

University teachers as role models for being sustainable – doing sustainability together with students through the use of professional ethics

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How can the university train its students to mend the society into becoming more sustainable? Courses and theme-days play an important role, but a key role is actually played by the university teachers. They often act as models for how a university educated person argues and how to be an educated professional. But university teachers can go one step further, and become role models for how to do a sustainable society through the ways in which they perform their teaching (cf. Lunenberg et.al, 2007; Aldrin, 2016).

In a recently published article I have put forward a new conceptual model of ethical didactics, where the university teacher is using the traditional didactical questions of what, how, why and whom, in connection with professional ethics (Aldrin, 2016). The article not only argues for a tight connection between teaching and professional ethics (towards the subject/what, the methods/why, the overall purpose/why, and the relation between student and teacher/whom), the article also presents an ethical framework of particular ethics where different ethical standpoints can be used in order to do professional ethics. According to the model, all university teachers do not have to believe in the same kind of ethics, but do need to share the visions of the subject and the purpose of higher education for their own particular subject.

Democratic societies need to further develop in the action of the teachers in relation to the pupils in compulsory schools (grundskolan). This has been a fundamental aspect of Swedish school policies since the end of the second world war. One key thinker to this aim, was the late John Dewey, who argued that democracy is not something we believe in, it is something we do, and train our children into doing (Dewey, 1916). Here, school teachers, has played a vital role for this democratic mending of the Swedish society, by being democratic towards and in connection with the pupils.

The United Nations' 17 goals for sustainable development could align well within the Swedish higher education's different academic programs, but are seldom seen as a vital part of the university education. All academic programs do not need to focus all of the goals, but seen as a whole, Borås University, for example, strive for a sustainable future in terms of the key goals in all the academic programmes combined.

The 17 goals are often seen as purposes (in didactic terms 'why') imposed from above, but sustainability is much more than a *why/purpose*, it also a *what/subject, how/methods* and *whom/relations*. Sustainable democratic societies are not something one only agrees upon, but something citizens of a society do. The role model university teachers play for their students in terms of academic reasoning and behaviour, can also be understood as a vital aspect of forming a sustainable society, like the schools have been a foundation for democratic development in the history. Professional ethics for a sustainable society is therefore much about the ways in which the university teachers do sustainability and train the students into imitating and further develop the idea of a society of equal rights not only for the living but also for the yet unborn.

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