Ethics of Care
– a dilemma or a challenge in education?

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ABSTRACT Every day there are a vast number of people within educational systems around the world. The school can be regarded as a meeting place for both adults and children with different backgrounds and expectations. A meeting between humans means for example that we are talking and acting together. Consciously or unconsciously one of the factors that govern our actions are our values – the morals or ethics one has.

   The aim of this paper is to elucidate, interpret and understand ethical situations in a Swedish secondary school. To develop an understanding of this, teachers were invited to formulate in writing their reflections on ethical situations in their profession. The phenomenology of the life-world is the theoretical basis in this study.

   During the analysis of the empirical data different themes gradually crystallised, and the picture of ethical situations in a school that emerged consists of three themes: *Relations to the Other, Conflict of Values* and *Ethical Maturity*. The findings are discussed according to the philosophies of Emanuel Levinas and Nel Noddings. The comprehensive understanding of the results is that the teachers are trying to achieve ethics of care. Finally we raise the question if ethics of care can be considered as a dilemma or a challenge in education.

Key words: ethics, learning, teachers, reflections, care

Introduction

Education may be thought of as a constellation of encounters, both planned and unplanned, that promote growth through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, understanding, and appreciation (Noddings, 2002a, p. 283).

Every day there are a vast number of people within educational systems around the world. In Swedish schools alone there are approximately 1.5 million people. This means that there are many "constellation of encounters, both planned and unplanned", to use Noddings term, in schools every day. The school can be regarded as a place where both adults and children with different backgrounds and expectations meet and learn together. Due to the meetings, relations between humans become very important and there are many opportunities to create networks.

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A meeting between humans means, for example, that we are talking and acting together, and this presupposes some kind of interaction (Zackari & Modigh, 2000). Consciously or unconsciously one of the factors that govern our actions are our values – the morals or ethics one has. In the meetings our values are shown and some times negotiated.

Ethical situations or considerations are common in school (Colnerud, 1995; Campbell, 2003; Johansson & Johansson, 2000). Campbell (2003) writes: "The teacher's conduct, at all times and in all ways, is a moral matter. For that reason alone, teaching is a profoundly moral activity" (p. 116). Campbell means that teaching is a moral activity because teachers and students interact in the school. This community is based on their relations to each other and it is through these relations that the students learn important values like honesty, respect and tolerance (Campbell, 2003).

The words ethics and morals are sometimes used as two terms with different meanings. Ethics is then considered to be the theory of the morals, and morals are demonstrated in our practical actions (Johansson & Johansson, 2000). According to Colnerud and Granström (2002) these two terms can also be used synonymously, which is the case in this paper. The word attitude can be regarded as synonymous with ethics. What attitude do we have to the world and what is the basis of our actions? This view on ethics can involve reflection on our own actions and an attempt to analyse which values that are guiding us and how they affect us (Gren, 1994). Johansson and Johansson (2000) give an example of what role ethical values play and they also mean that ethical values are connected to encounters between humans:

> Ethical values authorize actions and show a direction how to behave to others. They can be expressed in words or in actions, they can be unreflected or reflected and they are always intertwined in the individuals' life world. They exist, negotiate and change in the encounters between humans (Johansson & Johansson, 2000, p. 14, our translation).

The aim of this paper is to elucidate, interpret and understand ethical situations in a Swedish secondary school. To develop an understanding of this, teachers were invited to formulate in writing their reflections on ethical situations in their profession.

The theoretical basis of the study
A life-world approach for studying ethical situations in a school
The phenomenological concept of the life-world is the base of the life-world approach (Merleau-Ponty, 1996), an approach which should be seen as part of the phenomenological movement. However, it has its own distinguishing characteristics and therefore we, very briefly, want to outline some significant features of the life-world approach. We also want to explain why we think that it can be fruitful, in a study of ethical situations in a school, to use the life-world approach.

