own learning process, which means learning together with their students and with their colleagues from the teacher group.

When the teacher group is working together to develop a new form of teaching, it means that they have something in common to relate to and talk about. The common ground generates attempts to reach a consensus, but also means that the teachers care for the others in the group and about their knowledge and working environments. This allows them to learn from each other.

> I feel that we often sit down together to discuss (..) around the break room, like, 'Oh, you did that, and what did you think? How was it?' And then you write some things down and then maybe you bring tips you've received back to your group. So yeah, I think this has been something good to share. (1)

Another teacher mentions 'tips and advice from the team, this thing of getting comfortable with using these tools', 'taking the step to really use them in the group' (2). The common mission illustrated through this internal training course and the individual learning process creates a learning culture for supervising teachers. The teachers have begun talking about teaching, and even if discussion exclusively relates to the RHiO supervision, it likely has an impact on the teacher role in a more general sense.

Another aspect of the teacher's learning is the parallel process in which teachers and students learn together during the seminar. The teacher talks about developing a 'self-awareness' (1, 2) and their own role in the unique assignment as teacher or future nurse. One teacher speaks of the 'exchange' (1) between teacher and student from

participating in similar processes. For the teacher, the goal is to find their supervisory role in contrast to the traditional teacher role. Another parallel process, or rather a transformation, relates to the treatment of the patient and that of the student.

> As I've said before, it has given me a sense of security in the actual teaching job, the fact that here in our seminars and lectures I can let go a bit of my need for control/../but I was still really nervous and felt tense about the meeting with the students, seeing how it was a new role for me. But now I feel that with the help of this, my own RHiO training, I have been able to use the parts I had towards patients with my students as well; I have more tools to do it and to see connections as well as a common approach and common working methods. So I think for me it has been great for my personal development as a teacher. (1)

Learning as a teacher means learning from your colleagues, but also discovering that teachers and students learn from each other. The interaction in the seminar merges with the central didactic questions of what, how and why. As an effect of the teachers' collective learning, they speak spontaneously about their teaching and are able to put it into words. The teachers thereby feel that the parallel processes that emerge relate on the one hand to being a supervisor, and on the other to being in their own learning process.

Comprehensive understanding

A more in-depth analysis of university teacher descriptions of Reflective Supervision in Nursing (RHiO) with the aim of supporting the students' professional and personal development challenges notions and actions relating to the role of the teacher in higher education. The seminar format requires responsibility and power to be shifted away from the teacher towards a more interactive teaching culture in which the student has a leading role and where the seminar allows for the use of experiences that can challenge the intended educational content, normativity and professional cultures (cf. Foucault, 1982; Habermas, 1984). The content is determined by the students, while the format is provided by the teacher. The interaction with the individual student as well as with the group is characterized by unpredictability. In this format, the teacher's leadership requires immediate reflection and action (Schön, 1987) at the same time as the discussion is characterized by reflection on action. Challenging and being challenged sets the conditions for a learning based on a reflection upon experiences that illustrates thoughts, feelings, and actions. Using concepts and theories in the analysis of the students' stories creates the conditions for critical reflection (Bengtsson, 1993; Ricoeur, 1991). The teacher is trained to be in an unpredictable situation and to be adaptable to the needs of the group. They ask students questions with openness and curiosity in order to take the reflection to a deeper level, to shift perspectives and to be open to seeing things in a new light. This shifts the horizons of understanding (Gadamer, 2006) of both teachers and students. The open and safe atmosphere that the teacher tries to create is a prerequisite for this learning to be possible.

The teaching format reflects a learning community (Ekebergh, 2007), which in turn creates a format for collegial learning. The teachers learn from each other, from the students' experiences and from being supervising teachers in the seminar. The collegial learning culture supports the teacher's own actions in the student group, but also in

other teaching situations. An approach based on listening and challenging also appears to impact on how the teachers relate to each other as continuous learners, within a collegial culture.

Discussion

The academic professional education is on a par with other higher education in the sense that it is to be founded on research and theory, implement proven experience and contribute to the student developing knowledge, understanding, values, and approaches in the form of critical analytical skills (Ramsden, 2003). The unique aspect of professional education is that it is directly related to professional practice, which consequently plays a prominent role in the programme contents. The ability of critical reflection is an essential skill in an academic profession, and thereby a necessary point of departure in teaching. However, there is insufficient research and knowledge about the teaching of critical reflection skills in higher education (Solbrekke Dyrdal & Helstad, 2016).

The results of this study illustrate the characteristics of the teacher role in a teaching format intended to stimulate critical reflection skills. The point of departure for the studied seminar is the student's story where the professional and the personal blend together, which is not the case in the literature-based seminar. The study shows both reproducing and producing processes as the result of the teacher's task to both affirm and challenge (cf. Foucault, 1982). The nature of the seminar can possibly be seen as important in education programmes that contain placement studies, where it is necessary to integrate experiences from professional practice with scientific perspectives. Based on this comprehensive understanding, we choose to discuss the educational and didactic skills of the teacher and collegial learning.

