

The Role of the Educational Conversation in Succeeding in Undergraduate Kindergarten Teacher Education

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Abstract This paper investigates an institutional practice of the educational conversation that is a part of the undergraduate kindergarten teacher education program at a Norwegian university. The formal goal connected to this practice is to facilitate students coping with their courses of study. Thus, this paper reconstructs the perspectives of the teacher educators and the students regarding this practice and reconstructs its various supportive qualities. The core of the support derived from the educational conversation stems from transforming the formal, professional, and institutional expectations of the kindergarten teacher education program into the personal motivation of the students. Reflecting on better conditions for the educational conversation is connected to ethical reflections on the power relations and influence that face-to-face meetings with experienced teachers who listen can have on students particularly in the era of mass education.

Keywords Professional Mentoring, Kindergarten Teacher Education, Subjectification, Dialogue, Educational Conversation, Succeeding with Studies

1. Introduction

The national guidelines for kindergarten teacher education in Norway [1] (Norwegian Ministry of Science and Education, 2012) stipulate that education must safeguard interactions between academic, didactic, and social competences and the ability to reflect professionally on pedagogical work with children in kindergartens. The various institutions running kindergarten teacher education programs in Norway interpret the implementation of this rule differently. The higher education institution at which the study reported on in this paper was conducted developed the activity setting of the educational conversation, and this paper sheds light on this.

The educational conversation is a 45-minute meeting between teacher educators and students during the first year of their course of study that is held after the first practical training. The internal guidelines for the educational conversation, developed at the university participating in the study, indicate the need for examining issues of student experiences from practical training, their professional and social experiences of the course of study, and the learning environment in student groups. The conversation should be steered by student and teacher educator thoughts and reflections on professional and personal development. The general goal of this conversation is to help students succeed in their courses of study. However there is also another goal, which is to assess student suitability for the profession of teacher. The phenomenon of professional sustainability is not reported on following the educational conversation unless the teacher receives the impression, signaled in various ways, that a student is not right for earning a teaching qualification. In this instance, the case is reported to higher offices that deal with suitability issues at university, college and regional levels. The focus of this paper, however, is the educational conversation's role in supporting students to succeed in their courses of study.

This paper analyzes the educational conversation in the general framework of the socio-cultural approach to learning. This approach allows to define the educational conversation as an institutional activity setting in which teacher educators and students participate and develop certain aspects of profession-related motivation. This activity setting is organized on campus by campus-based teacher educators, where the one-to-one meeting is unique. In this paper, we reflect on how to make this institutional practice better for student professional and personal growth and for student success in their course of study.

Through participation in the institutional practices of the university, students become familiar with, among others, the kindergarten societal mandate, political steering documents, and kindergarten value-based and other relevant theories. Through participation in in-service

kindergartens, students experience how these guidelines, theories, and values are implemented in practice and are used in solving so-called real-life challenges. This, however, can sometimes be experienced as problematic. In this article, voice on these issues is given to students and their stories on experiences from in-service kindergartens.

2. Theoretical Approach

As mentioned above, this paper is anchored theoretically in socio-cultural learning theories. This means that we assume that the students' learning and meaning making processes are socially and contextually conditioned and they happen through participation, interactions, language, and communication [2: 33].

According to Vygotsky and Leontjev and Luria, who established the cultural-historical approach to learning, attitudes, thoughts, and emotions can be seen as the results of our experiences in various social and cultural settings. Vygotsky [3] highlights the role of interactions in learning and development, and it is interaction and co-action with the other that permits one to achieve more, which Vygotsky describes through the concept of the zone of proximal development. This concept, applied to the context of kindergarten teacher education, allows analyzing situations when students, under the guidance of teachers or in groups with other students, deal successfully with challenges greater than those who would ever be able to cope with alone.