According to Merleau-Ponty (1996) life-world ontology includes a pluralistic and integrative view of reality, and the ontological assumptions of the life-world are based on the fact that reality has many nuances. The world and life affect each other mutually in the sense that life is always worldly and the world is always what it is for a living being. Reality must be seen in terms of "both and" instead of "either or". This applies not only for life and the world, but also for body and mind, object and subject, outer and inner, physical and mental, self and other, individual and society, etc. By that, we want to stress that life and the world are integrated into a unity that cannot be separated. Human beings experience the world from the world itself, and this world is changeable. The body and the mind are intimately intertwined in the world of existence (Merleau-Ponty, 1996). The students and teachers are not coming to the school as "empty sheets" – a Tabula Rasa. Instead, all humans have a stock of experiences, and when, for example, teachers and students meet in school these experiences have an impact on their interaction and meetings (Levinas, 1969). Let us exemplify this by taking a railway junction as a metaphor for interaction and meetings in school. People in the school are coming

from different directions into a railway junction, they meet and share for a moment lived experiences with each other and then they continue out from the railway junction, and then they can go back again and so on. In the life-world there are many meetings and different relations and it is the same scenario in a school. A school is first of all a place with its particular content, meaning and value that change over the world, over time and between teachers and students (Noddings, 1984; Levinas, 1969).

This view of reality leads to methodological consequences. Reality cannot be reduced to two basic qualities − body and mind − and because of that we have to develop adequate methods to catch other kinds of qualities we may expect to find. To adopt ready "methodological recipes" is, quite obviously, not an option. But to do justice to the complexity of reality a methodological creativity is demanded (Bengtsson, 1999).

The methodological basis of the study

To elucidate, interpret and understand teachers' reflections on ethical situations in a school the methodological basis consists of two parts. One part concerns the methods which are used to collect the empirical data and the other part concerns the methods of analysing the empirical data.

Data collection

The teachers in the study all teach in different subjects within a compulsory school in a small town in northern Sweden. A total of 12 teachers and two head teachers took part in the study, six women and eight men − all together 14 persons. The selection of teachers was made on certain criteria, such as gender, teaching subject, and years of experience. In order to get an understanding of the phenomenon it was important to get a picture of the ethical situations as broadly as possible, therefore we have a variation of teachers participating in the study. The teachers were informed of the study orally as well as in writing, and participation in the study was voluntary.

The empirical data was collected through an assignment where the teachers were given the opportunity to formulate in writing their reflections on ethical situations in their profession. The writing task could be done at their own chosen place and time.

Writing − a way of visualising reflections

Writing is, according to Dysthe (1993), a much slower process than talking, and during this process the writer gets the opportunity to reflect. Vygotsky (1978) argues that writing is the highest form of symbolic thinking, and Applebee (1984) stresses that written words have a permanence that allows the writer to revise and rethink. The reflections moulded by writing activities can be "seen" on paper and by that, the reflections are made explicit compared with verbal speech. Writing turns language into an object of discourse, and reflective writing is, according to Winter et al (1999), one of many discourses in reflective practice, "… reflective writing has the voice which presents the thinking of a writer who is exploring, questioning, and thus − above all − learning" (p. 110).

Analysis of the empirical data

The analysis tried to elucidate, interpret and understand the meaning of the reflections to which the teachers gave form. According to the analytical procedure, all the written reflections were analysed repeatedly and thoroughly where qualitative similarities and differences, patterns and structures were noticed. The patterns and structures noticed were then combined in different themes, taking the central and common characteristics of the patterns and structures as the point of departure. These themes, which gradually emerged, consist in turn of internal variations in the form of different aspects. These aspects reflect the great variety of the teachers' reflections on ethical situations in a school within the respective themes and therefore make

each theme what it is. It is therefore, according to Van Manen (1990), the different themes which make *the phenomenon* what it is.

During the analysis it is therefore a matter of forming themes of the teachers' reflections, but it is essential to stress that this process should not be regarded as being governed by certain predetermined rules. Instead this process allows the phenomenon to appear precisely as it is, – a free act of "seeing" according to Van Manen (1990), and not a rule-bound process.

Teachers' reflections on ethical situations in a school

The picture of ethical situations in a school that appeared to us when we analysed the teachers' reflections consists of the themes*: Relations to the Other[2], Conflicts of Values* and *Ethical Maturity*. The interpretation and understanding of these themes are shown below. The themes and the different aspects in the themes are described separately, but there are no sharp distinctions between them, and they are also described without any order of precedence. The results will be seen and discussed according to the philosophies of Nel Noddings and Emanuel Levinas.