As a teaching format, the seminar is characterized by reciprocity between teacher and student, between practice and theory, between description and reflection (Ekebergh, 2007; Korthagen et al., 2006). The study results show that this reciprocity also characterizes the teacher role in the alternation between closeness and distance, support and challenge, and between control and uncertainty in the seminar. The teacher is expected to be able to support learning processes and have the didactic skills for planned content, the course's learning outcomes, and also the qualitative targets of the nursing programme. The aim of the studied seminar is to highlight experience from professional practice, which means that the question of contents is open in nature; the seminar discussion is based on professional practice as it is perceived and experienced by the students. There may be a notion that seminar discussion is about processing experiences, i.e. a reflection at the descriptive level. Teachers may therefore face an initial challenge of illustrating the learning process, both for themselves and for the students, and linking it to theory without undermining the experience-based nature of the seminar. When the student's story is central, experiences will be described that lead to questions, reactions and a need for further information. The procedures, possibilities, and obstacles of professional practice as well as its norms and values, language and culture are brought to the surface. A teacher leading an experience-based seminar discussion, such as RHiO, may need to alternate between a phenomenological approach (Ekebergh, 2007; Husserl, 1973; Merleau-Ponty, 2002) and a more structured approach in

which the student's understanding is challenged to result in critical reflection (Bengtsson, 1993; Griffiths & Tann, 1992). It cannot be considered given that a teacher in higher education is an autodidact in all teaching situations. One challenge lies in the alternation between story and critical analysis, and in not jumping to conclusions. Another challenge is to simultaneously manage the group process and the individual student's learning process. In addition, the seminar room sets a mental boundary for what is kept in and out, i.e. what the individual student, the group and also the teacher brings into the room and what they take away from it. According to Pettersson (2010), the teacher's responsibility is to work together with the students to create the supervisory space.

The function of theory in the seminar is expressed as something essential, but at the same time something that is not simple to illustrate. Statements like bring out a something suitable' may be understood to mean that the theory is not self-evident. It may also be a matter of the here-and-now nature of the discussion, which may make it difficult for teachers themselves to reflect more deeply while directly involved in the action (Schön, 1987). Another aspect of referring to theory may be a difference between expressing theory and discussing a patient situation, for example, from a theoretical point of departure (e.g., Griffiths & Tann, 1992; Ricoeur, 1976; Ricoeur & Thompson, 1981). If the teacher focuses on teaching theory, the seminar will likely shift from experience and reflection towards theoretical reasoning; something that the results show the teachers are aware of. If, on the other hand, the seminar shifts towards solely stimulating the individual student's personal experience, the seminar may take on a more social and psychological function. Thus, it is a balance between over-theorizing experience and looking solely at practical experience (Ekebergh, 2007; Korthagen et al., 2006; Griffiths & Tann, 1992; Bengtsson, 1993).

The study shows that the collegial discussion about teaching is meaningful and that, over time, creates a culture within the teacher group. This culture can both support and challenge teachers in their professional development. The teachers involved in the study have undergone training together which, as a result of its format, has contributed to a common culture. In the studied context, the teachers describe how a collegial teaching culture has emerged in a more general sense. The teachers talk to each other about the teacher role in the seminar in a way that is transferred to other teaching formats. The discussion on teaching, teacher role and teacher approach thereby becomes a natural area to develop jointly. This joint training, but probably also the joint assignment, leads to something that can be viewed as unique in higher education, where teachers rarely have collegial discussions about their teaching (cf. Bengtsson, 1993). Earlier studies (Danielsson et al., 2009; Ortlieb et al., 2010) have shown that the teacher's own learning process is likely in need of collective support. A teacher group with an open and explorative attitude to the members' teaching practices can be viewed as necessary in all higher education. An education and teaching culture that not only facilitates but also requires collegial learning would possibly benefit both educational and didactic skills at different levels. In this regard, there is a need for further studies to provide more in-depth knowledge about collegial teacher initiatives in order to develop the quality of higher education.

Trustworthiness is about credible, transferable, confirmable, and dependable. We have tried to consider this in the following way. The group interview as a method for

collecting data gave the participants' ability to reflect together which enables a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. The breadth of participants' experiences of RHiO the interview conveys a broad perspective. According to the method, the phenomenological hermeneutic approach (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004), the themes and subthemes were reflected on in relation to the naive understanding to validate and adjust the interpretation. In the comprehensive understanding, the themes and subthemes were summarized and reflected on in relation to theories with aim to expand and broaden our understanding, which we think gives a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. The aim of this study was to look at the character and challenges of the teacher role in reflective seminars. One conclusion is that the seminar teaching practice stimulates a collegial learning environment. This practice promotes the teachers pedagogical and didactical competence and an open attitude to each other´s teaching practice. Another conclusion is that the study shows the importance of didactic competence in order to be able to supervise reflective seminars with its specific character. Where a challenge is to reflect situations from practice with the support of theories and concepts with the skill to handle the situation at the moment. The conclusion is, tutoring teachers need a specific university pedagogical competence that differs from other teaching and other supervision, for example degree project. The accounts given by teachers illustrate differences compared to other teaching formats. Questions that could be investigated further include: What does the teacher do to develop the student's critical reflective approach? What differences are there between different academic professional education programmes?

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Notes on contributors

Susanne Gustavsson is PhD and an Assistant Professor at the department for education and special education vid University of Gothenburg. Her research focuses on didactics in academic vocational education and vocational training.

Annelie Andersén, is Assistant Professor in Educational work at Karlstad University. Her research focuses on culture and (social) identity in education and at work, as well as teachers' role in learning in vocational and higher education.

Mia Berglund is a registered nurse with a PhD in caring science. The focus of her research ison the phenomenon learning in living with long-term illness and to develop support for thislearning, in

aim to support health and well-being. Her research interests include students and health professionals learing, with particular focus om reflection and supervision in groups. Mia is an Associate Professor in Nursing at the University of Skovde, Sweden.

ORCID

Susanne Gustavsson http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2203-7472
Annelie Andersén http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5306-7012
Mia Berglund http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2671-1041

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