

## ABSTRACT Ethics and Leadership Conference 2011

### Leadership for learning and well-being with an appreciative attitude

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#### Abstract

Different perspectives govern school improvement processes: national and international evaluations of schools, steering documents as well as experiences from within schools. Teachers' responsibilities as leaders in schools include supporting student learning, encouraging students to develop an ethical attitude toward others, and promoting health and well-being. Thus, important aspects of teacher responsibility are learning, ethics, and health.

The aim of this paper is therefore to explore how teachers, principals, and other leaders in school can use an appreciative attitude in strengthening students' learning and well-being. The adults perspectives have dominated school research time, although in recent years, research has shown the benefit of student voice (Reed, 2007; Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007). Our own experiences also underline this as we found students trustworthy, capable, and competent in describing their school experiences (Bergmark & Kostenius, 2009). When we listened to students and teachers we found them explaining how acts of appreciation had improved their personal learning experience in school (Bergmark & Kostenius, 2011).

The theoretical framework of this paper is the phenomenology of the life-world in the areas of health and educational research. This philosophy is a branch of the phenomenological movement, which derives from Edmund Husserl's work (Bengtsson, 1998; Bengtsson, 2005; Todd, 2003), as further developed by others such as Emanuel Lévinas (1969), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1996), and Max van Manen (1997).

We have re-analyzed the results from our doctoral dissertations (Bergmark, 2009; Kostenius, 2008), which focused on ethical and health issues in schools. The phenomenological analyze process we used was inspired by van Manen (1997) and included three steps: seeking meaning, thematic analysis, and interpretation with reflection. The analysis resulted in three themes important for building positive learning environments in schools, which are: (i) *Meet me*, (ii) *See, hear, and respect me*, and (iii) *Let me influence*.

When exploring teachers' responsibilities and students' experiences in school the opportunity for an appreciative attitude emerged. This attitude includes the importance of meeting others where they are, care about them, have faith in their abilities, letting them influence, and encouraging and recognizing them.

The challenge, as we see it, is first of all discover the power of appreciation and then consciously use it as fuel for school improvement. Therefore we will discuss possible practical applications of an appreciative attitude, which focus on building relationships that makes people learn, grow, and feel well in school.

*Keywords:* leadership, teacher responsibility, student voice, appreciation, learning, well-being

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