Relations to the Other

The teachers' written reflections often contain situations about meetings and relations, and the important parts they play in school. Meetings and relations are the underlying base for the activities in the school. One of the themes that emerged is relations to the Other. Levinas marks that the "… encounter between self and Other is the time and place of responsibility; it is a profoundly ethical event" (Todd, 2003, p. 50). This means that our experiences in the relationships with the Other have an impact on how we treat the Other and that it implies responsibility for the Other. The empirical data shows a variation of experiences of the relations to the Other where different expressions, both positive and negative, of responsibility, empathy, support and trust appear. The theme contains three different aspects: real-life meetings, behaving to each other and face-to-face communication.

Real-life meetings

In the empirical data we see traces of real-life meetings, which means that teachers and students are connected to each other. This is quite obvious because both teachers and students bring their experiences and expectations when they meet in the school. It is impossible to put former or present experiences of life outside school aside when entering the school and this is why, for example, social problems have an impact in the school. A teacher reflects on this in the following:

> *What is the right way to treat a child whose father drinks too much alcohol? Should you as a teacher allow the student to sit and do nothing during the lessons and should you not say that it is not ok to be late for a lesson? Sometimes I have been cross with the student, but then the student started crying and then I was reminded of the student's situation at home* (male teacher).

This quotation shows that the teacher and the student are connected to each other, their life worlds overlap and there is potential for a meeting between the two. The teacher in this example is not arguing according to principles in trying to figure out what is the best thing to do for this student. Deciding the actions is not a rule-bound process, but it is instead adjusted to the present situation – the person's needs and the circumstances in the situation. Meetings like one described above are common in the teachers' daily lives in school. We believe that these kinds of meetings can be considered as meetings of an ethical nature where the relationships with the students are in focus.

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[2] Levinas use the term Other with a capital O to stress that the concern is about a specific person in a relationship (Levinas, 1969). In this paper the term is therefore used in the same way, and the concerns in the teachers' written reflections are mostly about the students.

The teacher describes that the social problems, that appear in the school, affect not only the relationship between the student and the teacher, but also the student's learning situation. Learning about what is stated in the syllabus is the aim in education. A teacher's task is to, together with the student, take responsibility for the learning process and that is why the teacher is trying to make better opportunities for the student's learning. The teacher is wondering how to relate to these social problems in this particular case in order to improve the learning situation for the student. In Noddings' words this kind of education means "… a mode of living and learning together, as a way of being in the world" (2003, p. 241). Discussions about real-life meetings have a connection to Merleau-Ponty (1996) in that the world and those who live in the world are affecting each other mutually.

Behaving to each other

The teachers in this study stress the importance of how humans behave to each other in the school. One of the teachers reflects about relations and how to behave to each other:

> *In the beginning of my time as a teacher I was going to have the first lesson in a class. I opened the door and the students were rushing in as they were shouting. I have a history of a problem with my hot temper and of course I got angry and lost control. I started the lesson by really telling off the students. I remember that I insulted everybody by comparing them to a runaway herd of cattle …. The person who suffered the most from this situation was – myself. The first impression of me the class got was devastating. I felt that we never connected with each other during the rest of the year and the first impression of the class I got was seemed to be firmly cemented. I had immediately destroyed the interpersonal bridge* (male teacher).

In the continuation of the story the teacher saw the consequences of the actions. His actions had a great impact on the relations with the students in a negative way. He therefore felt that it was very difficult to teach if both parties distrust each other. However the teacher did not stop at those statements, but tried consciously to change strategy, in rebuilding the "interpersonal bridge". This situation can be seen as an example of Levinas (1969) thoughts that teaching is about learning and ethics.

Face-to-face communication

From the empirical data we can draw the conclusion that, in the relations to the Other, face-to-face communication is important. This communication can take place between teachers and students, between students and students, between teacher and teachers and between teachers and parents. In the written reflections successful communication as well as insufficient communication appear. One of the teachers tell a story about a class where they had problems with bullying – students were spreading bad comments about classmates – and that resulted in a negative atmosphere in the classroom. The teacher felt that, under these circumstances, there were no good conditions for learning. Some action was needed and in this case the teacher used communication as a means in trying to solve the problems in the classroom. The teacher expresses it like this: "I explained in a conversation face to face with the bullying students that the negative atmosphere in the classroom was caused by their behaviour" (male teacher).

