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Editorial: Work-Integrated Learning in Scandinavia

Leif Karlsson

Work-integrated learning (WIL) as a pedagogical philosophy is, as a result of the so-called Bologna process, gaining more and more interest in the strategies and policies of many European Universities. The idea seems to be that students' employability could increase if we could design educational models that bridges the gap between higher education and professional work. Concepts such as work-based training, internships and cooperative education is being discussed and evaluated in a wide range of educational fields ranging from teacher and nursing education to engineering and business.

In Scandinavia, the VILÅR network’s annual conference on work-integrated learning is an example of an arena where different educational fields meet to present and discuss ideas on research and development on WIL from a multitude of perspectives. In December 2010, the conference was hosted by Kristianstad University which is one of the leading universities in promoting work-integrated learning in Sweden. The conference initially attracted 36 contributions from Sweden, Norway and Finland, and after a double blind peer review process, five papers were selected for this special issue.

The common denominator for the papers in this special issue is that they all address the problematic relationship between theory and practice. The tensions and the potentially added quality that could come from critically contrasting work in theory with work in practice is probably an eternal theme for research on work-integrated learning, and the papers all contribute to our understanding of how these challenges could be conceptually and methodologically addressed.

In the article by Karlsson, the tension between theory and practice is explored through a study of different ways that students in work placements understand and frame academic qualities. The results reveal five archetypical mental models amongst the students, and the author argues in favour of supporting the students to better integrate academic thinking in their reflections on work experience.
The fact that work-integrated learning models involve experts from both academia and the workplace is explored through a survey in Sweden and Finland, where Hill Melender and Jonsén has explored how preceptors perceive their role as brokers between nursing practice and nursing education. The results show that most preceptors view themselves as role models that should guide the students in being socialized into existing best practice of nursing. Furthermore, it is concluded that closer and richer interaction between preceptors, student nurses, and academic nursing supervisors from the university could result in model that is better equipped to develop nursing practice and bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Similarly, in a survey by Sandvik and Fagerström, the difficulties relating to the assessment and the understanding of students’ performance during work placements are explored. Students’ in general seem to think they do better than their supervisors think they do. Based on the data, this is argued to be more an issue of miss communication than mere over confidence on behalf of the students.

A more methodological contribution to how to address the gap between theory and practice is provided by Gustavsson and her colleagues who have studied the outcome of a pedagogical model aimed at developing the ability to perform critical reflection and analysis among student teachers during their work placements. The model is built on the students documenting their work experiences in video and text logs, and these reifications are subsequently used for a reflective dialogue between the students and their academic supervisors. The results from the study indicate that critical and analytical skills do increase as the result of the dialogues.

Finally, Dimenäs and Jaffari demonstrate how work-integrated learning through internships for immigrant academics plays a central role in the socialization into a new social and cultural work life. Their empirical data highlights how work-placements become instrumental in a collective process of translating educational and professional knowledge between different national contexts.

To summarize, we realize that this special issue by no way is a silver bullet that once and for all will resolve the inherent tension between theory and practice in models for work-integrated learning. But hopefully, you will find the articles thought provoking and challenging where theory and practice is less of a dichotomy and more of a duality.
Academic Quality and Internships
Students’ account on the value of theory in practice

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Abstract
At Kristianstad University in Sweden it has been decided that all study programmes should have work-placed training consisting of at least a period of five weeks. In different strategy documents the University states that the main reason for this is to raise employability. At the same time the importance of maintaining academic quality is stressed.

Interviews were carried out in 2006 with 22 students from The Health Promotion and Education Programme concerning what they perceived as the value and relevance of the concepts that are essential to academic quality, scientific foundation/scholarly activity, critical thinking and reflection, with respect to their practical activities during their internship.

The results of the study show that the students perceived the value and relevance of the concepts quite differently. The five different patterns or categories that emerged: undeveloped, separated, performance-oriented, oppositional and participatory all give different prerequisites for developing professional expertise.

The study reveals the importance of the students perceiving academic thinking to be important to their practical activities during their internship, but also the significance of a greater interaction between theory and practice for maintaining a better standard of education within higher education and for developing the prerequisites for professional expertise.

Introduction
Within higher education there is the idea that by connecting education more closely to working life the employability of the students is thereby increased. The introduction of work-placed training or more internship is one way that might make this connection (Knight & Yorke 2003; Knight & Yorke 2004; Moreland 2006).

At Kristianstad University in Sweden, it has been decided that all study programmes should have internship or work-placed training consisting of at least a period of five weeks. In different
strategy documents the University states that the main reason for this is to raise employability. At the same time the importance of maintaining academic quality is stressed.

These prerequisites provide an interesting question whether and how or in which way the vocational elements can be incorporated into an academic discourse and in what way academic thinking can be firmly established in a practical context.

The Health Promotion and Education Programme at Kristianstad University was started in 1998 and integrated the subjects of teaching and learning with public health science. At the time of the study the programme contained 10 contiguous weeks of internship. The students in the Health Promotion and Education Programme represent a new and partially ill-defined theory, public health education, and the practicum within which they perform their internship is distinguished by a complex field comprising a number of different competencies and by richly varied work tasks (Karlsson 2005).

This paper addresses an important question in this context: How do the students in the Health Promotion and Education Programme perceive the value and relevance of the concepts that are essential to academic quality, scientific foundation/scholarly activity, critical thinking and reflection, with respect to their practical activities?

An empirical study on the basis of this question may of course be performed in different ways. The theoretical foundation(s) and perspective(s) one starts from determines to a large extent where one begins, but also where one ends up. The distinguishing mark of academia and its relation to internship and to employability thus needs some theoretical elucidation.

**Theoretical points of departure**

In Sweden, the Higher Education Act (Sv. Högskolelagen) (1992) emphasizes that all higher education, in addition to the purpose of giving students knowledge and skills, shall also stimulate their personal development to critical, reflective and independent individuals, responsible professionals and active members of society. Higher education should not only be characterized by information exchange on a scientific or scholarly level but also by an element of doubt regarding existing information, critical analysis, independent thinking and construction of synthesis. It should also give students the capacity to participate with insight in the future development of knowledge within the field of education together with the ability to argue and reflect (The Higher Education Act, (Sv. Högskolelagen), 1992). The purpose of higher education is not just to engage in the creation and distribution of information but also to develop fully the
diversity of skills needed to encode, decode, ponder, interpret, evaluate and reach decisions on the basis of this information (Barnett 1999; Rhoder & French 1999).

In many of the professions that Universities train for a large section of the professional practice depends on their professional judgment, is not just about doing the right thing, but to ask what you do and why, and to consider different alternatives (Boud & Walker 1998; Eraut 1985; Griffiths 2004). This is well in line with what could be seen as the core of academia and the guiding star for higher education. Instead of just emphasizing the importance of critical reflection in an academic discourse its importance for future work should also be emphasized (Warner, & Tranter 2001). Learning at university and during the work-placed period may imply adjusting to routines and rules but should focus on critical thinking that challenges status quo (Ellström 2005; Lester & Costley 2010; Raelin 1997).

Schoug (2008) argues that academic credibility and employability could go hand in hand. It is usually not just the subject knowledge employers primarily want but the intellectual capacity, capacity for independent problem solving, critical thinking, analysis, source criticism, language skills and abilities to express oneself well in speech and writing. A view also supported by other international studies (Bradshaw, 1992; Candy & Crebert 1991; Harvey Geall & Moon 1997, Marginson 1993 & Warn & Tranter 2001).

Employers appreciate critical ability because it is an essential skill for both adapting to innovation and leadership (Harvey, Geall & Moon 1997). According to Harvey, Geall & Moon (1997) employers would like to have employees that are adaptive, adaptable and transformative. Employees should therefore be well prepared for work, be able to take the initiative to develop new ideas and also actively develop the organization by inspiring and leading others. To support students' development in terms of these abilities is an important task in educating employable students (Warn & Tranter, 2001). Studies in higher education should therefore inspire students to be self-governed and help them to drive development rather than be driven (Niblett, 1990).

That academic credibility and employability could go hand in hand is supported by several studies about professional skills and expertise. Fundamental to these is that they demonstrate the importance of the need to reconcile an act at different levels, and to vary between routine problems and new or unfamiliar problem situations.

Ellström (2005) talks about learning at work as primarily production-oriented or as a development-oriented process. The former is distinguished by a view of learning as following
given instructions and directives and adapting oneself to situations that occur. Many of the tasks that must be handled in practice can be carried out on a routine level which makes this learning a necessary part of the work. The emphasis is on developmental learning with regard to critical reflection and alternative thinking in relation to your own beliefs and actions as well as to the information submitted to you or chosen by you. The main point is thus to learn to deal with complex situations and problems, where the first task is not to develop and propose a solution, but rather to identify and define the situation, task or problem (cp. Schön 1983, 1987). This requires, inter alia, that existing practices are questioned and reviewed, and new approaches developed and tested by an experimental approach that also includes participation in development work in order to change and improve the existing working system.

Development learning is thus basically an ability to go beyond the immediate task or situation and to put this in context, but also an emphasis on change of circumstances. This can also be seen as an expression of the kind of action and autonomy of practice in relation to prevailing patterns of thinking and perspectives, which makes it possible to discover new aspects of the world (Löfberg 2001).

Ellström (2005) describes a balance between the two forms of learning as a pendulum swinging between routine and reflection, a constant interaction between different levels of action, between two complementary aspects of a complicated learning process.

This distinction between two forms of learning is in part parallel to the distinction between "single-loop," and "double loop" learning by Argyris and Schön (1978), as well as to the distinction between reproductive and expansive learning by Engeström (1987, 2001).

According to Rolf (1993), practical knowledge is divided into know-how and competence. Know-how is the ability to solve problems and act properly, that is, in accordance with the guiding standard or existing rules, which can be taken for granted in action (Ryle 1962). Competence is know-how and the ability, through reflection or theory, to affect or change the rules of the game. Reflection on practice is considered as fundamental to the renewal of existing practice. Distance, problematization and critical analysis are combined with self-reflection as essential aspects of the professional role.

Ultimately, both for students and for employees the aim of learning in internship and for employability in the long run is the development of professional expertise; a professional competence that is based on the same concepts and abilities that are essential to academic
quality, namely scientific foundation/scholarly activity, critical thinking and reflection (Ellström 2005; Rolf 1993).

The question of whether and how or in which way the vocational elements can be incorporated into an academic discourse and in what way academic thinking can be firmly established in a practical context is of great importance here. How the students perceive the value and relevance of the concepts that are essential to academic quality, scientific foundation/scholarly activity, critical thinking and reflection for their internship and in what way the concepts are expressed during their internship is one way to apprehend this important question.

**Method**

The study was conducted in the department of Health Sciences in a Health Promotion and Education Programme at a Swedish University.

The students who participated in the study included 14 students, 13 female and 1 male, who finished their education spring 2006 and the interviews took place just before they graduated or just after. All students, 22 in number where invited to be interviewed. The 8 students, who did not participate, did not differ from the studied group in any relevant way.

All students were informed of the overall purpose of the study and the interview's design, content and structure and that participation was voluntary and that they had the possibility of withdrawing at any point in time.