Being in another's company may be insufficient for development unless an exchange of meanings and perspectives is possible through dialogue. Bakhtin [4] sees dialogue as the basic condition for human existence. Social and cultural diversity may function as stimuli for dialogue [5], and a dialogical community has to be established to make learning happen [4]. This is where meaning making and understanding processes can take place. In monological settings, all utterances are similar, and they reproduce the same sets of meaning. In educational settings, monological utterances occur when student responses are rather repetitions of what they are expected or are told to say. Other sets of meanings are seen as dangerous and disruptive elements in monological contexts.

The disruptive elements are particularly appreciated by Biesta [6, 7]. According to the socio-cultural tradition, he sees learning as occurring between gaining certain skills and being socialized within certain values, cultural habits, and sets of meaning. However, the moment when the subjects creates itself—subjectification—is always disruptive, and, thus, there is tension between this and the other two other functions of education (qualification and socialization).

In this paper, the concepts of qualification, socialization, and subjectification are related to the professional and personal growth of kindergarten teacher education

students and their experiences of succeeding in their courses of study. **Qualification** is connected to gaining particular knowledge and skills that students must acquire as future kindergarten teachers. For example, this can be knowledge about steering documents of early childhood education and the values and abilities to observe and register children's all-round development. **Socialization** is about becoming a part of a larger order of values, traditions, and culture. It is also about finding one's own role in this. In the context of kindergarten teacher education, students are being socialized into the profession based on certain knowledge and values. Socialization happens through formal and informal studies, culture, group projects, and ways of communicating, showing respect, participating, and allowing others to participate. Socialization also occurs in contact with the teacher educators and when observing teacher educators interacting with each other during various projects or meetings in in-service kindergartens. Both qualification and socialization are processes that can be planned and routinized. **Subjectification** is, however, of a different character. Biesta [7] puts forward the argument that it can even be understood as the opposite of qualification and socialization, as it is a phenomenon that disturbs the establish order(s). Biesta [7] insists that the educational system—even though it happens and will happen seldom—creates conditions for individuals so they can create for themselves as free, participating subjects. He relates the concept of subjectification strongly to the values of freedom, participation, equality, and the experience of coping with something. In kindergarten teacher education, subjectification refers to student participation and critical reflection on their own learning processes, and it relates to disagreements, protests, and formal requests for changes in certain procedures or routines. But it is also about inner dialogue with oneself asking oneself about the value of education, one's own desire to learn, and plans for one's future.

The processes of socialization and subjectification are connected to the development of certain motivations and activities. According to the cultural-historical wholeness approach [8, 9], individuals develop certain motivations and activities as responses to various expectations of the institutional contexts they participate in. The institutional context may expect individuals to do unlike things, and, thus, cause motivational or even developmental conflicts. In the case of this study, we look at individuals—both teacher educators and students—at a higher education institution that offers the particular activity setting of the educational conversation.

3. Methodological Approach

The research question posed in the study is: how can the educational conversation contribute to students achieving more success during their courses of study?

With this, we are asking how the educational conversation is experienced by teacher educators and students and what improvements these groups think could make this practice more beneficial for student progress. Focusing attention on the understandings and meanings developed among teachers and students places this study within the sphere of qualitative methodologies. Since the interview is described as a relevant method to gain insight into others' ways of thinking, reflecting, and understanding [10], we chose interview-inspired methods to gain access to the research participants' sets of meanings.

The teacher educators, who in this case were academic pedagogy teachers, were interviewed in groups with the world café method. Developed by Brown and Isacs [11], this method is used in various organizational settings connected with teaching and/or learning [12] "Practically seen, it is about gathering people around one table for a certain amount of time and leading their discussions by asking them questions that were prepared in advance. After they have answered one group of questions at one table, they move to another table where there is a new set of questions and/or points to discuss" [13: 68].

This method was chosen to be used as the interview technique because it is a working method academic teacher's use, especially when the task is to sum up knowledge on an issue or generate new ideas. We decided to use it so the teachers would feel comfortable with the interview situation, which would allow them focus on the issue under discussion by using a method that they were very familiar with.

