

Abstract

The subject of the dissertation is the relational competence of teachers. Through empirical analysis the dissertation examines the conditions for and the characteristics and effects of whether teachers act relationally competent in interactions with single students and a full class in general teaching on a primary school basis. The aim is to contribute to the qualification of teacher students' and teachers' professional relational competence.

Using ethnographic methods, I observed four teachers' teaching 5th, 6th and 7th grades and interviewed the teachers and 50 of their pupils. The analysis has been generated on the basis of two cases with teachers, who found it challenging to create positive relationships with the pupils and two cases with teachers, who were not challenged by it. The empirical analysis is theoretically conducted in five theories with focus on human interaction and experience: Ethics of care, mentalization, self-determination theory, communicative musicality and neuro-affective developmental psychology.

The dissertation shows that the quality of the teacher-pupil relation influences the pupils' academic commitment and progression, their well-being – including stress level and self-perception – their social behaviour, internalisation of rules and standards and self-regulation, and that a central factor to it all is the relational competence of the teacher.

Pupil interviews point on a fundamental wish to be of importance to the teacher. Partly, in the educational context in which they relate to the teacher and in which they thrive and learn something through the teacher's careful teaching. Partly, through an existential dimension which concerns the matter of being taken seriously by the teacher and to feel a general human interest.

When the teachers found themselves short of time or were negatively aroused, a discrepancy occurred between on one hand the teacher's attitude towards the teaching, the pupils and the teacher role and on the other hand the teacher's interactional behaviour when teaching. In these situations, the teacher's practice was characterized by ways of acting which excluded certain pupils from the learning community, and of irritable exclams and scolding. Amongst other things, this inhibited the pupils' motivation, safety and ability to concentrate even for pupils, who were not scolded at.

Finally, it is concluded that the relational competence of the teacher is a general human competence, which is both situationally conditioned, as a teacher to a varying extent acts relationally competent in the interactions with the pupils and personally conditioned, as teachers under very similar circumstances, differ in their extent of relational competence. The empirically grounded and theoretically founded analysis shows, that teachers act relationally competent through ethical caring, attunement and supporting of the pupils' needs for self-determination, competence and relatedness. Hereby, individual and collective relations to the pupils are established and maintained, which promote the learning community of the class on a common third, and thereby the well-being and cross-curricular competences of each pupil. The relational competence of teachers presupposes receptive directedness, their own psychological needs being supported, and a general and specific knowledge of children.