The teacher tried to solve the problems by a version of face-to-face communication and the continuation of the story shows that this action failed to solve the problematic situation. The bullying continued, but not in an explicit way as negative comments. The victims of the bullying felt the insults in a more tacit and implicit way, because they still had feeling of being bullied. The real change as the teacher experienced it came when:

> *We managed to persuade one student who experienced the situation as problematic to attend at a meeting together with the student who was insulting, both the students' parents, the form teacher and me as the subject teacher… They simply got the time in an organized manner to talk to each other* (male teacher).

In this meeting, both one of the students who was bullying, and one of the students who was the victim, had the time and place to talk face to face to each other. By that they got an opportunity to express their own view. To solve the situation it was not enough to have a conversation between the teacher and the bullying student. There had to be a conversation between the students in this problematic situation – they had to meet face to face. This type of deeper face-to-face communication led to a real change in the classroom. When the different parties met face to face it was easier to understand the Other's perspective – that this student had experienced the situation in the classroom in this negative way – and that may here evoked empathy for the victim's feelings, because the insults ended. Paulo Freire (1970) calls this a "true dialogue", where both parties speak and both parties listen. Levinas means that openness is a condition for real communication – one has to open oneself to the Other. In this openness the responsibility for the Other reveals itself (Levinas, 1989) and here the ability to care can be a helpful way to keep the openness. Noddings (2002b) means that this dialogue draws the attention to the Other, not just the topic of the conversation. "Dialogue is central to moral education because it always implies the question, What are you going through?" (p. 17). In the true dialogue the needs of the Other are brought into the light. In the dialogue we can also talk about the intentions of our actions and reflect upon the effects of our actions. Noddings (2002b) states that this "… is our way of being in relation" (p. 19).

Conflict of values

The second theme in the empirical data is conflict of values. The teachers give many examples of conflict of values or ethical dilemmas in their relations to the Other and they describe the process of the conflict. The relationship with the Other is not unproblematic and Levinas (1989) explains it like this:

> … [it] is not an idyllic and harmonious relationship of communion, or a sympathy through which we put ourselves in the other's place; we recognize the other as resembling us, but exterior to us; the relationship with the other is a relationship with a Mystery (p. 43).

The theme consists of three aspects: causes of a conflict, contents of a conflict and solutions of a conflict.

Causes of a conflict

The teachers reflect upon many different causes of conflicts. One cause is *priorities*. The teachers care about their students' learning and well-being and often they feel that, because of this, end up in a conflict. They ask questions like: who shall I prioritise? If many students have the same needs and I as a teacher am not able to fulfil the needs of all my students, what shall I do? One teacher describes a situation like this:

> *A big problem in the school today is that every student shall be seen and noticed and that the teacher takes into account every student's needs. Large classes and socially demanding students, puts an unreasonable pressure on the teacher. The teachers have to prioritise in coping with work and who shall we then prioritise? All students just a little bit? Put most resources on weaker students? Just commit oneself to the students who show that they want something?* (male teacher).

This teacher's voice expresses a frustration in the teaching practice. Because of the care of their students the teacher does not know how to handle the situation in an ethical way – there are no easy solutions. Noddings (1984) expresses the problems with caring this way:

> … conflict may arise between the perceived need of the one person and the desire of another; between what the cared-for wants and what we see as his best interest. … Sometimes, the conflict cannot be resolved and must simply be lived (p. 55).

Another cause of conflicts is *behaviours*. The teachers give examples of abuse of trust, disrespect, insults and irresponsibility, which can lead to a poor learning atmosphere and a conflict. A teacher describes a situation where a student repeatedly has rejected doing an assignment and taking responsibility for his learning. This situation contains different kinds of behaviours, both from the teacher and the student, which are causing the conflict. The teacher sees that this student is not involved in the learning process but still tries to give a second chance. The student does not accept the offer from the teacher. Despite several invitations to take part in the activities in the classroom, the student chooses not to read the book and present a report. The teacher lets the student take the consequences of his actions, by not letting him into the classroom. The escalation of this story is shown in the teacher's words, and there at the doorway the conflict leads to the action of barring the student.

Contents of a conflict

Contents of a conflict can be described as a competition between different values, for example justice, personal integrity, trust and power. In the empirical data we have found conflicts on different levels. There are situations where a teacher's personal and/or professional values are opposed to a student's values and situations where a teacher's or a student's values are opposed to economic or organisational values.