Our knowledge about what is familiar or not to the teachers interviewed comes from our membership in this group. Thus, we had an insider's perspective when developing the research questions and conducting the research [14]. The advantage of insider research is that the researchers have a deep understanding and closeness to the problem, while challenges connected to it include difficulties in gaining the necessary distance from one's own practice and the ability and willingness to see it from a critical perspective [15, 16, 17]. Furthermore, there were also questions regarding what is useful to us and our practice and what is useful in the general, scientific perspective.

In order to triangulate and gain distance from our pedagogy teacher perspective, the student perspective was also researched. This was also important since the educational conversation is an interactive phenomenon that happens with the participation of one member each of these two groups, and only by reconstructing the views of each group on the educational conversation can this practice be improved.

3.1. Data Gathering

Altogether, there were three world café session conducted with four teacher educators each. Each group discussed the subject for 40 minutes. Eleven students

participated in individual interviews, which produced 180 minutes of audio material. Three of the students were in the first year, four in the second year, and four in the third year of the kindergarten teacher education course. The same questions were posed to both groups: a) 1) How do you understand the phrases "to succeed in the course of study" and "to be a successful student"?; b) What role does the educational conversation play in how the course of study is conducted?; c) How can the educational conversation be developed so that it is more supportive of students' professional and personal development?

3.2. Ethics

Participation in the interviews was voluntarily, and participants could withdraw at any time. Information about the study and the questions were sent to the students and pedagogy teachers in advance of the world cafés and interviews at the end of May 2011. The world cafés with the teachers were conducted in June 2011, and the interviews with the students were held between May and September 2011. General research ethical guidelines were followed. Neither personal nor sensitive data were asked for in the study.

Another ethnics-related aspect of the study was connected to our meetings with students. At various points during the interviews some of the students raised issues regarding general unhappiness or frustration with their courses of study that had nothing to do with the educational conversation. This raised a dilemma between meeting a human being with respect for what he/she articulates and to what a teacher educator should listen and the scientific ambition of the research being conducted. Since the teacher educators were in a power position in relation to the students [18] as were the researchers in relation to the informants [19], we decided to listen to the whole array of student voices and did not interrupt or ask them to speak with more relevance to the research subject. All the students' stories were listened to and when they did not answer the questions posed, we asked them if there was anything else they wanted to say in relation to the research questions.

3.3. Analysis

The interviews and world cafés were transcribed in anonymized form and analyzed using qualitative data analysis [20], with the main research question in focus. The main category reconstructed in the material was "supportive elements." This category embraced both the student and educator experiences and suggestions on what could be improved. Thereby, it created a red thread that joined the two groups, their past experiences, and suggestions for the future. These subcategories were as follows: a) trust and security; b) to be seen and listened to; c) professional coping and development; d) personal

development; e) motivation for the course of study; f) support for the course of study. The section below presents students' and teacher educators' voices referring to each of the subcategories and a discussion of them in relation to the theoretical perspectives presented earlier in the text.

4. Results

4.1. Supportive Elements: Trust and Security

Trust and security were a category that was mentioned by and important to both the students and the teachers involved in the educational conversation; however, their points of view differed. Trust and feeling secure in the relationship with the teacher were important for the students, while the teacher educators reflected on facilitating trust and security in the students with whom they conducted conversations. Relationships that were perceived as secure, which facilitated student confidence, were highlighted as positive by both students and teacher educators.

Of course, it says something if you feel confident about the teacher (year one student 2, interview 1).

What this says about a feeling of confidence is that it facilitates question asking and this produces greater benefits from the educational conversation. Being confident enough to influence the conversation in the directions that allow the student to benefit most from it is related to acting like a subject and actor in one's own life, and, in this case, in one's own course of study.

