



Konferens
Relationskompetencer i
skolen og
laereruddannelsen

Relational Pedagogy and Teachers' Relational Competence

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Disposition

- 1) What is relational pedagogy?
- 2) Martin Buber's distinction between "the social" and "the interhuman"
- 3) What does current research tell about the teacher-student relationship?
- 4) What is teachers' relational competence?
- 5) How can Buber's concepts contribute to the idea of teachers' relational competence?



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What is relational pedagogy?

- A theoretical framework based on the idea that education, teaching and learning are relational processes.
- The concept of relationship is considered basic fact of human existence and foundation of (good) education. Interpersonal relationships rather than single individuals, groups or organizations are in the focal point.
- Thus, the research is distinguished by a focus on interaction and inter-human, personal encounters.
- An international field of research (Relational Pedagogy). NORP - Nordic Relational Pedagogy. FoRP – Forskning relationell pedagogik (HKR) www.relationellpedagogik.se



Relational being

- Man as unique being breaks into an already existing “web of human relationships” (Arendt)
- “We are living in the mind of others without knowing it, just as we daily walk the solid ground without thinking how it bears us up” (Cooley).
- We must be others to be ourselves (Mead).
- “We are always already emerging from relationship; we cannot step out of relationship” (Gergen)
- “I am not naturally alone. I am naturally in a relation from which I derive nourishment and guidance. My very individuality is defined in a set of relations. This is my basic reality.” (Noddings)

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Martin Buber's anthropology

“In an anthropological sense, a human being does not exist in isolation, but only in the fullness of the relationship between one person and another”.

”I become through my relation to the *Thou*; as I become, I say *Thou*. All real living is meeting.”



”The social” and ”The interhuman”

- Buber introduces a distinction between “two essentially different areas in the life of humans”.
- “The social” includes everything that takes place between human beings, e.g. in group activities. Concepts such as social order, norm, convention, ritual, and sanction signify such influences.
- “The interhuman” is an ontological concept defining the fundamental fact of human existence. It is an occurrence or a happening when two people experiences the other as “this particular other”.



Precious (2009). Director: Lee Daniels: [Precious](#)



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Current research on teacher-student relationship

- A positive, supportive relationship between teacher and student is essential for students' social development, well-being, and motivation for school work.
- Qualities of the relationship is central also for students' learning and academic achievements.
- Teacher-student relationship can make a significant difference especially for students in need of special support
- The teacher-student relationship is important not only for small children, but also for older children and for teenagers.
- The ability to build supportive relationships with students is a key element in teacher professionalism.

Hughes, 2012; Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2006; Murray & Pianta, 2007; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Hattie, 2009; Cornelius White, 2007, Roorda & Koomen, 2011 Rimm-Kaufmann et.al., 2003. Also see Drugli, 2014.



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What is teachers' relational competence?

Some definitions



Definition 1

Teachers' skills in supporting, activating, and motivating students and in developing relationships based on qualities such as respect, tolerance, and empathy. It is a basic teacher competence, together with *didactic competence* and *leadership*.

(S-E Nordenbo et al, 2008).



Definition 2

- “The true core of relational competence ... consists of being able to meet students and parents with openness and respect, to show empathy and to be able to take responsibility for one’s own part of the relationship as an educator”

(Elsebeth Jensen, Else Benggaard Skibsted, Mette Vedsgaard Christensen, 2015, p. 206).



Definition 3

Teachers' ability to cooperate with students, foster interpersonal relationships, and encounter students in authentic and professional contacts. Teachers' having well-developed self-knowledge and reflexive capacity, and understanding their own contributions and responsibilities concerning relationships.



Definition 4

The ability to “establish and retain relationships with students, individually and collectively, in which the school class as a learning community and the well-being and comprehensive development of each student are promoted”

(Louise Klinge, 2016, p. 15, my transl.).



A schematic definition

- Teachers´ relational competence is an ability to build ”*good*” relationships (care, trust, respect etc.).
- It includes different kinds of relationships, but primarily it is about teachers´ relationships to *individual* students.
- A part of professionalism: it is about *educational* relationships.
- It labels *growth-fostering relationships*; i.e. implies to move someone or a relationship and promote the well-being and the competencies of the participants.
- It has *a personal dimension*; it is about understanding yourself in relation to the student - your influence and responsibility.
- It includes *personal qualities* such as authenticity, trustworthyness and honesty.

Aspelin (2015)



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A two-dimensional conception

- Based on Buber we could say that there are two fundamentally different aspects of relationship, as well as two accompanying types of pedagogical attitude and relational competencies:
 - On one hand, the teacher *manages* social relationships.
 - On the other hand, the teacher *participates in* interhuman relationships.

Aspelin (2015) "Lärares relationskompetens." Concept built on Buber's distinction between "the social" and "the interhuman".



R C from the social perspective...

- This perspective essentially concerns teachers' relational work, e.g. how we problematize, reflect on, analyze, organize, design, manage – social relationships.
- It is about a “surface level” and about handling relationships from “the outside”.
- The teacher is actively and purposely engaged in promoting pedagogically fruitful relationships and the well-being of the student.
- As teachers, we can work individually and/or in teams to cultivate such a skill.
- In teacher practice and teacher training, we can actively and purposely promote social relationships.



R C from the interhuman perspective...

- This perspective concerns an existential dimension; it is an immanent part of authentic encounters between teacher and student.
- It is about a deeper relational level and about being in a relationship.
- It is essentially about teachers' recognizing and responding to the existential call of the student, i.e. who the student is and could become.
- This attitude is not something that the teacher learns or teaches in a conventional sense.
- However, it is more or less cultivated in and through pedagogical practice, as well as in teacher training.



Conclusion

- Being a relationally competent teacher means being competent in two essentially different ways.
- Whatever the relationally competent teacher does he/she either is immediately involved in an interhuman relationship *or* uses some kind of means to promote social relationships.
- This does not imply that one relational form and attitude is “better” than the other.
- The main point is that we need a two-dimensional conception to gain a deeper understanding of teachers’ relational competence; how it functions and how it is developed.



LÄRK-projektet (Aspelin & Jönsson)

- Pilot project (2016): aims to get indications about teacher students' strengths and need of development regarding relational competence and about methods that works to develop such competence.
- Main project (2017): aims to explore how teacher students' relational competence could be supported with the use of digital video.

For discussion

- What could teachers' relational competence mean for students' social development, achievements etcetera? Own experiences?
- How could teacher education be (re)arranged, to improve students' relational competence?
- How do you imagine a school built on relational pedagogy?