Some of the teachers reflect upon how justice is working and they express the belief that many of the conflicts in a school are, in one way or another, related to justice. There are three principles of justice: *the principal of need*, everybody gets what he or she is in need of, *the principal of equality*, everybody gets the same, and *the principal of qualification*, the one who is most qualified gets the most (Colnerud, 1995; Johansson & Johansson, 2003). Justice can be defined in different ways if we see it in the light of these principles. According to which principle of justice we are holding, several students are entitled to a just treatment. But in a conflict of values there are no exact answers to whom is in most need and here is where both care and priorities are at stake. Different ways of viewing justice are highlighted in the following example:

> *I and my colleague had picked four boys [from the class] that we spend the day together with. These four boys feel lonely in the class and two of them really feel bad because of the current atmosphere. We did not want the boys to feel nervous or accused so when we informed them of the reason why they would go to town with us and have some fun we modified the truth a bit. We said that it was because they had behaved exemplarily for one and a half years and that is why they deserved it. We had a very nice day and the boys "spoke out frankly" about their loneliness. Everything was peace and joy, you can believe. No, of course this had spread to the rest of the class and an upset mother [another boy's parent] called me during the day. What were we really doing in school? She had not expected that from me. After a long conversation she understood how we were reasoning, but it was not obvious. Her thinking of justice was very deeply rooted. … Her boy had indeed pulled himself together and what encouragement did he get for that?* (female teacher).

Here we see an example of a conflict of justice – the different principles of justice are in competition. The teachers in this case express the principle of need as the reason for the trip to town, but to hide this they tell a white lie and base the reason for the trip on the principle of qualification instead. When the teachers talk to the boys it seems to be easier to say that this trip is a reward, rather than an attempt to remedy the boys' loneliness. The teacher gets at the end of the day a phone call from a mother to another boy in the class, and she believes that her son should also have the right to go to town as the other boys. At that time the teacher is caught up in the crossfire between the principle of need and the principle of equality. Both parties in the conflict feel that they have reasons for their standpoint. This is an example of a conflict when the content is an issue of justice.

Conflicts of justice are also shown on the level of teachers' and/or students' values against economic or organisational values. One of the head teachers describes a struggle between values of economics and a students' well being:

A student with a handicap has lived since for a time in another school area and is therefore not entitled to go by school bus. The municipality has rejected the mother's request and refers to the nearest school. The school team for students' health felt, like the mother, that it was best for the student in this case to continue the schooling in our school and in this autumn we wrote a request [to the municipality] to reconsider their decision. A new decision from the municipality allowed the student to go by school bus. A while after that a medical doctor recommended adjusted schooling for the student because of the handicap (shorter school days in order to cope with the situation). … Then the instructions from the municipality came and they said that the school bussing must be coordinated in order to keep the expenses down. Checking with the school bussing team it was impossible to coordinate the school bus in order to keep the expenses down, that the school day was of just the right length and at the same time providing for the students teaching needs (male head teacher).*

In this situation we see another example of problems that can appear in a relationship to the Other. It is not easy for the head teacher or the other teachers to decide what to do when the student's particular needs and the economic and organisational values are opposed to their convictions and wished-for actions. In this case there is little room for the teachers' action, because the municipality has the legal power to decide despite the school's caring wish. Caring and legislation are not cooperating in this case.

Solutions of a conflict

We have now come to the third aspect of a conflict: the solution. We can at least say that some of the teachers' examples show solutions and some are still remaining as dilemmas. We also want to stress that a solution does not need not have a happy ending; there can also be an ending with the feeling: "Did I do the right thing?". In the empirical data we have seen solutions that can be described as *status quo*, no particular solution, *happy endings*, solutions that really mean a solution and *uncertainty*, ending with questioning as the solution.

One teacher describes a situation where a student is not taking responsibility for his or her learning. Despite repeated requests from the teacher to come back into the classroom the student refuses and stays in the corridor lying on a sofa. The teacher and the student start to argue, but they never meet in their conversation, so the teacher leaves the student and walks back into the classroom. After the lesson the teacher wrote a report of the situation and talked to the form teacher and that teacher talked with the parents in a private conversation. Since then nothing has happened – a state of status quo you can say. The problems with the student have neither increased nor vanished.