The interview approach used was semi-structured. An interview guide was used that emphasized certain themes and which also contained core questions. The time taken for the interviews varied in length up to 1 hour.

The questions asked were about how the students perceived the value and relevance of the concepts that are essential to academic quality, scientific foundation/scholarly activity, critical thinking and reflection in their work-placed training period and in what way the concepts were expressed during their internship. The interviewer asked for clarification, to probe meanings and to encourage reflection. Interviews were brought to a close when both parties felt that they had revealed all that could be said about the conceptions.

The interviews were transcribed from the tape recordings and the responses were the object of a hermeneutic analysis with the purpose of acquiring general patterns in the responses of the
students. The point of departure was openness towards the material, to attempt to find and understand what lies beneath the surface and to go beyond the descriptive without abusing the text. I began my processing of the material by listening to all the interviews in their entirety.

Then I sorted the statements of the students as a sort of primary interpretation (Alvesson & Sköldberg 1994) before the actual analysis. The sorting involved my dividing up the interview statements in each individual interview into categories. I then read through the interview in its entirety to check that the statements were placed in the proper categories. Subsequently, the material in each category was concentrated.

I then read through each of the categories in their concentrated form with the purpose of finding structure in the statements of the students. The processing resulted in the appearance of a number of perceptions. The categorisations that both the fundamental questions resulted in and, after repeated re-readings of the individual interviews, emerged gradually as a number of variations or patterns that could be connected to the different perceptions. Variations that appeared in this part of the interpretation should not just be regarded as differences between the students as individuals, but as an expression of differences in approach or indications of the different contexts they found themselves in. In other contexts, different patterns could have developed in this way.

Results
The final interpretation resulted in five different patterns or categories emerging: Undeveloped, separated, performance-oriented, oppositional and participatory. The patterns are based on the two categories that emerged in the first part of the interpretation; how the students perceive the value and relevance of the concepts that are essential to academic quality, scientific foundation/scholarly activity, critical thinking and reflection for their internship and in what way the concepts are expressed during their internship.

Undeveloped
The concepts that are of importance to academic quality of a scientific basis, critical thinking and reflection seem to have little relevance among the students who are to be found in this pattern. They have difficulty verbalising its significance and when they do so the expression is for the most part vague and difficult to apprehend.

I cannot think of anything concrete, it is difficult to see the meaning of them (1)
can serve as an example of this.

This pattern is also distinguished by an apparent lack of awareness about the way the concepts are expressed during the internship.

**Separated**

In the separated pattern the concepts are characterized as irrelevant to the work-placed training. Theory and practice are separate and academic skills and abilities have little or no value or relevance to practical activities.

"...so I felt that everything we've learned does not work out there anyway, was one of my feelings. What you learnt at school, it doesn't work here’. The second feeling was that what we have learnt at school is one extreme and what we have learnt in practice is another extreme (6)"

and

"A scientific and critical reflective approach, I had not much use of that in practice. Practice was more concrete and practical (3)"

Here students give the impression that a scientific basis, critical thinking and reflection is almost invisible in practice.

"...these concepts have remained at school so to speak. They have no place in practical realities (6)"

For these students the concepts that are the core of higher education have very little meaning in practice and they are almost invisible to the students during their internship.

**Performance-oriented**

The academic concepts in the performance-oriented pattern are more related to performance and action than to criticism and reflection. Academic knowledge, in the form of the three concepts, is presented as key academic concepts, but their usability in practice is more instrumental. A more development-oriented approach is conspicuously absent. The following statement can be said to reflect this:

"You can't just go by your feelings, what is cool and fun. It is about finding research and methods on these topics to work by for example when you do a survey, like I did (11)"
Students are not talking in terms of change and development instead they are describing the relationship between the concepts and practice in a rather pragmatic way.

If she [the supervisor] came up with some proposals that we thought were good, then we could just carry it out [the job] (5)

The academic concepts become almost tools for doing the right thing and a reality that justifies action. Performance dominates over development.

In summary the relevance for the concepts that are of importance to academic quality of a scientific basis, critical thinking and reflection is about performance and the way they are expressed during internship is by action.

**Oppositional**

In the oppositional pattern the academic concepts are highlighted as legitimacy-building

These three concepts, significant for Higher Education, contribute to a certain status once we are out in practice. I learned so much new stuff, which I now that I am legitimated, can transmit to others (12)

Scientific foundation/scholarly activity, critical thinking and reflection are described as tools to criticize and correct practice.

We were also very self-supporting and yet we felt secure in that"we know this". Those working in the field know absolutely nothing (4)

The students’ own training and competence are seen as superior to those currently working in health promotion.

They have no training for it. My supervisor perceived directly that I had more skills than she had for her profession and she directly felt inferior to me. I do not think she did anything. She accomplished nothing. It was very different what she meant by effectively and what I think is effective. For her it was important to have many papers on her desk, to have a lot to do. While I believe that effective is when you manage to make something of it, to raise it one step further (13)

To summarise; in the oppositional pattern the relevance of the academic concepts is about legitimacy, and criticism and correction are the ways in which they are expressed during the internship.
**Participatory**

The participatory pattern is characterized by the idea that the academic concepts led to a greater degree of understanding of practice and the work that goes on there.

> Otherwise I might not understand some things they did or why you did it in a certain way and how to work and so on. It provided a great opportunity to participate in and understand their conversation (8)

The students also feel that they are more competent to talk to "practitioners" and provide feedback and comments in a relevant way.

> You participate in discussions and you comment and perhaps offer constructive criticism in a different way than if you had not embraced these [the academic concepts] (9)

In the participating pattern the students “use” the core conceptions to communicate with their supervisors and to relate in a communicative way with practice. In other words; academic knowledge makes the encounter with practice more valuable.

**Summary**

The relation of the patterns as to how the students perceived the relevance of the academic concepts to the internship and in what way the concepts are expressed during the internship is shown in table 1.

The differences are appreciable between the way the students perceive the concepts of a scientific basis, critical thinking and reflection that are the core of academic quality. With a point of departure in the reasoning that is conducted in theoretical points of departure the prerequisites for learning are probably also great. What these differences imply for the possibilities of the students to develop important knowledge, abilities and attitudes for future work is a question of the greatest importance to elucidate in further detail. This question will be emphasized in the following discussion.

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<tr>
<th>Patterns</th>
<th>Relevance of academic concepts</th>
<th>Expression during internship</th>
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<tr>
<td>Undeveloped</td>
<td>Unclear/unclarified</td>
<td>Unclear/unclarified</td>
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<td>Separated</td>
<td>Irrelevant</td>
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Table 1. Patterns. The perceptions of the students about the relevance of the academic concepts for their internship and the way in which the concepts are expressed during the internship.

**Discussion**

The essential relation between academic theoretical knowledge and the knowledge, abilities and attitude that are required in practice is shown in several studies (Brennan 1982; Chalmers & Fuller 1996; Korthagen & Wubbels 1991). The core of academia and the demands from working life could consequently be seen as pointing in the same direction. For students to be employable in the long run they need to develop a diversity of skills that is essential to academic quality as well as to the professional role and work tasks. The study shows that this is rarely the case.

The pattern undeveloped is characterized by the notion that the concepts that are of importance to academic quality of scientific basis, critical thinking and reflection seem to have little relevance to the internship. There is a lack of connection between theoretical courses and the work-placed period which does not correspond with the views concerning the development of expertise described above. The work-placed experience does not function as a cross boundary between education and work. An important starting point for developing the prerequisites for professional expertise is consequently missing.

In the separated pattern the academic concepts are characterized as irrelevant to the internship. Academic skills and abilities have little or no value or relevance to practical activities. In this pattern students do not regard the working tasks as challenges and there is no need for special academic competence founded on a scientific basis, critical thinking and reflection. An integrated approach involving theorising practice, conceptualising practical experiences and developing self-regulative, meta-cognitive and reflective skills offers a more promising gateway towards the development of expertise (Leinhardt, McCarthy Young & Merriman 1995; Tynjälä 1999).

The performance-oriented pattern has great similarities with what Ellström (2005) calls learning at work - a production-oriented process; Engeström (1987, 2001) calls reproductive learning and Ryle (1962) calls “know-how”. Characteristic for this view on carrying out work is the importance of following given instructions and directives, to solve problems and act properly,
that is, in accordance with the guiding standard and you adapt to situations that occur. This pattern appears to be unfavourable with respect to the possibility of stimulating development-oriented learning (Ellström 2005), expansive learning (Engeström 1987, 2001) and professional competence (Rolf 1993). Critical reflection and alternative thinking, to learn to deal with complex situations and problems, abilities to go beyond the immediate task or situation and to put this in context combined with distance, problematization, critical analysis and self-reflection are essential aspects of the professional role. These fundamental concepts for academic quality are distinctly in the background in this pattern.

In the oppositional pattern the academic concepts are highlighted as legitimacy-building and scientific foundation/scholarly activity; critical thinking and reflection are described as tools to criticize and correct an inferior practice. According to Ellström (2005) it is important to have a developmental-learning emphasis on critical reflection and alternative thinking and that existing practices are questioned. Rolf (1993) points out distance, problematization and critical analysis combined with self-reflection as essential aspects of the professional role.

In this pattern however critical thinking and reflection is a way to look down on practice and the supervisors and self reflection seems to be absent. For the students in the oppositional pattern this appears to be a way to legitimatize their own position as professionals in a new and ill-defined working field.

For professional competence to develop the students need to reflect on their work experiences and to examine them in the light of theoretical understanding and, respectively, to scrutinize theoretical knowledge in the light of practical work (Raelin 1997). They need to build a firm relation between theory and practice or science and work. In addition to students who are prepared for learning in practice, an activity is required that makes relevant learning possible as well as supervisors who stimulate reflection and critical thinking, and who, in addition, view this as a part of their professional role. In the oppositional pattern this seems to be missing.

The participatory pattern is characterized by the view that the academic concepts make the encounter with practice more valuable. The students “use” the core conceptions by relating in a communicative way with practice, to communicate with their supervisors and to come up with constructive criticism. This is well in line with what is essential for developing professional expertise, “a true integration of theoretical, practical and self-regulative knowledge” (Tynjälä
Välimaa & Sarja 2003 s 155) and that the students’ reflective and metacognitive skills are integrated with work and learning.

Conclusions

The question of whether and how or in which way the vocational elements can be incorporated into an academic discourse and in what way academic thinking can be firmly established in a practical context is propounded in this paper as being of great importance. How the students perceive the value and relevance of the concepts essential to academic quality; scientific foundation/ scholarly activity, critical thinking and reflection in their internship is seen as one way to bring this important question to our notice.

This point of departure implies an integrated approach regarding theory and practice. By tradition, theory and practice have tended to be separated from each other and learnt in isolation and there has been a weak connection between theoretical courses and practice periods (Tynjälä, Välimaa, & Sarja 2003). This traditional idea to separate two forms of knowledge does not correspond with the views regarding the development of expertise described for example by Ellström (2005), Engeström (1987, 2001) and Rolf (1993).