That you feel (...) that you have benefitted from it [the educational conversation – M.O, K.H]. Teachers that you are confident about make you feel that you can ask questions if there is anything (year one student 2, interview 1).

According to Bakhtin [4], the condition for dialogue is daring to ask questions and/or talk about things that one finds meaningful. Dialogue, with what Bakhtin refers to as inner meaning creates room for students to emerge as subjects, and, since teacher educators are also in dialogue with students, we understand this as advantageous for what Biesta [7] calls subjectification. To act as subjects in the education conversation depends on some kind of security. This security, however, is not always to be found in students themselves or in their relationships with teacher educators. There was a case in our empirical data in which a first-year student went to the educational conversation with a friend to feel more secure and speak in her own voice.

Having no personal attachment and thereby no trust and/or security in the relationship to the teacher seemed to reduce the meaningfulness of the experience of the educational conversation.

Since I didn't have any personal relationship with the teacher, our talk was only about the formal side, and I found it difficult to ask about anything or talk about my experience, and then she asked if I had managed all the reading, so... (Third-year student 1, interview 3).

So when trust was not established between the parties, the educational conversation could easily stop at Biesta's level of qualification and dwell on formal activities and skills that are necessary to complete the course of study. The teacher educators also highlighted the fundamental role of security and trust in the exercise of the conversation. It was the basis on which open communication can go, which, again, strengthens trust and security:

I am not afraid to tell a student what I think is the best solution to a problem, or that I am happy that she/he is in my class. I think this strengthens trust between us (teacher educator 2, world café 3).

4.2. Supportive Elements: To Be Seen and Listened to

The educational conversation facilitated face-to-face meetings between students and teachers. It was quite different from usual classroom encounters in which teachers meet and work with around 30 students. This was highlighted in particular by the teacher educators who had an opportunity during the educational conversation to see and listen to individual students and respond to their needs in real time. It also permitted them to adjust further teaching to the needs of individual students.

It's very important for me to have these educational conversations, to help the students develop as professionals, but I can also see that I understand them better afterward, and during subsequent classes I adapt to respond to students' needs better (teacher educator 2, world café 3).

The educational conversation is an activity setting that safeguards academic teachers meeting all students face-to-face and individually. On the one hand, it is important because of student suitability assessments, while on the other, this personal contact facilitates student professional and personal growth. The students experience the one-to-one meeting as an opportunity to be seen and listened to, which they define as very positive. It helps them to systematize their thoughts and put them into action. "I had been thinking about this, but now I know that I have to do this and that and the other thing. And I needed the conversation to put it into a plan" (first-year student 3, interview 1). The educational conversation also encompasses the need for student issues being the main focus. Experiencing them as important and as involving the teacher educator seemed to be necessary for student self-confidence.

It's important that we can talk about the experiences we have during our courses of study, and we can get

constructive feedback to build on. It gives me greater self-confidence (second-year student, interview 2).

This is also apparent for the teacher educators conducting the educational conversation.

The students are so happy when you tell them that you see how much they contribute during classes and respond with “Oh, do you really see that?” This feedback almost changes them. It makes me think how important the feedback we give them is (teacher educator 3, world café 1).

To be met and recognized as a subject, and to get recognition for one’s trials and work provides the experience of belonging to a community, and not only of students, but also of professionals. On this level, the educational conversation touches on socialization and qualification [7]. The students are seen and listened to, but they are also spoken to as members of the professional group of kindergarten teachers.

However, the reality of the educational conversation was not always this positive. It was not always the case that students’ words were listened to and taken seriously; it happened that students’ right to subjectification was taken away. For example, when they tried to communicate something disturbing or interruptive (in Biesta’s understanding), which was usually simply something negative or critical about the course of study, they experienced the teachers using their positions of power to convince them that such a negative perspective on things stemmed from professional immaturity.

And when we said something critical, it was manipulated away by saying that we had to try to look at it in a positive way (second-year student, interview 2).