Another situation elucidates another type of ending: a happy ending, when the teacher writes this:

A student in the 7th grade had big problems with getting good results in tests during ordinary lesson time together with the whole class. I tried really quickly to let the student work individually with tests outside ordinary lesson time. The results became immediately better. In order to avoid the classmates feeling that the student was having special treatment, the student did test-like tasks together with the other classmates at ordinary lesson time. This course of action made the student more relaxed and after a while the student was in no need of special arrangements (female teacher).

The teacher in this example is aware of the needs of this particular student and she is also aware of the fact that there can be a conflict of different values about the nature of justice. The teacher is not satisfied with the situation where a student is not producing good test results because of what we can assume is test-related anxiety. That teacher's ethical standpoint is therefore to make a change for the student in need. In caring for that student's personal

integrity the teacher arranges the tests in a way that will minimize the student's exposure to the other students in the class. Finally we also can see that, in this case this special arrangements lead to a happy ending. van Manen describes an educator's work like this, a description which has connections to the above teacher-student example:

> A tactful pedagogy, therefore, tries to prevent the circumstances and factors that make an experience injurious and hurtful to children. This means, however, when an educator poses challenges and creates learning tasks for children, he or she has to have an understanding of the meaning of anxiety… Some forms of anxiety (such as those created by tests) are stimulating and challenging for certain students, while the same sources of anxiety can paralyze other students into poor performance and even physical distress (Van Manen, 1991, p. 194-195).

Another ending of a conflict is a feeling of uncertainty whether the action taken was the right way to do in the conflict. A teacher describes a situation, presented above, where a student has repeatedly rejected doing an assignment and taking responsibility for his learning. The situation ends when the teacher stops the student at the doorway and do not let him into the classroom because of his behaviour. In the teacher's reflections on the story, she writes: "So it happened. Right or wrong?". Here we see the uncertainty and that the teacher is reflecting afterwards on the event and on her own actions. This is how this story ends – it leaves us with a question mark.

Ethical maturity

The third theme we have found we call ethical maturity. The theme is about professionalism and consists of two aspects: the contradiction between private and professional, and being a professional teacher. The teachers are considering ethical issues every day in their relations to the Other. Some of the teachers are asking themselves what professionalism really means. They wonder about the difference between the teacher as a private person and as a professional. The teachers' written reflections also express the belief that a teacher has to have many skills in order to be a professional teacher.

The contradiction between private and professional

One teacher reflects on the contradiction between private and professional. A student in this teacher's class had social problems that affected the learning situation. In a conversation with the student, the parents and the teacher, the causes of the problems are shown and a week after the conversation the mother calls the teacher on the phone. She explains the history of the family and their problems. At that moment the teacher felt that he was a support for a parent in crisis and that is where the dilemma is showing. The question for the teacher is where to draw the line between "good contact with the homes" and "amateur social worker/counsellor". He describes two extremes, of response:

> *I am just a teacher and have no interest in your personal relationships in, or outside the family, just make sure that your children comes to school, bring their stuff and do the things they should … I will be here for you and help you according to my ability (*male teacher*).*

The first standpoint may be harsh and insensitive, but it says in a clear way what a teacher's work tasks mean. The other standpoint may be human and caring, but this teacher sees problems with this view when it comes to time, involvement and whether it really helps the family if the teacher acts as a social worker without formal competence. The teacher argues that some thing in the middle would be a better solution to this and this is where the professionalism of the teacher is shown. A teacher has to hold on to the tasks of work, but also show the students sympathy and warmth, without trying to solve their problems, rather leaving them to the professionals – social workers and therapists.

Being a professional teacher

Another teacher gives an example of a situation which was hard to respond to in a professional way: "Tobias thinks you have sexy breasts." I responded to him in the classical way: "What did you say?" The student then repeats the same phrase even louder and more distinct" (female teacher). The teacher expresses in the written reflections that she was paralysed and did nothing in this situation. In her role as a teacher she felt that it was hard to respond to this kind of comment in an appropriate way. If this would have happened to her in a private situation she would have said something sarcastic that would have insulted the person who maid the comment. But then she says: "You cannot use that tactic as a teacher". Here we see that this teacher is trying to be a professional teacher and act as a model for the students. She wants to separate her private person from the professional teacher role, in order to act professionally.