There is a danger that theory and practice will continue to be separated from each other. Therefore, it is important that when different forms of work-based learning in higher education are being developed this separation is prevented and that theoretical analysis and reflection on work experiences will become an essential part of education and work-based learning.

A greater interaction between theory and practice is consequently important for maintaining a better standard of education in higher education and for developing the prerequisites for professional expertise.

However, this requires that true integration of theoretical, practical and self-regulative knowledge takes place and that students really are allowed to solve complex and ill-defined problems during their work-based learning (WBL) periods. Practica should be seen as complex and challenging experiences, not because of the off-campus environment itself but because of the relevant and significant problems for the future professionals to resolve (Tynjälä, Välimaa, & Sarja 2003, s 155).

According to Leinhardt, McCarthy Young & Merriman (1995) and Tynjälä (1999) an integrated approach involving theorising practice, conceptualising practical experiences and developing self-
regulative, meta-cognitive and reflective skills offers a more promising gateway towards the development of expertise. This integrated approach is a demanding task for the students as well as for the learning context at the university and for the practical activities at the workplace and the working supervisors. The result of the study indicates that, apart from in the participatory pattern integration is not “good enough”.

It would be easy to blame the student but an analysis of the result has to go further. Although good learning, whether directed at employability or not, depends on the quality of students’ general approaches and beliefs, there is a lot of evidence that approaches can be changed for the better by well-designed learning environments, programmes and practices (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999).

Academic skills cannot only be developed through the course literature or by well-designed lectures, but also by the presence of academic conversation in an academic culture. For higher education to develop self-regulative, meta-cognitive and reflective skills there has to be a learning context that supports it, that does not just allow it but actually demands it. In addition to requirements to read the literature and to cope with exams in time, everyone should get the opportunity to mirror their knowledge in different perspectives and new contexts. It is only open systems, systems that allow conflicts and instability, which can change and grow. The rational conversation in which the best argument is valid is such a system. Therefore, it is necessary to make scientific discourse open to students.

A greater focus in schools on high-level thinking skills would go a long way toward making students productive learners and workers. By moving away from academic problems that are neatly defined and readily solvable towards more complex, real-life problems in the classrooms, teachers can better prepare students for the kinds of problems and expectations they will face in the workplace. Moreover, the connections between academic and real-life problems will become clear.

In addition to students who are prepared for learning in practice, an activity is required that makes relevant learning possible as well as supervisors who stimulate reflection and critical thinking, and who, in addition, view this as a part of their professional role. In an earlier study (Karlsson 2010) regarding the field supervisor in the Health Promotion and Education Programme at Kristianstad University this was however shown not be the case.
To summarise; this study shows that there seems to be no strong prerequisite for the students to develop professional expertise. For this to happen there has to be an increased interaction between theory and practice which must affect both learning on campus and learning at work. Learning is not automatically good. The learning context could lead to the breakdown of competence rather then that its development. This could be the case irrespective of if it is about learning on campus or in the working place.

The interaction between theory and practice respective learning on campus and different forms of work-based learning is important issues when it comes to employability and preparing students for future work tasks. How the students perceive the value and relevance of the concepts essential to academic quality; scientific foundation/ scholarly activity, critical thinking and reflection in their internship is one way to try to throw light upon this important field. Obviously there is a lot more to study in this area. To follow up this study; are the students in the participatory pattern also more employable in the sense that they actually master their work better after they graduate? And to widen the context; are more established study programmes regarding internship and work-based learning, such as teacher education and nursing “better off” or do they have similar problems about the prerequisites for professional expertise? To invite others to study this and other related questions more in depth is my final point in this article.

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Turning over stones I hadn't even realized were there at the beginning

A study of critical analysis in teacher training

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Abstract
The ability to analyses critically is a skill that one develops during academic education, and which is thus also of importance in professions based on academic qualifications. The aim of the study was to investigate how continuous guidance and tutoring during student teachers' period of in-school teaching practice can challenge and assist the student's competence at critical analysis. Over a twelve-month period, six student teachers kept a digital logbook and produced video documentation of their classroom work while on placement. The material was followed and mentored on an ongoing basis by the students' lecturers at the university. The logbook and the feedback from tutors form the empirical data for the study, and thus the documentary foundation for a consideration of what the practical application of critical analysis in teaching contexts looks like. The study shows that regular documentation, together with a mentoring process rich in feedback, create conditions which enable the student to develop a more analytical approach. The study also shows how tutor's mentoring balances different kinds of feedback: encouragement, the highlighting of broader possibilities, challenging, and discussion. The student poses new questions, concerning subjects such as the value of the logbook in comparison with other forms of documentation, or different possible models for tutoring and mentoring during periods of practical teaching experience.

Introduction
It is a stated objective of higher education that it should help students to develop ability for critical analysis. "Critical analysis" is defined in this respect as the ability to discuss aspects of the program content systematically and from a range of different perspectives that are rooted in theory and research. The term "aspects of the program content" refers to elements encountered in written texts, lectures or practical work placements. Proficiency in critical analysis is of course
not an end in itself without any further applicability: it is a useful competence for practical use in professions with an academic foundation. This article is concerned with teacher training and teachers' pedagogical competence – i.e., it is based on the standpoint that critical analysis is an important element of teachers' professional competence (Orlenius, 2005; Westbury, Hansén, Kansanen & Björkvist, 2005). The question as to what teachers do and how cannot be separated from their ability to analyses, systematically and critically, both their own practical work and that of other teachers.

Over time there has been a shift in the ethos of teacher training, towards an increasingly research-based and academic educational culture (Gustavsson, 2008). The proportional importance accorded to the research-oriented and the vocationally-oriented elements of the training provided is however a matter that has been subject to criticism (Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, 2005, 2008) – the criticism being that the programs do not concentrate enough on preparing students for the practical realities of teaching, at the same time as there are shortcomings in the research aspects. Studies show that scientific research does have a function in teacher training, but that it is difficult to identify its place and role (Gustavsson, 2008; Säljö & Södling, 2006). This thus raises questions about the content of the training provided, and about how much opportunity students have to develop their powers of critical analysis.

The purpose of the present study was to describe how continuous guidance from tutors during students' period of practical teaching work experience can serve to challenge and assist the students to improve their critical analysis skills. Over a twelve-month period a group of students wrote a logbook and filmed themselves, teaching in the classroom. This documentation provided the basis for regular distance tutoring by lecturers at their university.

**Literature Review**

This section presents the central reference points of the study: it looks at the concept of critical analysis, using the theories which underpin the study; and deals with how tutoring is carried out in response to students' documentation.

Griffiths & Tann (1992) expound a theory which views the teacher's reflection from the perspective of action research. The authors describe four stages: the first stage is when the teacher reacts spontaneously and on the basis of experience; stage two entails observation, and evaluation of what has been observed; and the third and fourth stages are when the teacher
carefully, systematically and in reference to a theoretical foundation seeks new ways to understand the practical work. The more advanced forms of reflection can be viewed as critical analysis and the application of a scientific approach to empirical experience. The way teachers look at their everyday practical work, is also discussed by Max van Manen (2006). He compares intuitive, experience-based and rational ways of approaching practical situations to an approach where the teacher takes a step back and, making use of theoretical constructs, subjects their own practice to a more critical appraisal. The more advanced levels of reflection require a systematic methodology, both when appraising a situation and when analyzing one's appraisal. They also require the teacher to take a step back from their own interpretation, to adopt a critical stance vis-à-vis their own and other people's choices, and to identify different consequences.

One aspect of a systematic methodology is documentation possible to give visible expression in this case to the student's experience and interpretation of content (Francis, 1995; Kroll, 2004). In the present study, documentation provides the foundation for the tutoring. Francis (1995) highlights the importance of striking a balance between tutoring which focuses and builds on students' experiences, and tutoring that has explicit objectives. In a study in which trainee teachers describe and assess their previous experiences, the term "the second self" is used (Braun Jr & Crumpler, 2004, p 60) as a way of underlining the importance of the ability to observe oneself with detachment.

A further important aspect in this context concerns language as the tool for communication and documentation. Colnerud & Granström (2002) identify "everyday language" and "metalanguage", with the latter being a useful tool for attaining the distance to observe others and oneself. The narrative the students present in their logbook is not the action itself, but a written "staging" of occurrences or chains of thought (Ricoeur, 2002). This staging also accommodates the student's reference – or the framework of a context. When the student's text is challenged by the tutor, this creates the conditions for new understanding. Jansen (2008) writes, on the subject of what it is possible to read into a text: "the challenge is to be able to ask critical questions" (p 35). Ricoeur (2002) describes an ongoing process in which pre-understanding is challenged through the opposition between the familiar and the unfamiliar. The logbook and the student's reaction to the tutoring give visible expression to the student's movement between the communication of experience, perspective taking and processing, and new understanding.
Methodology

In connection with periods of teaching practice, spread over a total of one academic year student received tutoring from a lecturer at their university via a digital communication platform.

The student documented experiences and discussion subjects on a regular basis, by means of a written logbook and video-filmed sequences of their own teaching. The data used by the study consisted of texts in the form of logbook entries and tutoring sequences. The study was carried out in terms three and four of the students' teacher training. A total of six student teachers and three university lecturers in Education took part. The study was interactive (Aagard Nielsen & Svensson, 2006), in that it both tested and studied a process in which students and tutors alike were given a participatory role. During the study dialogue seminars were organized, which supplemented the other data and contributed input to the analysis.

The study's analytical approach derives from critical hermeneutics (Ricoeur, 1993, 2002), with the logbook and tutoring being studied as discourse: the message conveyed, the message interpreted, interaction, and the reference of the text. More specifically, the analysis consisted of alternate phases of description and interpretation. The describing phase entailed a systematic sorting of the text's character in the form of choice of words, types of questions, and ways in which events were described and viewpoints were explained. The central elements of the text were classified in a table consisting of columns for significant text in the form of words and expressions, descriptions of content, descriptions of the students' arguments and discussion, and description of the tutor's attitude. The interpreting phase of the analysis asked questions about meanings.

The critical dimension of the analysis required an openness vis-à-vis the data encountered, and a willingness to try varying interpretations deriving from my previous studies of the literature and my own pre-understanding. The movement back and forth between on the one hand, looking at the sorted, concentrated material, and on the other hand a more interpretative approach, led to an incremental development of new understanding. The analytical work benefited from the dialogue seminars which and these discussions in turn triggered new angles and perspectives. The seminars also had an important part to play in underpinning the study's credibility and ethical standing.
Results

In presenting the findings of the study, this section begins by describing the character of the content of the logbooks and tutoring, and then looks in more detail at the logbooks and tutoring as tools for supporting students' development of critical analysis proficiency.

Logbook and tutoring as methods for documenting educational content

The logbook and tutoring generate a dialogue between the student and the tutor. The dialogue is asynchronous, a form of learning communication which seems to be particularly appropriate in situations where a theme is to be dealt with over a period of time, linked to ongoing experience, or given new perspectives. Student and tutor can discuss the same theme or topic over a lengthy period. The logbook is rich and wide-ranging in its content, and both the documentation in itself, and the tutoring, say the students, stimulate them to think through their experiences and learn more from their education.