Since such episodes were represented only in the students’ voices, it is hard to surmise the teacher educators’ intentions. They may have been positive and intended to challenge students’ perceptions thereby facilitating their professional development. Nevertheless, the students’ perceptions of the situation showed how great the power relation was during the educational conversation. There were certain issues that could have easily been rejected from the educational conversation by the teacher. These were not erased by the student’s perception, but they were no longer the subject of the dialogue. By censoring student perceptions, teachers could have easily turned the conversation into a monologue in the Bakhtinian understanding. It could have been a monologue spoken by two people with the student subordinated to the teacher’s expectations and to the teacher him/herself.

4.3. Supportive Elements: Professional Coping and Development

During the interviews, students and teacher educators were asked about “succeeding in the course of study” and

the role of the educational conversation in it. One student’s way of understanding “to succeed in the course of study” was connected to passing all assignments and exams with good grades. “To succeed” was understood, first of all, according to Biesta’s concept of qualification.

I think that to succeed is to pass and get through the course of study. To pass all the assignments and get the skills. Obviously with good grades (second-year student 2, interview 2).

All this succeeding in the course of study actually comes down to what the lecturers want you to know, and that this is what you should read for your exams (second-year student 1, interview 2).

When it comes to the teacher’s perspective on this, it seemed to include more than just qualification. The teachers were more focused on the other aspects of socialization and subjectification when it came to succeed in the course of study. Acquiring certain knowledge and skills was not the goal in itself, it had to, according to the academic teachers, result in a qualitative change in the student.

It is about a kind of qualitative development, like, for example, when a child learns to walk, read, or whatever else it is struggling with, and then, suddenly something happens, and all the pieces come together and it can. This can happen with students as well, it can happen during practical training, and this is something, after which, you can tell yourself that you have succeeded (teacher educator 1, world café 1)

Qualitative change in students can be created through critical distance, a metaperspective to themselves and their education. However, this distance can work positively only if students have first created a closeness to the field and the profession.

I wanted to say that to succeed in the course of study is both about a sort of closeness to the field, a meaningful closeness to the field, as well as a critical distance to it. Apart from getting so close to all the skills, theories, and the field, I wish the students also could get a bird’s-eye perspective on what is happening to them (teacher educator 3, world café 1).

4.4. Supportive Elements: Personal Development

Another of the students’ conceptualizations of “succeeding in the course of study” was connected to the internalization of the content communicated to them, or personal development that joined all the parts of the academic and practical knowledge being taught on the university campus and in-service kindergartens.

I was thinking that succeeding in the course of study is about making knowledge a part of you as a teacher, so that you can bring it with you to your future job

(third-year student 2, interview 3).

The other third-year students who participated in the interviews indicated the importance of the educational conversation in facilitating the process of internalization. This group, which had had their educational conversations two years previously, argued for having this practice during each year of the course of study.

If we had the educational conversation every year, we could reflect more on our becoming pedagogical leaders, on how it was during the first and second years of the course, and we could get help in seeing things that were happening to us that we were not necessarily were aware of (third-year student, interview 3).

This means that, to develop as a person and as a professional, the students needed possibilities to engage in dialogue when they articulated this as a subject that was important to them. It could have helped them to co-develop meanings and understandings crucial for their further professional development, which is in line with Bakhtin's understanding of dialogue as central for meaning making and Biesta's highlighting of community in learning processes.

The first-year students stated that it was important to develop on both the professional and personal levels, but at one's own pace. This did not appear to be only about earning top grades, but also about seeing and witnessing one's own progression throughout the academic plan and also in relationships with others.

I have never gotten an A in whole my life, and I don't think I'll start now. I feel that this is an unnaturally high expectation of myself. And that I can function well in society without being an A-student. It's not that I want to underestimate my potential, but I want to develop first of all, as a person. Academically as well. But an A would be too high an expectation anyway. I want to feel that I learned something that I wanted to learn, that I'm happy with the grades I got, no matter how low or high they are. And I want to feel that the time I spent here is not wasted... and that I can cooperate and communicate with people (first-year student 3, interview 1).