In the ethical dilemmas or ethical considerations that teachers express, there is a need for flexibility, consciousness, reflection on actions, an ability to listen to the students' needs and learning by their own mistakes. A teacher expresses her intentions to be an ethically mature teacher, as we interpret it, like this:

> *What ever you do and how you think, what theory you base your pedagogy on, things can go wrong. The important thing is however that you know why you made some decisions and that you can defend them, and also have a humble attitude when things go wrong* (female teacher).

This teacher is showing an example of consciousness and reflection, which Noddings (2002b) describes in the following terms: "… ethical caring requires reflection and self-understanding. We need to understand our own capacities and how we are likely to react in various situations" (p. 15). We return for a moment to the empirical example where a teacher was angry with his students in the first lesson and the interpersonal bridge was destroyed. The following quotation shows the teacher's reflections after the situation described in the classroom:

> *But as you know, from mistakes you learn one or many things. For many years my policy is to let the first meeting with a new class be a positive meeting. It feels nowadays extremely important to quickly create a positive attitude to me as the teacher, the subject and the teaching* (male teacher).

The teacher's voice really stresses the importance of a teacher's own learning process and that it is an important teacher skill to be able to learn from mistakes and strive to behave ethically in the interaction with the students. In this example we can see a clear connection between ethical behaviour and the possibility to learn. We believe that Levinas (1969) thoughts that the relationship between me and the Other is asymmetric and that means that I am responsible for the Other have a connection to above teacher example. The teacher in his role must be responsible for the situation and the students' well-being and learning – that means, trying to be a professional teacher.

In order to be an ethically mature teacher one has to be faithful to one's values and never give up hope that there can be an ethical way to treat our fellow-beings in order to help them to grow and develop in life. This belief is expressed by the teacher who arranged special solutions for a student: "If I had not tried this method I would have felt that I let the student down and according to that not behaving ethically [to the student]" (female teacher).

Comprehensive understanding – Ethics of Care

Our comprehensive understanding of the results of these written reflections about ethical situations in a school is that the teachers are describing what we mean by achieving *ethics of care*.

The teachers stress the importance of seeing their students and adjusting to their different needs. This is the teachers' ethical ground and starting point for the interaction between them and the students. One of the teachers writes the following:

> *An all-embracing goal for my teaching is that all students should feel that they can manage in school and that they never should feel discouraged. You can never give too much positive feed back. … All students should have an opportunity to leave the school with their heads held high and their backs straight* (female teacher).

The teacher in this quotation is determined to see the teaching and learning from the students' perspective, an example of trying to achieve ethics of care. Teaching is not only about mediating knowledge about a certain subject. In the Curriculum for the Swedish Compulsory School System, the Preschool Class and the Leisure-time Centre (Swedish Parliament and Government, 1994) the teacher's mission centres on two things: teaching about subjects and caring about the child's upbringing – it is about how learning and ethics can interplay in the school. We can see this in Nodding' writing as well: "…students should be encouraged to work together, to help one other – not just to improve academic performance, but to gain competence in caring" (2002a, p. 20). Or to use Todds (2003) and Levinas (1969) words – teaching is about learning and ethics. Noddings (1984) means that all humans have an ability to show care of another and because of that we have a moral obligation to use this ability to see the needs of the Other and to meet these needs. The ethics of care is relational and situated (Noddings, 1984). Our actions are not based on reasoning and principles, but it is "… feeling with, and for, the other that motivates us in natural caring" (Noddings, 2002b, p. 14). Care is a reciprocal act, and Noddings (1984, 2002b) talks about a relationship between the cared-for and the one-caring and that people can learn to both give and receive care. In this relationship between the one-caring and the cared-for, the carer has to discover the Others' needs and respond to them in an appropriate way. The act of care is only received when the Other accepts the act. Noddings (1995) describes the task for the one-caring like this:

> I have to respond to the cared-for who addresses me in a special way and asks me for something concrete and, perhaps, even unique. Thus what I as a carer do for one person may not satisfy another. I take my cues not from a stable principle but from the living other whom I encounter (p. 188).