The content the students choose to write about can be of three kinds: descriptions of daily events; selected situations which for some reason need to be spotlighted in more detail; and concepts or phenomena which they have encountered in their lessons and lectures at the university. The content of the logbook embraces different areas: the social practice of teaching, i.e., aspects such as relationships, communication, conflicts; teaching practice, i.e., teaching situations to do with questions concerning content and working methods; and the learning person, i.e., ideas relating to what children and young people learn, why learning takes place and how it is possible to monitor pupils' knowledge. The topics and issues the students have dealt with in their courses at university are constantly present in their logbook texts; the students make use of, or ask questions about, lectures and text books. The university course content can thus be seen as the students' reference – it provides them with tools to help them explain and understand their practical work experience, but at the same time gives them things they can try out in practice. The course content is present in different ways – as a comparative reference, or as one or more perspectives which can be brought to bear on the teaching practice. A comparative reference corroborates, while a perspective-giving reference discusses.

An example of a comparative reference is when Eve observes how children between one and three years old communicate by means of mimicry. "Children learn a lot by mimicking. In the literature I've read, Williams (2006) says that people learn from interacting with each other, and he relates how Dewey, in the early 20th century, also pointed out that learning in collaborative
situations gives good results." What the student has read in course literature supports and reinforces what she observes in the classroom. An example of a perspective-widening reference is when Penny is thinking through the relationship between play and learning: "/.../ said in a lecture, that play at school should be free and spontaneous, because play and learning should be interwoven. But what is a good way of achieving that, when the aim is for the children to learn things?" What Penny heard in the lecture led her to think about learning objectives and the knowledge children are expected to acquire. Is it possible to view play both as an integrated part of an education that is governed by certain set learning objectives, and as something that is free and spontaneous? The student is relating the general and normative definition of play that was presented in the lecture to the tasks with which school education is charged, and wondering how two different objectives, two arguments concerning the importance of play in learning, can be reconciled with each other. While Eve's comments are statements, Penny's are a formulation of new questions. We can thus see that one difference between students is that for some, the logbook is more descriptive, while for others it is more analytical in character (Griffiths & Tann, 1992; van Manen, 2006).

Tutoring is a personal teaching method, and the tutor's idea, attitude and strategy are important factors in shaping how the tutoring works. The tutoring observed in the course of this study can be seen to fall into three categories: it provides confirmation or recognition; it seeks to broaden students' field of vision; and it challenges and discusses. A tutoring sequence nearly always begins with recognition of the student's text; the tutor shows his/her interest, and gives a positive response. Ingrid, for example, has watched a student's video recording and read the student's logbook. Ingrid's reaction: "It was interesting to see the video clip, and you have produced a very good analysis of what happened from the pupils' perspective." The tutor has thus given a confirmative assessment of both the video recording and the written documentation; this recognition can be understood as an opening greeting, and as a way of leading into more detailed tutoring input. When the tutoring seeks to have a broadening effect, it asks new questions on the same topic, but without any change of perspective – instead, the current perspective is expanded to include a related area. For example, the tutor might ask: "What are your thoughts about only letting the quicker pupils work together?", or "What ideas do you have concerning the attitude of the teacher and the physical learning environment with regard to pupils working together?" We can interpret questions of this kind as aiming to stimulate the student to stop, think through the same situation once more, and consider the matter in greater detail. It may also be that the tutor is seeking to gain more time for reflection, or is looking for more reaction from the student as a
basis for providing further tutoring input. In contrast to the confirmative style of tutoring, broadening tutoring asks questions and often results in the student coming up with an answer.

Tutoring which challenges and discusses is characterized by a systematic nature, shifts in perspective and a problematizing approach. An expression of the systematic character of this kind of tutoring is when the tutor asks questions concerning the same area, but from different perspectives. As an example: a student, Karen, is interested in the subject of conflict, and tells her tutor that there are very few conflicts in the class she has been teaching. She also says that she feels that the regular teacher does not plan very much. The tutor responds to Karen’s observations by discussing the meaning of both conflict and planning:

How do you define conflict? What can a confrontation between two pupils look like for you to see and interpret it as a conflict? What aspects of behaviour make you perceive a situation as a conflict? Can you develop your description further? I'm curious about your comments on planning. What is planning, to your mind?

The tutoring here consists of four questions which touch on the definition, expression and signs of conflict. In other words, it is a systematic questioning, which refers back to Karen's observations and conclusion. The tutor asks questions about the foundations on which she has based her views. The question regarding planning can perhaps be understood in a similar way, since it wonders what Karen considers to be planning. These three types of tutoring questions send different messages to the student. However, that being said, the message is implicit; the student is not told why the tutoring focuses on one particular area and disregards another.

Logbook and tutoring as a support for critical analysis

In the logbooks, a more critically analytical or reflective kind of reasoning can be distinguished in relation to three kinds of texts: texts describing or discussing concepts; texts which discuss actions; and texts characterized by students' self-observation with regard to their knowledge and competence. The critical analysis is of differing nature in the different areas, and it also changes over time. We also see, as a kind of contrast to more critical discussion, what can be seen to be normative, given or exclusively experience-based statements of viewpoint. While there are of course differences between individual students, there are bigger differences in one and the same student over time.

The concepts used in teacher training are a frequent topic in the logbooks. One way in which students use these theoretical tools is that they find quotations which to a great extent are
divorced from their context and are used as unconnected statements. Students use concepts such as "the competent child" or "the nascent self", apparently without grasping what these terms are rooted in. When a tutor asks a student to explain the content of a concept, the aim is probably twofold: to identify what the student understands by the concept, in order to be able to continue the dialogue; and to point up the importance of discussing one's concepts. The students react in three different ways: by giving a personal definition; by using quotes or references from the course literature or a lecture; by giving their ideas for various possible meanings. In all of these three methods, what they have learnt, read and heard during their university lessons and lectures plays a central part. The quotations taken directly from text-books are to a large extent reproduced without any context, and give the impression of serving to reinforce the student's opinion or observation. When concepts are defined using quotations, it can said to be an example of descriptive, normative analysis. Tina gives both her own explanation and a classic definition of bullying:

When I think about bullying in this age group, it's basically exclusion, cold-shouldering, I think about. For example, if two children go off somewhere and don't allow a third child to join them. In this class it seems as though everyone is invited to join in and play [...] I think that Olweus (1999) has a good definition of bullying; he says that if a person is repeatedly subjected to insulting or offensive behaviour, and can't defend themself and feels hurt by it, then that is defined as bullying.

Tina does not content herself with a statement about cold-shouldering and what that can look like. The definition of bullying she gives is related to her example, but does not lead on to any further discussion. Lena, on the other hand, adopts a more critical and questioning stance, and discovers how theoretical concepts can be inapplicable in practice:

I've started thinking about the concepts of star children, isolates, and those in between, and have thought about trying to start identifying which pupils come into which category. A thought related to this struck me today: I don't like categorizing, but if we use the term "educationally normal", then the majority of the pupils in the class would fall into that group. These children could represent the average, "in-between" group, while the "isolates" are the pupils with special needs or who (to borrow Tina's well-chosen words) have "slipped behind in their development in one way or another." And finally, the stars would be those pupils who find school work easy and have no problems getting good marks. However, pupils of this kind could also be isolates – for example, there's a boy in the class who is "above normal"; he's extremely bright and does well in all subjects, but he finds the social part very difficult. To put it simply, he doesn't know how to interact with other children. I suppose
you could say that he's a star child from a teacher's perspective, but an isolated child in the way that his classmates don't get through to him...?

Marion draws a conclusion which indicates how, while practice can lean on concepts, the concepts cannot be seen as templates for practice. Her question-marks may signal uncertainty, or an attempt to elicit additional arguments with the primary aim of understanding the concepts. The lines of thinking she presents can be seen as unconscious critical analysis. Marion appears to find it problematical when she cannot apply the concepts in practice. Her position can be seen as exemplifying the uncertainty students can feel with regard to the use and practical implications of theory and concepts. Students tend to ascribe a normative significance to what they have been taught at university, and they view theories and concepts as models for describing the practical work of teaching.

Over the year, there were changes in the students' logbooks; their awareness of the value and complexity of theories and concepts seems to develop. One example of this is provided by Penny, and the changes in her thoughts regarding pupils' knowledge. During the first term she wrote that to evaluate her teaching she observes the pupils: "I walk around the class and look at the pupils' work to see what has 'stuck'" – in other words, her thinking did not problematize the matter. In the second term, Penny holds a Maths lesson, and wonders about what the pupils can be expected to learn: "I always refer to the learning objectives in the syllabus; yes, the children listened and followed instructions, but how do I know whether they improved their understanding of the different numbers you can add together to make ten?... I find myself wondering, did the pupils just think it was a fun lesson with me dressed up as a witch, or did they learn something?" She evinces here a change in the way she views her work – a move away from a mere statement of what has happened, to a position where she recognizes the difficulty involved in identifying what children have learnt.

Marion looks at different approaches to understanding, and deciding how to deal with, conflicts between pupils. Her text shows that she is open to a continuation of dialogue on the subject. At a later stage she returns to the subject of theory, and to the question of how she assesses and observes her own actions:

I used to think Gordon's conflict resolution model, where "no-one loses, both sides win", was a good method, but thinking about it, perhaps it's not suited to pupils in Year 2? Can nine-year-old children compromise and work jointly to achieve a common result? Maybe it would be easier
with slightly older pupils? Perhaps these younger pupils need more help and guidance, an adult who helps them work together to reach a compromise? Or is it me, who views the pupils in Year 2 as being much younger than they really are? One clear advantage that I can see is that the pupils learn to listen to each other, while the main disadvantage I see is that those pupils who can't compromise will still end up losing out.

Marion expresses thoughts and arguments relating to a theory and her own views, and she questions both the model and her own observations. She asks questions which provide a meaningful basis for a more systematic appraisal of the model. In this logbook entry we thus see the student thinking about her actions, and about how she understands those actions. We can view the questions as providing a springboard for more critical analysis – although it is not clear to what extent the student is aware of the character of her reasoning and questioning, or how possible it would be for her to develop it further to attain new understanding.

The dialogue-based relationship between student and tutor probably contributes to enabling the students to portray themselves as individuals and as teachers-to-be. The free nature of the logbook, and the fact that tutoring is given regularly, can be seen to create the foundation for a dialogue which can help students to develop the ability to view themselves and their teaching with detachment. The individual student's personality, interests and values become visible as a result of the detachment and self-observation manifested in their logbook entries. Karen, for example, wrote this:

I have to admit that previously I haven't reflected on what I myself do, or on whether I have any strategies for catching the pupils' attention. The thought just struck me that it is easier to reflect on and talk about what other people do; it's harder to put words to what I myself do.

Karen has discovered how difficult it is to direct one's focus both onto others and onto oneself. She describes how she herself always wants to have a correct picture of an event or phenomenon, and how she projects this approach onto her pupils' needs. The tutor challenges Karen: "Why is it important to gain a 'correct picture' first and then look at things from different viewpoints? Do you think it might be possible to adopt a different approach – and what effect would that have on the lessons? Might not a bit of confusion be something positive, from a learning point of view?"