This student seemed to be in a continuous dialogue with herself [4] about what succeeding in the course of study was, and however subjectifying grades were for the formal qualification, she recognized the importance of socializing and being able to communicate and cooperate with other people. Hence, again, knowledge and understanding were developing [3].

These processes were also noted among teacher educators.

Yes, I think it happens at the professional, social, and personal level, that students feel that they develop. I believe that they also believe that they have succeeded. When they feel and can articulate that "oh, something is

happening to me now," "I've changed," that's when it starts... That's what I hear the students are taking about. "Oh, then, then the light turned on for me! When I started the second practical training, then I felt that something had happened...and then I saw the kindergartens and the practice differently" (teacher educator 3, word café 3).

The student and teachers shared views on succeeding in the course of study during the educational conversations.

Sharing understandings of succeeding provided a basis for co-creating strategy for achieving success, and, again, it had a motivating effect.

4.5. Supportive Elements: Motivation for the Study

One third-year student asking about the educational conversation's role in succeeding in the course of study pointed directly at this and at creating one's own strategy for self-defined success. In her/his case, a very important factor was to recognize her/his own learning strategies and mechanisms. Becoming aware of how she/he learns was, for this person, succeeding in the course of study. Spending time on these issues and taking them seriously during the educational conversation was of a great importance to this particular student.

It's important to know how and from what you learn. What do the children learn from and how? If you do not understand what you are learning from and how, it will be difficult to find motivation (third-year student 4, interview 3).

A second-year student extended the need for talking about learning from work in the kindergarten during practical training.

It's very useful that we are talking about this during the educational conversation. Have you seen what is expected of you, and how you do it...I would like to talk more about how you experience working in the kindergarten and how you can learn from the practical training (second-year student 1, interview 2).

Another second-year student argued that what was really motivating was the presence of the teacher and her/his listening, but also her/his giving feedback on how she/he sees the student in the classroom, for example, in group work.

It's motivating that the teacher is there only for you and whatever you say during this conversation will be taken seriously. Another thing is feedback on things that you've contributed to during classes. It's motivating that the teacher sees it, remembers it, and tells you about it... (Second-year student 2, interview 2).

This last utterance is particularly compatible with the one above that mentioned how the student's contribution during classes changed them and let them grow.

The students are so happy when you tell them that you see how much they contribute during classes and respond with “Oh, do you really see that?” This feedback almost changes them. It makes me think how important the feedback we give them is (teacher educator 3, word café 1).

The students’ voices made it clear that this sort of feedback develops the necessary motivation and motives to complete the course of study. According to the cultural-historical wholeness approach [8], individuals in certain institutions that run certain practices develop the necessary motivation to meet institutional expectations. Formally, the institution expects only **qualification**, to use Biesta’s category. Nevertheless, **qualification** happens through **socialization** and **subjectification**. Through the educational conversation, the students recognized the institutional expectations as their own motivation. Following the educational conversation, qualifying as a kindergarten teacher became not only qualifying, but also becoming someone (a subject) that one wants to be.

4.6. Support during Studies

Most generally, students recognized the educational conversation as support during their course of study, as something that helped them on the way, and as an activity setting in which they experienced being seen, but also of being challenged and motivated. Many wished this sort of support was accessible during each year of the course of study and that it was not that easy to get teachers’ time and attention.

It’s simply important during the course of study to talk about learning and the course. It could be nice to have it each year. Otherwise, it’s very difficult to reach the teachers; they’re very busy (second-year student 2, interview 2).

In some cases, the educational conversation came with some fundamental explanations, like where to find class schedules, where to follow room changes, how to arrange the first practical training, etc. Students who experienced the start of the course of study as very confusing argued that the educational conversation should have been held earlier during the first year.