In order to achieve ethics of care in education the teacher (the one-caring) must listen to the students' voices (the cared-for), because the act of care is not completed until the cared-for has received the care. It is in the real-life meetings in the school that the teacher encounters the Other and has an opportunity to meet the needs of the Other and thereby show his or her ethical maturity. Even if the relationship to the Other is asymmetric, and the teacher is the most responsible person in the relationship, the student must also take responsibility for actions in the relation and it is their responsibility to communicate their needs to the teacher (Levinas, 1969; Noddings, 2005). Noddings (2005) writes about this mutual responsibility: "As recipients of care, they [the student] must respond to their teachers' efforts… One of the greatest tasks of teachers is to help students learn how to be recipients of care" (p. 107-108).

Discussion

As we have stressed above there are many meetings and different relations in the life-world. According to Merleau-Ponty (1996) body and mind are intertwined in the life-world, which in turn affect meetings between humans. If we only view the Other as a body, an object, there is no chance of a real-life meeting, nor occur a real-life meeting if we view the Other as only a mind. To really achieve ethics of care we have to view and meet each other as whole humans.

Ethics of care is often associated with female care, but Noddings (2002b) argues that it does not have to be that way. "Whether or not the tendency to care is an essentially female characteristic is an open question, of course, but the hope of moral educators is that both sexes can learn to care" (p. 19). Our results in this study indicate that both men and women are capable of caring for the Other. We have not seen less interest and intention to care for the students' well-being and learning from the male teachers in the empirical data of this study.

The teachers in the study are trying to achieve ethics of care and we have seen in the empirical data that due to this, the teachers often are caught up in conflicts and dilemmas. Is it therefore naïve to believe that practicing ethics of care is realistic in the schools today? Noddings has met with critical voices which question the possibilities of the practice of ethics of care in the schools (Colnerud, 2006). As we have seen in our empirical data, teachers are often caught up in dilemmas between care and justice in relations to the Other. Despite of that, can ethics of care still be a starting point and goal for the activities in school and a help in trying to develop the school further? Some mean that ethics of care follow on where justice ends and that implies that we need ethics of care in combination with ethics of justice (Colnerud, 2006). We believe that this can be a fruitful way forward for schools today, but we need to stress that everything starts with care for the Other and this gives direction for our actions. If we have ethics of justice as base, there might be a chance that we lose our focus on the care for the Other, in our striving to see that justice is done. Noddings (2002a) is aware of the problems that ethics of care can give, but despite this she seems confident that this is the right approach.

> The best we can do is to care directly for those who address us – those we actually encounter (notice that this include strangers) – and indirectly for others by working to establish social conditions in which care can flourish. We have to work toward a world in which "it is possible to be good" – one in which carers are enabled to care without sacrificing their own lives and in which caring goes beyond politically correct rhetoric (p. 48).

Ethics of care can sometimes be hard to practice, which also van Manen (1991) emphasise. It can involve extensive involvement from the teachers, but in our struggle for a more ethical and caring school we cannot afford to let the teachers burn out totally. All have to learn to care-for and to be cared-for; caring is a reciprocal act. That means that a teacher is both a person who is one-caring and also a person who is cared-for. Here we once again see that ethics of care are relational and it has high hopes of both teachers' and students' ability to care for each other and, in that way, create an ethical school.

As we interpret Levinas, ethics of care can be seen as learning from the Other. If a teacher is caring for her students it means a responsibility for the Other. This also means an openness to the Other's abilities and a will to be a part of the relationship and also be a learner. It is not only the student who is learning something in a learning encounter. In the following Levinas (1969) describes his view of learning and education:

> It is therefore to *receive* from the Other beyond the capacity of the I … this also means: to be taught. The relation with the Other, or Conversation is ... an ethical relation…this conversation is a teaching [enseignement]. Teaching is not reducible to maieutics; it comes from the exterior and brings me more than I contain (p. 51).

In the light of Levinas' words we want to stress that, in an ethical relationship with the Other, there has to be an openness to the Other. This conviction can lead to curiosity and a will to learn from the Other.

Ethics of care – is it a dilemma or a challenge in education? If we see ethics of care as only a dilemma, teachers might be caught up in constant conflicts, with frustration as a result. If we let ethics of care be a challenge we have to have both ethical maturity and courage and

involvement. Ethics of care seen as a challenge is maybe not the easiest way forward, but sometimes the hardest way is also the most creative and encouraging.

Acknowledgements

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