Karen describes how she herself needs to feel she has a firm grasp of a certain item of knowledge before she can start looking at it from different angles. She uses expressions such as
"a correct picture" and its opposite, "confusion". At the same time, she says that she realizes how easy it is to project one’s own way of looking at things onto other people, and how it is necessary to take account of the fact that pupils are different from one another. She understands that she tends to assume that what is obvious for her is obvious for others – i.e., she has reached a realization of the need to take a step back from herself and deal with varying perspectives.

**Synthesis**

This study cannot, of course, say with certainty where, how, when or why students develop improved proficiency at critical analysis. What it can do, however, is say something about the importance of documentation, and of a regular challenging of the lines of thought the students express in their logbooks. The students’ logbooks are texts about their experience and about themselves. The students are questioning themselves, and directing their thoughts onto the subject of how their own knowledge develops. The documentation thus has the function of stimulating detachment, the development of knowledge, and creation of a metalanguage (Colnerud & Granström, 2002). The logbook as a tool is characterized by commitment and meaning, and the fact that it facilitates detailed descriptions (Jansen, 2008) – perhaps because the logbook is free from restraints as to its content (Franics, 1995; Kroll, 2004). The logbook and the tutoring in combination can thus stimulate development in students’ competence at critical analysis and in ability to reflect more advanced.

The relative importance which the logbook and tutoring have for the students’ development, as compared to their university lectures, personal study and other kinds of work, is something that it is impossible to quantify. That being said, there are indications that lectures and text-book-based study do not in themselves stimulate the application of a critically analytical approach – it is rather the case that they lead to content being dealt with in a normative or fragmented manner. Tutoring, on the other hand, can be of central importance. The logbook is the students' text about their training and about their own development. Annie, describing how she has experienced the documentation and the tutoring feedback, says: "I've been turning over stones I hadn't even realized were there at the beginning" – in other words the process has been about systematic information gathering, and finding things that are not immediately apparent in everyday work. That being said, one can maintain that it is not enough merely to discover stones and turn them over; a further dimension is added when students describe a perception of having undergone change and development in their understanding of their practical work, and of themselves (Braun Jr & Crumpler, 2004). Their logbooks bring together practical experience and
theoretical studies. The students use the tools they have available to describe and understand, and, while the background to a question may come from their course content, the question itself is still a result of the student's own, genuine desire to know more. Reflection is expressed at levels which differ from student to student, but also depending on what content or what point of departure is being dealt with (Griffiths & Tann; van Manen, 2006). Students' differing reflections highlight the different ways in which they view and discuss experience and theory.

**Implications**

This study gives some insights into students' experiences, and the subjects that they think about most, during a limited part of their teacher training. The study focuses primarily on students' proficiency at critical analysis, and on how tutoring can challenge, stimulate and support the progress in developing this skill. The study does not claim to have produced generalizable conclusions, and neither can it say anything definite about what input factors have affected the way the students express themselves; however, it does identify questions which should be of interest for future studies. The central conclusion reached is that a combination of logbook and tutoring helps students to think in depth about the content of their teacher training course; it probably also creates conditions for students to improve their ability at critical analysis. This can have implications for their learning as they progress through teacher training; and also contributes to the formulation of new questions.

The students' teacher training takes place in two environments: the university and their practical teaching experience at a school. During their teacher training they attend lessons/lectures, and also receive tutoring; the aim being that in different ways – through dealing with scientific/theoretical aspects of education, and through dealing with the practicalities of teaching a class – the students are stimulated to develop their knowledge and understanding. The study shows how education for teachers mediates both everyday communication and meta communication (Colnerud & Granström, 2002). The university-based part of their studies has a special responsibility for providing students with tools for adopting a systematic and critically analytical approach to both theory and practical experience. This observation suggests that the relationship between talking while on practical teaching experience, and talking about practical teaching experience, is an issue which should be addressed during the university-based part of their training. This underlines the fact that it is important to be aware of the differences in what the two kinds of educational context (the university, and the school-based work experience) have to offer (Dinkelman, 2000).
In the field of teacher education there is a permanently ongoing discussion about the relationship between pedagogical science and the practical realities of teaching. While there is academic study and discussion of the role and character of scientific theory (e.g., Gustafsson & Hallström, 2005; Säljö & Södling, 2006), it is more seldom the case that the two perspectives (theory and practice) are combined and studied together. We see in the present study that the documentation effected via the logbook provided a basis for theory-based reflection related to the occupational realities (Griffiths & Tann, 1992; van Manen, 2006). In future studies it might be meaningful to try a more explicitly meta communicative kind of tutoring with regard to the questions arising out of practical classroom experience. One obvious incentive for this is that it should lead to knowledge as to how such tutoring can stimulate students to adopt and apply a scientific approach.

References


One step towards integration
Aspects on how immigrant academics learn during internship

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Abstract
This article is focused on the higher education studies of immigrant academics’ during internship. These students obtain an internship that corresponds to the vocational and educational training they received in their homelands, during their first year at a Swedish university. The purpose of this investigation is to describe and understand the learning of immigrant academics in the clash between their former work culture and the Swedish. Particular attention is drawn to the issue concerning what knowledge in relation to their professions, these students find they have gained during placement. This is a qualitative study; assumptions and analyses are related to sociocultural theory on learning during internship that draws attention to the students’ ability to distinguish between different situations and their contents in professional practice. The results reveal that the encounter with the Swedish work culture has a twofold benefit. Firstly students share the knowledge obtained during their professional practice in their former home countries with their current placement. Secondly, they gain knowledge about Swedish professional culture, its language, management and work environment, as well as the language and Swedish language in general. Finally, the students gain better self-esteem, as they discover that they can be integrated into the new culture, despite their own different competences and approaches. We can obviously here understand the result from the sociocultural theory’s way of regarding that learning occurs in a social and cultural context. The value of the practical placement period is therefore of crucial significance when the same proximity to the professional culture is not available during the university placed period of the education. In order to facilitate integration, universities should open their doors and adjust current rules to meet the attributes of this group.
Introduction

After WWII, Sweden focused on developing its infrastructure in terms of roads, railroads, power lines, and telecommunications. However the public sector also developed the educational system, while the social security system grew in terms of new institutions and authorities. Industry expanded and the resulting need of labour was mainly recruited from the Nordic countries and the rest of Europe (Schierup & Paulson 1994). The industrial, economical, and ideological situation laid the foundation of the modern Swedish welfare society. During the 1950s and 1960s, immigration to Sweden was labelled labour immigration (Ronström 1996; Björk Brämberg 2008). However wars and political unrest in the rest of the world, during the 1970s and 1980s, resulted in the fact that increasing numbers of the immigrants were now refugees from Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa. The term ‘immigrant’ was first used in the mid-1970s, in juridical and official contexts (Ronström 1996). At the beginning of the 21st century, many of the immigrants to Sweden were academics. An immigrant academic is referred to as a person, registered in Sweden, with another mother tongue than Swedish, who has an academic degree from their former home country. Furthermore, this person’s education and degree, for which credits have been given in part or in entirety, have been recognised by a university, the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education or another authority in Sweden (The Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, 2006). This group has met more difficulties finding employment than a corresponding academic group with a Swedish background. With regard to integration in general, and the labour market in particular, for those with an immigrant background, the number of unemployed foreign-born is greater than unemployed Swedish-born academics (Swedish Government Official Reports (SOU): 2006:59; 2000:47 2006:79). It has also been demonstrated that, within this group, the possibilities of obtaining work vary with background (SOU: 2000:47). The least likely to enter the Swedish labour market are refugees and people from so-called third world countries. Women in the latter group face even further obstacles (SOU: 2006:79). It should be noted that foreign academics actively recruited as qualified labour are not included in these groups.

In order to facilitate for the immigrant academics’ entry to the Swedish labour market, several universities have initiated specific programmes and courses. This could be regarded as an expectation from society that immigrant academics will be integrated into the Swedish work culture and have the opportunity to pursue the same profession as in their home countries. In their encounter with Swedish working life, we have identified two main obstacles to integration: language and different approaches in exercising one’s profession. Several immigrants have
applied for higher education; however, the university courses we have investigated, and refer to in this study, not only contain university-based education, but also employment-based training. During their first year of university, the students receive an internship (placement; practical training) that corresponds to their former professional training. The purpose of this investigation is to describe and understand the learning of immigrant academics in the clash between their former work culture and the Swedish one. This study draws attention to what knowledge, in relation to their work roles, these students find they have developed during their placement.

**Immigrant Academics and Labour the Market**

As previously mentioned, from the 1980s/90s and onwards to this day, immigrants and refugees have come to Sweden with a greater diversity of educational background, motives, and heterogeneity, in terms of class, gender, and ethnicity, than ever before. Several government inquiries have noted that the labour market should mirror the population in terms of native Swedes as well as immigrants. This should be understood in the light of a changing job market in which refugees and those born outside of Europe are the least employed (Dahlstedt, I & Bevelander, P., 2010; SOU 2006:59; 2006:60; 2006:79). The road to employment is described from the basis of a number of obstacles such as language, network, discrimination, normality view, and the hierarchical relations of the labour organisations. In Swedish universities, there are fewer foreign-born students and staff than Swedish-born compared to society in general (SOU: 2000:47). Stören & Wiers-Jenssen (2010) confirm similar tendencies in a Norwegian study and draw the conclusion that immigrants, and in particular non-Western ones, have disadvantages when competing for a job. They also draw attention to the risk that employers might not choose those with the most adequate education for the job and that they know little about this issue. Grenier and Xue (2011) demonstrate similar results and state that during your first year as an immigrant, you are critical to what it takes finding work within your profession. In general, it is easier finding a job that does not require special training. Mastering the language also improves the odds of obtaining employment, as do previous work experience and a personal network. In a Danish study, Kristensen (2007) touches upon similar issues and draws attention to the necessity of challenging the idea that immigration only result in costs and difficulties. Nählinder (2008) describes different measures and activities that have paved the way to higher education for immigrant academics since the early 1990s. One of the most successful measures was a government decision (Government, 1995:889) concerning a special theoretical and practical education programme for unemployed academics with a foreign background. To a large extent, this has resulted in higher educational institutes offering at least three specialisations with
different contents and disposition, since 1995 (Universities of Gothenburg, Lund, and Stockholm). Common to all three is the possibility of improving one’s chances of entering work force by learning Swedish, the professional language, the subject language, practical training, or some sort of supplementary education for persons with a foreign academic education (Nählinder 2008). In short, these specialisations consist of the following:

Efforts and educations for foreign academics such as contract education, with support from the Swedish public employment services (especially directed towards professions such as engineering, the law, and teaching)

Supplementary educations for regulated professions within the healthcare sector. The National Board of Health and Welfare decides on supplementary educations, and knowledge tests take place in cooperation with certain universities, for example, the Karolinska Institutet, Lund University, and Sahlgrenska Academy. This concerns mostly doctors and dentists (for people with foreign diplomas from the Third World).