In my view, this should have taken place much earlier. It’s though at the very beginning when one is most confused here. All these fuss with the Time Edit [an app that updates room numbers for certain classes – M.O., K.H.], the semester plan [the plan for the content of each class – M.O., K.H.] that are not compatible...It took so much time to find out. I think the educational conversation could have taken place before the first practical training. There are so many of the new students who are very insecure during the start and the practical training comes so quick...It would be nice to talk to someone before it (first-year student 3, interview

3).

The teachers also saw this activity as supportive for the students; however, meeting vulnerable personalities seemed to require support and resources guaranteed at the institutional level. This is why some of the teachers suggested a more formalized form of the educational conversation that would safeguard its supportive function.

It’s so important to have the educational conversation, since it helps the students to articulate their experiences. Therefore, I think it should be more formalized and that there should be some guidelines indicating certain issues that we must address (teacher educator 1, world café 2).

5. Discussion: Turning Institutional Expectations into Personal Motivation

What we see as most important during the educational conversation is that it is an institutional practice that aims to support individuals in their journey through the kindergarten teacher education program. In addition to the formal side, which is to ensure that the human being who is going to work with children is seen and assessed with regard to her/his fundamental suitability for the profession, this practice also supports student success in the course of study.

In our view, the practice of supporting student success is about turning institutional expectations into students’ personal motivation to use cultural-historical terms [8, 9]. If using Biesta’s [7] theoretical tools, then these include extending **qualification** into **socialization** and **subjectification**.

Turning institutional expectations into personal motives may sound paradoxical since the empirical material pictured the educational conversation as a meeting in which students were subjects and human beings with their own meanings, needs, questions, and experiences. However, a great part of the educational conversation was about asking students and thinking with them about how they were coping with expectations and what was necessary to help them meet these expectations. This developed motives to fulfill the formal demands. Motivation also developed when strategies for fulfilling the requirements of the course of study was not being discussed. The recognition of student effort and the simple fact of being in a face-to-face meeting with teachers who saw and listened to students had a great impact on the young people.

There was great power in placing first-year students in one-to-one meetings with a much more experienced academic teachers who listened and took the students’ voices seriously. After reflecting on creating better conditions for this practice, we suggest making both the

students and the teachers more aware of the effect that such a personal meeting can have on students and particularly in contemporary academia with its growing mass culture of studying, teaching, and learning. Our study reports on the generally very supportive function of the educational conversation for the students, as it helped them to integrate professional and personal development. However, it also opened up certain ethical dilemmas connected to the personal influence of experienced teachers on young people. This was especially apparent in cases when the students experienced their critiques being “manipulated away” when they were summarized as professionally immature or when the students were told that, at that moment, they were unable to recognize the future value of certain practices.

The students entered into the educational conversations at a very young age, and they usually spoke with much older, experienced teachers. Moreover, they were very new to the institutional setting of the university. In a great majority of cases, the students were aware of their lack of experience and limited perspective. This could have often led to auto-censorship. That is why eventual critiques from their side had to be treated with great care, sensitivity, and an awareness of the great power relation influencing the interaction.

Conversely, we saw the internalization of formal expectations as important and positive during kindergarten teacher education, since it joins together professional and personal development.

6. Summary

This paper reports on a study on the educational conversation from the perspectives of students and teacher educators. We reconstructed value qualities that were associated by both groups with the educational conversation that describe its supportive function for students’ professional and personal development. The core of the educational conversation’s support for “succeeding in the course of study” was that it facilitated the students internalizing institutional expectations. In other words, the formal demands became their own motives and goals, which had a positive effect on student professional development, but ethical dilemmas connected to the students being influenced in direct, personal contact with the teacher also arose. Power relations connected to positions in academia, experience, and age that could have resulted in the re-definition of student voices, especially those that were critical, is a field that we believe requires further exploration.

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