Bridging programmes for international graduates and the Immigrant Academy (IA) are found in three Swedish educational institutes (Malmö University, the University of Borås, and Linköping University). These education programmes are part of the ordinary activities of the three schools. The courses at both Malmö University and the University of Borås are directed towards the entire target group. Their education comprises preparatory introductions, compared to Linköping University which has either a general entry for people with foreign diplomas or one for teachers and doctors.

The Immigrant Academy (IA) at the university in which the presented study took place began as a project in cooperation with other actors in the society. The main purpose of the project was to facilitate the entry of foreign academics into the Swedish labour market. Within the IA framework there is, amongst others, the course Swedish as a second language with focus on society and working life for foreign academics. This course targets foreign academics that have difficulty obtaining work in Sweden and aims to facilitate and increase their possibilities of obtaining employment by offering guidance. Swedish as a second language education with its focus on society and working life, as well as practical training. The Immigrant Academy’s goal is that approximately 70% of the participants will be able to support themselves through further studies or work, which most of the interviewed for this study have done.
Researching Internship in Higher Education

There is little research on immigrant academics and their adjustment to the Swedish labour market, as well as a lack of relevant research in terms of what immigrant academics believe they develop during practice, which among other matters is what this study intends to illuminate. However, there are important research results for this group which reveal general problems in the encounter with both the university-placed and employment-based parts of professional training. In one study, Gustavsson (2008) illuminates the difficulties student teachers face during their first year of placement. Although they socialise early, they still demonstrate difficulties understanding their future professions as they lack support from theories and strategies. This leads to insecurity, both during the employment-based and the university-placed parts of their education. Similarly, the Lindberg-Sand (1996) study on the nursing education shows that experiences from clinical practice clash with theoretical knowledge. In another study Pilhammar Andersson (1999) demonstrates that the university-based parts of the courses for future nurses are little affected by their actual professions. Several studies confirm an often dichotimised picture of university-placed and employment-based professional education, which indicates that the education does not offer the students challenges which are sufficiently characterised by problematisation and critical thinking (Heggen, 2006; Kennedy-Olsson, 1995; Säljö & Södling, 2006).

We also more specifically assess that foreign-born academics are included in how Eriksson (2009) draws attention to the way the issue on theory versus practice is presented for students during teacher education. It seems that students need to reflect on the literature more in relation to the practical parts of their training, which could be an expression of the divergence demonstrated between the two parts in other studies. Eriksson means that students understand the necessity of theory. On the basis of these perspectives, it is reasonable to return to Schön’s descriptions of the problems with implementing professional education in an academic milieu. According to Schön, the problem with academia is that it is closed, conservative, self-righteous and more focused on students’ general qualities than identifying qualities within the profession in order to prepare them for their future work roles. Moreover, he warns for the risk that students gain some sort of scientific competence but at the same time remain incompetent exercising their professions. To explain this, he acknowledges the interest of academia to understand and explain the world, in comparison to the professionals who want to change it. Schön, in fact, means that an important part of developing one’s skills as a professional is to take part in content-related and situational complex practice. Exercising a profession ought to give the students possibilities
to problematise different events by asking questions and suggesting solutions. From the results of general research on internships, we might draw the conclusion that the aim is not only to increase the students’ knowledge about professional practice, but rather to emphasise relevant knowledge in practice (Biggs, 1999; Entwistle & Entwistle, 1997; Leinhardt, McCarthy Young & Merriam, 1995). Biggs (1999) further draws attention to the importance of students experiencing their professions from different perspectives. With students from engineering, teacher and nursing programmes, Dimenäs (2010) demonstrates how fruitful the attachment of practical training supports the idea of multiple perspectives and how education inspired by Work Integrated Learning could constitute an arena where situations are reflected on and experienced. Based on the above description of the tension that seems to exist between the academia and on-the-job training, it is useful to more closely study the relatively sparse results students obtain in terms of content-related aspects, that is, the skills students learn or develop during employment-based training. Stengel, Young & Stengel (2010) maintain for example, that practical experience has its strength in the fact that students take on a future work role. They categorise the abilities that the undergraduate business interns develop during their practice, either as academic or workplace related. The latter involves, for example, increasing verbal and writing skills, as well as a developed ability to use the computer. Other abilities concern the culture of the workplace and include aspects such as honesty, integrity, interpersonal relationships, motivation, work ethic, team work, and flexibility. In a similar way, Andersson (2002) describes such a way of approaching the employment-based parts of teacher education. She notes perspectives where traditional practice and academically-oriented knowledge dominate, but also indicates a critical social and personality developing orientation. The latter perspective is also acknowledged in Heggen (2003), as an important part of students developing as good practitioners.

**Theory and Method**

The starting point of this study is that assumptions and analyses are related to theories on work integrated learning, as it notes the students’ ability to distinguish between different situations and perspectives regarding their professional practice, that is, a specific context. The students’ conceptions of different situations in their employment-based training are studied and form the basis for the analysis (Marton & Booth, 1997). This means that we have not studied students in practice, but their reflections in relation to the occurring practices of which they are a part, to a greater or lesser extent. Schön (1983) uses the term ‘reflection-on-action’, which is also applicable as a way of understanding the data collection. According to our interpretation, the term, reflection on action’, means that the workplace’s culture and interaction constitute the
basis required for learning to occur at all. Theoretically, we consider the result from a socio-cultural point of departure (Säljö, 2002). In this study, the analysis has a qualitative starting point based on the assumption that there is a relation between what the interviewees say and the possibility of describing their statements in qualitative terms, in order to understand immigrant academics’ learning in the clash between their former work culture and the Swedish one (Malmqvist 2007). The study group is from a Swedish university and enrolled in what we call the ‘Immigrant Academy’. Those admitted to the Immigrant Academy are academics that have come to Sweden to seek asylum or to be reunited with family members.

The Academy, founded in 2002 as a project in cooperation with several societal actors involved, aims to facilitate the entry of foreign-born academics into the Swedish labour market. The project, which ran from 2002-2006, was evaluated by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education (2006:35R), after which the IA was included in the ordinary activities of the university. Within the IA framework, there is, for example, the course ‘Swedish as a Second Language for Foreign Academics with a Focus on Society and Work Life’ (60 credits), for foreign-born academics with difficulties finding employment. The purpose of the course is to facilitate and improve their chances of being employed. This is achieved by offering counselling, education in Swedish as a second language, learning about Swedish society and working life, and obtaining an internship. Thereafter, they may apply to study at other university departments, in order to obtain a supplementary education. The academics participate in four weeks of practical training during the first semester of their one-year education. The empirical material of this study is based on interviews with immigrant academics and what they believe they have learnt during their four weeks of training. The conversation during the interviews can be described as consensual and open, and where the content of the discussion is clearly stated.

With regard to selection and educational background, all participants in the study have a foreign diploma of at least two years full-time education. They have resided in Sweden for two years, on average and are registered in the country. In addition they have all studied Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) to D level (intermediate school level). The group comprised 18 students, but since three were not able to participate in the interviews, 15 were asked to join. Twelve accepted and thus formed the study group which comprised two engineers, two doctors, two teachers, two qualified administrators, three economists, and one communications officer. Their countries of origin are Indonesia, Iraq (2), Kosovo, Moldavia, Norway, Poland (2), Tunisia, Hungary, and Ukraine (2). The focus interviews were tape-recorded and form the basis for the analysis.
In preparation for their internships, they receive a crash course in the Swedish language, society, culture, and working life, that is, descriptions of different professions in terms of content and conditions, as well as labour market and business culture. In addition, rules and regulations are mentioned, for example professional secrecy, police record, confidentiality as well as labour market statistics and practical information. Their placements are planned according to their needs and wishes. Both employers and students are informed about the purpose of the practical part of their education. This means that the immigrant academics are given the opportunity to experience how to work within their field in Sweden. Moreover, they learn how work in Sweden is organised and how Swedish work-places are related to the labour market and its various organisations in general. The purpose is to develop the immigrant academics’ ways of using Swedish in relation to their work fields, make contacts, and obtain personal references. In concrete terms, this means that they observe, listen, take responsibility for some or several tasks and actively participate; in other words, they take part in the daily activities.

Results

General Description of Placement
The students in the study group regarded the Immigrant Academy as an opportunity to study in an academic environment as well as experience their profession in Sweden. However, they also had comments and desires about the purpose and disposition of their education revealing that they needed to improve and develop their professional language, for which the placement was the best location. They also expressed the importance of understanding how to describe a workplace, finding it important to understand how it “works, to experience a real situation” and get to know “what I’m like and what they are like”. In addition the students wanted more preparation time for employment-based training, as they wanted to fit in and experience the whole aspect of the work culture, including having tasks of their own. In summary, the students claim that several rules, norms, and linguistic concepts are learnt in working life during contact with other people, not in class during the academic part of their education.

Developed Abilities during Placement
The purpose of this investigation is to describe and understand the learning of immigrant academics in the clash between their former working culture and the Swedish one. The main results show that we can identify four different themes in their statements related to what they
believe they have learnt in practice. The students believe they have developed skills and abilities related to the following themes:

A. Communication

B. The contents of different professions

C. Swedish professional culture

D. Integration

There is no doubt that the students state they learnt more Swedish and professional terminology in practice. Not only did they learn new words, several of them had not previously used Swedish outside school, but had greater opportunities practicing communicating in Swedish at their workplaces. For example one student states:

Well, for one month in practice I’ve developed my language skills a lot, I’d say, so compared to when I started the IA, it’s a big difference (administrator).

Some of them said they had not had any previous contacts with native Swedes, so for the four week placement period was the only time they could use Swedish. One of the interviewees used a dictionary frequently to improve communication. We can thus understand, though not unexpectedly, that communication entails developing knowledge in the Swedish language and is an important part of the employment-based training for immigrant academics, as it is part of the integration into Swedish society.

The results of the group conversations are characterised by a clear focus on what we would like to call the contents of different professions. We use the term ‘professions’ because the interviewees demonstrate that there are two different aspects of professional content. While the first aspect is focused on what the Swedish profession has contributed to the enhancement of the immigrants’ knowledge enhancement during placement, the second aspect is the reverse; the knowledge that the immigrants bring with them contributes to knowledge enhancement at the Swedish workplace. When we use the term, ‘contents of different professions’, we refer to the concrete phenomena obtained or learnt at a specific workplace. There are several examples of descriptions concerning what the academics have learnt from Swedish workplaces. One of the participants whose internship was at a municipality worked with the real planning of tasks. She states,
I did a lot of different things, yeah, for the first time I learnt how to make a schedule for work concerning electronics, for example, when to dig when you’re going to lay a cable (engineer).

One of the interviewees was placed at a school and comments,

I've learnt a lot. It was very interesting. There’s a big difference between the school in my home country and in Sweden. The teachers plan and organise their work differently, and in the classroom the teacher works in different ways. The students have different activities and different methods (teacher).

Another of the interviewees who had her placement in a school says she has learnt to, “deal with situations involving children from war-torn countries”. She claims to have observed that, “those kids act differently than other kids” (teacher). When analysing the statements from the conversation groups, it also emerges that the immigrant academics have made positive contributions to the Swedish workplaces, described, for example as follows:

As an international coordinator, I helped a substitute writing a missive of the tasks she could offer the students based on the university language I learnt in America (communications officer).

Another says, “since I’m an immigrant, I have knowledge about other countries, and the children are interested and ask a lot of questions; they appreciate the fact that I’ve told them about my situation and they are curious” (teacher). One of the teachers was placed in different schools and could help the children both in Polish and in Albanian.

During the analysis of the statements from the interviewed students, what we categorise as Swedish professional culture, emerged on several occasions. The work environment and the open relations, especially between employees and management, were particularly noted. All of the interviewees said that they now had a picture of their workplaces; what the organisation was like, how it was governed and what the duties of the staff were. Several expressed in positive terms, that their workplaces had a good atmosphere and that the staff and the boss had an open relationship. Overall, the immigrant academics clearly expressed that they found teamwork and the environment positive, with less authority and hierarchies. One of them says,

It is well organised and I have learnt that it’s not a hierarchical system. This is important to me because in Indonesia, we have a hierarchical system and you have to bow to your leader (economist).
From a school perspective, one interviewee claims that the vice-chancellor “governs with humility”, that there is an “equal relationship”, and that the ‘boss is thinking about everyone’s best” (administrator). For example, a participant mentions that “the boss is sitting at the same table and shows that there’s equality” (economist). Another says that a Swedish boss likes to talk to everybody before making a decision. Some students compare the work culture to experiences from their homelands:

*When we compared Swedish and Polish workplaces, we found that in Poland the employees often have more varied tasks than in Sweden, and there are no workplaces with summer jobs. Another difference is that in Poland, you have no lunch break even though you’re working 40 hour weeks (economist).*

One immigrant academic mentions worries, conflicts, and the relation to the professional culture:

*Of course there are conflicts, but you could say the environment is good for doing your job. Conflicts are solved after compromises, and you could always have a dialogue. The employees don’t complain much. They don’t act aggressively and they respect each other. During my four weeks I was part of the team and I learnt a lot about Swedish work life (teacher).*

In a similar way, an academic placed at a Swedish school touches upon the relation to the professional culture:

*In this school, teachers don’t form a front against the pupils. Here you work together with the children. I like the fact that you work with them; teachers and pupils are partners. You don’t fight each other and everybody helps you. I’ve never worked in a school before so I made a lot of mistakes, but no one laughed or bullied me. Everybody, from the boss to the cleaning lady, help each other, so that was really good. I learnt so much (teacher).*

The interviewees talked about better working conditions and greater resources in school. Not the least, and perhaps most characteristic for a Swedish workplace, is the culture. Several say that coffee breaks and the staff room are important to the workplace as they create an atmosphere of joy.

When analysing the statements, we find that one category is connected to the others, namely, the will to integrate into Swedish society via one’s work. Some claim that their internships have given them the opportunities to try their professions in Sweden so that they know what they are like.
One academic says that she no longer fears job hunting as she now has much better self-esteem. Another maintains that practicing was important to her:

*For me, it was important to be able to go to my job without feeling stressed, so I wasn’t stressed and the children were not stressed in school. It’s completely different where I come from, where children come to school terrified (teacher).*

In their home country of yet another student, “you feel uncomfortable working, but here you’re more like a family, you cooperate a lot” (engineer). Finally, one interviews said,

*An internship makes us ready and teaches us to prepare for what it is like working at a Swedish workplace, because we come from other countries with experiences from other environments and cultures, which could be a problem if we just started at a job (doctor).*

She explains that the employment-based part of their education is “one step towards a job” (doctor) as well as an important factor with regard to integrating into Swedish working life in terms of references and participating in different networks.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

Based on the descriptive analysis in the result section, we now discuss how this result can be understood. The results show that the encounter with Swedish working life has a twofold benefit. Firstly, the competences obtained in the students’ former homelands can be used at their placements. In addition the students have a different perspective after their experiences with Swedish professional culture, identifying a different kind of management strategy and work environment. Secondly, the interviewees demonstrated better self-confidence as they realised that although their competences and approaches might be different, they can be integrated into the new culture. Thus, in this context, employment-based training could lead to improving their knowledge of Swedish, as well as developing terms and definitions in professional terminology. Moreover, the interviewees expressed that their practical training has given them an understanding of the work environment, professional culture, organisations, norms, relations, cooperation, routines, and the relationship between staff and management. They also experience increased self-knowledge and self-esteem. During their internship, they became aware of their competences (or lack thereof) in relation to their tasks and the demands for qualifications as well as how this is related to their position in society as a whole.
In comparing these results with those of other studies, there is a consensus that internships not only give the students possibilities to develop their language and knowledge about the working culture (Stengel, Young & Stengel, 2010), but also improve personality-related abilities (Andersson, 2002; Heggen, 2003). In this study, we can also point to the development that clearly emerges in on-the-job training, that is, the students obtain knowledge during their practice which gives them the abilities they need to become part of Swedish society. We can obviously here understand the result from the socio cultural theory’s way of regarding that learning occurs in a social, interactive, and cultural context (Säljö, 2002). The value of the practical placement period and the students’ possibility of “reflection-on-action” (Schön, 1983) is therefore of crucial significance when the same proximity to the professional culture is not available during the university places period of the education. It may even be more appropriate to consider “reflection-on-culture”, as a way of developing knowledge in different Swedish professional cultures.

A sustainable society requires equal conditions, participation, and common responsibilities for its population. More people with a foreign background are unemployed than native-born, especially female refugees from Asia and Africa. This also applies to immigrant academics. We may conclude that, for this group, there are a number of obstacles, such as language, networks, discrimination, view of normality, and the hierarchical relations of work organisations which altogether make it more difficult to enter the labour market. Innovative thinking, a holistic view, imagination, and cooperation from all partners involved are required so that we can successfully use and highlight the knowledge and competence immigrants and refugees bring with them to Sweden. It seems even more difficult to make the best of the competence that people with a foreign diploma can contribute to society. The life patterns of immigrant academics not only affect their own health and life situation, but their children’s as well. If the resource that immigrant academics constitute cannot be incorporated into Swedish society, their successors will most likely be affected as well. It may be more difficult motivating children of immigrant academics to get a higher education, if their parents were not able to use their academic education in Sweden.

Much has been said about immigrants’ opportunities to establish themselves in the Swedish labour market. Measures have been implemented but much remains to be done (Nählinder, 2008; Dahlstedt, I & Bevelander, P., 2010; SOU 2006:59; 2006:60; 2006:79). People who have fled their home countries or come here due to family situations often carry with them traumatic experiences. Many need care, but most of all they need an active and dynamic process that can
realise their actual possibilities of forming a new life in Sweden. With regard to the importance of achieving good results, some of the interviewees mention that universities offering this type of education should draw attention to the challenges involved with this issue. For example, this concerns organising the employment-based part of their education with a focus on the length of the students’ internships, contents, and economic resources for supervision. Other aspects to take into consideration when planning internships are issues concerning the employers and other representatives’ practical approach to the names, clothing, religion, nationality, and language of immigrant academics. Modern day Sweden is a multicultural society. According to an inquiry (SOU 2000:47) approximately 20 percent of Sweden’s population has its origin in other countries and cultures. One way of promoting the possibilities of integration is offering education and training programmes that can improve circumstances of immigrants so they can become engaged members of society and be able to take part in societal development in several arenas. A democratic society requires participation, equal conditions and possibilities. It is a necessity for everyone to have employment in order to provide for themselves, develop, and feel involved in a societal community and, thus, contribute to development and growth.

The inquiry, Diversity in University (SOU 2000:47), raises the importance of diversity and emphasises the significance of society being part of this development, both at a national as well as local level. Furthermore, the inquiry concludes that education generally improves people’s circumstances and qualifications, but the number of students with a foreign background in higher education – particularly from Asia and Africa – is not represented in the labour market or in higher education. As we have demonstrated in this investigation, immigrant academics have a lot to contribute to Swedish society, in terms of cultural, social, and economic capital. Our study shows that the IA students want to learn and integrate into society at all levels, through education and work. They are positive about being able to study at an academic institution and having the opportunity to develop knowledge, make personal contacts, acquire references, and build up networks. In order for immigrant academics to be one step closer to integration, all universities should open their doors and adjust the rules and directives to suit the attributes of this group. Another step is for the labour market to lower the bar for immigrant academics and to consider both the societal and the individual perspectives when recruiting labour. Universities can contribute by offering for example; employment-based training that gives foreign academics the possibility of understanding their academic education in a meaningful and integrative context with new opportunities. This certainly applies to supplementary education for regulated professions, such as in the healthcare sector, pedagogy, and the law.
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Nurse students’ clinical competence assessed by students and their clinical supervisors: an issue of communication

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Abstract

This study compares the students’ view of own competence, the students’ view of how they perceive supervisors assess their competence and the supervisors’ own assessment of students’ competence. The study was carried out as questionnaires with nurse students in their second year of education (n=39) and their clinical supervisors (n = 51). The questionnaires were structured according to Aristotle’s three-dimensional epistemology and consisted of eight comparable Likert scale questions followed by open-ended questions. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics and content analysis.

The comparison between students’ view of how they perceive supervisors assess their competence and the supervisors’ assessment showed significant differences in student rating higher than supervisors regarding of theoretical, practical and moral ethical knowledge. Also regarding the ability to apply knowledge, the differences are significant both for theoretical and practical knowledge. The comparison between students’ view of how they perceive supervisors assess their competence and the students’ own competence assessment differs clearly. When assessing from their own point of view, students assess their competence level lower than when assessing according to how they perceived supervisors assessment of their competence. It seems that supervisors do not clearly express and communicate their opinion on students’ competence, since students get the impression they do better than they actually do. It is suggested that differences in competence assessment can be an issue of communication rather than students merely overestimating their competence.
Introduction

Clinical practice and clinical learning are an important part of nursing (Jerlock, Falck & Severinsson 2003; Baxter 2007) and its purpose is to develop the students clinical skills, to introduce them to the profession and help them to connect theoretical knowledge with clinical practice (Heinonen 2004, 35). The Finnish education program for nurses is 210 credits (cr.), i.e. 3 ½ years, and according to EU Council Directive (89/595/EEC) about 1/3 (75 cr.) are clinical education. The clinical studies are an important part of education and their implementation is therefore also of great importance for students’ learning and becoming a professional nurse (Warne et al 2010). Most of the clinical studies are performed in different nursing units, as clinical education should be supervised by professionals within the occupation (EU Directive 77/453/EEC).

Since such a great part of the education is carried out as clinical placements, the wards' and nurses' responsibility for the clinical teaching has become increasingly important (Saarikoski 2000; Papp et al 2003). Supervisors have a special importance to facilitate transition to the professional role and to promote socialization (Beattie 1998) and students’ self-confidence (Löfmark & Wikblad 2001). They help students learn and develop by allowing them to take responsibility and work independently, by giving them the opportunity to practice different tasks and receive feedback (Löfmark & Wikblad 2001). Supervisors are required to have capacity to help students implement theory into practice and to identify and maximize learning opportunities to enable students to develop a good clinical assessment skills, i.e. clinical gaze (Beattie 1998). This requires a more constructivist supervision than master-apprentice method (cf. Saarikoski 2002) i.e. a student-focused tutoring where the student's previous knowledge will be modified, built on and extended (Peters 2000).

Assessment of nurse students’ capability is of vital importance to their professional development. It is important that the quality of the “final product”, the graduated, practicing nurse, is evaluated but it is also important to evaluate the stages and processes of learning during education (Russell & Cordingley 1996). Students expect to get feedback from supervisors; otherwise students experience uncertainty about their development (Löfmark & Wikblad 2001). Thru the process of evaluating, students get an idea of their capability level, i.e. what knowledge and skills should be developed and trained more (Kapborg & Fischbein 2002). Within the clinical environment, teaching, learning and assessing are crucial aspects as they generate the evolution of knowledge and skills ensuring the development of competent practitioners (Lambert & Glacken 2005).
The purpose of this study, set within a Finnish context, is therefore, to assess nurse students’ clinical competence in the middle of education after a clinical placement in a hospital by comparing students’ and supervisors’ assessments. This was done by a comparison between students’ and supervisors’ assessments of students’ competence.

**Literature review**

A review of nursing literature reveals an abundance of research examining clinical competence assessment. Yanhua and Watson (2011) based their review on 219 papers exploring trends in clinical competence assessment in graduating nurse students and newly qualified nurses in 2001–2010. They found that most of the studies were cross-sectional studies and concluded that there is a need for more longitudinal work to track the change in clinical competence throughout nurse education and also across the transition from nurse student to newly qualified nurse. Students’ experiences of knowledge development during the studies are still sparsely studied, particularly in relation to factors that promote development (Holmén & Ora-Hyttiäinen 2004). Studies on students’ knowledge tend to focus on studies beginning or end (c.f. Yanhua & Watson 2011).

Holmén and Ora-Hyttiäinen (2004) did a longitudinal study, comparing two schools, on student’ self-assessment of their professional competence during the education. There were slight differences in competence assessment during education and between the schools, but overall both groups of students considered their competence to be good. According to earlier research self-assessment cannot be seen as an effective method to determine clinical competence. Students have a tendency to overrate their abilities (Baxter & Norman 2011). This becomes evident also in e.g. Pauls (2010) study that compared students’ self-assessment and examiners assessments of students CPR performance. The results showed that three out of six students assed their performance higher than the examiner.

It is suggested that additional assessment methods should be used in competence assessment (Baxter & Norman 2011). In Chaves’ et al (2006) study, a self-assessment was combined with peer and tutor assessment. By using the Web-based PBL-evaluator master's degree students and two nurse faculty-tutors evaluated key professional competencies. There were notable differences among self, peer, and tutor assessment. The students assessed their knowledge better than their peer and tutor, whose assessments were quite similar. In Salmelas (2004) study a comparison between nurse students, clinical supervisors and teachers’ view of graduating nurse students’ psycho-emotional nursing skills was done. Here all parties estimated the skills of the students as moderate, but mentors being the most critical in their ratings.
Research on the clinical supervisors’, the prospective colleagues’, opinions on the student’s professional competence in comparison with students’ self-assessment is rare. Quattrin et al (2010) did a comparison between supervisors and students in relation to clinical nursing practice. The results of the survey, that included questions about students’ learning objectives and students’ competence, showed that students’ and supervisors’ perceptions differed in several fields. Löfmark et al (2006) did a comparison between final year students’ view of own competence and qualified nurses’ view of newly-graduated nurses’ competence measured according to 18 items on ability to give nursing care. Compared with experienced nurses’ ratings, students estimated their ability to provide nursing care higher in all items.

Areas that both students and experienced nurses rated the strongest were ethical awareness, ability to cooperate and preparation for action. Löfmark et al (2006) conclude that to make students aware of their ability in different areas, feedback from supervisors during clinical periods is essential. This was also established in Zijlstra-Shaws et al (2005) study that assessed professional behaviour of undergraduate dental students during three terms by comparing students’ self-assessment to staff’s assessment. The assessments were used as basis for student-staff feedback discussions on professional behaviour. It was found to be a useful teaching aid as it can be used to give feedback to the students and encourage an open discussion of professional behaviour between staff and students. Both groups found this a very acceptable means of assessment of students’ professional behaviour.

Since the clinical supervisors have great impact on nurse students’ learning and professional development it’s necessary to consider how well their assessment of student competence corresponds with how the students have apprehended their level of competence. Communication with and feedback from supervisors is crucial for the student to get a realistic conception of their skill level (Sarajärvi 2002). It is important that students receive feedback on their functioning in order to identify their strengths and weaknesses (Kevin 2006), since only what you are aware of can be corrected. A clear elucidation from supervisors, of how they value the student’s knowledge, is therefore of influence to students’ professional development. Through assessment of students' knowledge the weaknesses are clarified and prerequisites for developing a professional competence increase. Assessment of students' knowledge should accordingly be made throughout the program, not only at the end (Sandvik & Fagerström 2010).

Competence is built up of different kinds of knowledge. In assessing competence, the view of knowledge is a fundamental starting point. The most common conception of competence is
task-based or behaviourist. Competence is then regarded as behaviours associated with the completion of atomistic tasks. According to Tiwari et al (2005), the main focus in assessments was more on an assessment of the different tasks rather than on students’ learning during the clinical placement. This study does not examine specific detail knowledge and skills that a nurse should master (c.f. Paloposki et al. 2003) but more complex unities. This is in accordance with what Gonczi (1994) call the “integrated“ or the holistic approach to competence. This approach looks at the complex combinations of attributes (knowledge, skills, attitudes and values).

The structure of assessment in this study originates from Aristotle’s (1955) three dimensional epistemology, which concern a theoretical, a productive and socio-ethical domain. Theoretical-scientific knowledge (episteme) refers to universal and general knowledge. Practical knowledge (techne) refers to competence as practical skill and handicraft. Fronesis has an ethical and democratic dimension and implies the knowledge needed to develop appropriate discretion. This practical wisdom, referred to as ethical and moral knowledge in this study, is applied in concrete actions and is expressed as an attitude, an ability to understand and interpret the situation at hand and decide about appropriate actions.

Eriksson et al (1999) have the same basic idea as they refer to the historical head-heart-hand model as a rationale for an evidence-based nursing care. The head symbolizes science, the hand the skills and the heart symbolizes art (the ethical, moral). From a nursing perspective, a junction of ‘head’ (theoretical, scientific knowledge), ‘hearth’ (moral-ethical knowledge) and ‘hand’ (practical knowledge) are necessities that need to be addressed in all nursing education and praxis (Lindström et al 2006, Eriksson et al 1999). This three-pronged approach to knowledge can be usefully applied also to assessment of nurses’ professional competence and has been the theoretical framework used in the development of the questionnaire in this the study.

Methodology
The aim was to assess nurse students’ clinical competence in the middle of education out of their own perspective and the clinical supervisors’ perspectives. The research questions were:

- How do the clinical supervisors assess nurse students’ competence?
- How do the students experience the clinical supervisors’ assessment of their competence?
- How do the nurse students themselves assess their competence?
This small-scale cross-sectional study is based on a descriptive, non-experimental design that includes both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

**Sample**

This study included two groups of informants, nurse students and their clinical supervisors. The student group consisted of students at a university of applied science in Western Finland. All students that had accomplished their first clinical placement in basic nursing practice in secondary health care in a hospital setting (18 cr.) during their second year of studies were included in the study. Totally 45 students were invited and 39 answered the questionnaire (86.7%). The students’ background variables are shown in table 1.

Table 1. The nurse students’ background variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>92.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>male</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.7</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17–20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21–25</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>71.8</td>
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<td>26–30</td>
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<td>5.1</td>
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<td>31–35</td>
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<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;36</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Earlier education</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary school certification</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>61.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical nurse</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The supervisors’ group consisted of clinical supervising nurses from four wards (two medical wards and two surgical wards) at a hospital in Western Finland where the same students had had their clinical placement. A total of 60 supervisors were invited to participate in the study and 51 supervisors answered the questionnaire (85%). The supervisors’ background variables are shown in table 2.
Table 2. The clinical supervisors’ background variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>TYPE OF WARD</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>PER CENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>surgical</td>
<td>internal medicine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per cent</td>
<td>54,9</td>
<td>45,1</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother tongue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 - 25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 - 30</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 - 35</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 - 40</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 - 45</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>46 - 50</td>
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<td>51 - 55</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled nurse</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialized nurses</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education in supervision</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of exam</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
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<td>3</td>
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</tr>
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<td>2000s</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working experience, totally</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 5 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - 10 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 - 15 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 - 20 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 - 25 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 - 30 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 30 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working experience within the same field of practice</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 5 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - 10 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 - 15 years</td>
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<td>11,8</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 - 20 years</td>
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<td>21 - 25 years</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 - 30 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 30 years</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Data collection**

Data was collected by questionnaires. The student questionnaire was the fourth re-developed version of a questionnaire used in a similar previous study (Sandvik & Fagerström 2010).

The questionnaire for supervisors was developed from the student questionnaire. To make comparison possible most of the questions corresponded. The questionnaires contained both structured questions with possible answers of Likert-type, with the assessment scale from 1 to 4 (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree), and open follow-up, "Explain / give examples". The pre-tested questionnaires contained a total of 24 (student) and 29 subjects (supervisor) divided into three main areas: theoretical, practical and ethical-moral knowledge. The results of the nine questions and their open follow-up questions that were comparable are presented here.

Data collection among supervisors’ was done about two weeks after the students’ ten week long clinical placement. The students’ data collection was done at a seminar finishing the clinical placement. Both informant groups were informed about the aim and conduction of the study. The researchers pursued the ethical guidelines that apply to all research and followed the ethical guidelines for nursing research in the Nordic countries (Northern Nurses Federation, 2003). Approval for the study was obtained from both organizations concerned.

**Data analysis**

The quantitative data material was processed statistically using SPSS. The response options 1 (=strongly disagree) and 2 (= disagree) were fused into a negative position which indicates that the informants did not agree with the statement, i.e. they found the students’ knowledge inadequate. The response options 3 (= agree) and 4 (= strongly agree) were fused into a positive position which indicates that the informants agreed with the statement, i.e. they found the students’ knowledge adequate. T-test was used to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between the two study groups' mean values. A P value > 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Inductive and manifest content analysis was used for analysis of the qualitative data (Graneheim & Lundman 2004). Responses and comments on the open questions were read through several times and the core content extracted from the text material. In this way the meaning content of the text was synthesized and reduced to meaningful synopsis, which are illustrated with quotations.
Results
First the assessment of the theoretical knowledge and its implementation is presented, then the practical knowledge and its implementation, and finally the assessment of ethical-moral knowledge is presented (see table 3).
Table 3: Assessment of nurse students’ competence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CSs’ assessment</th>
<th>NSs’ perception of CSs’ assessment</th>
<th>NSs’ assessment</th>
<th>t-test/df</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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</tr>
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<td>Assessment of students’ theoretical knowledge in a) medical science</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• adequate</td>
<td>21,6 %</td>
<td>76,9</td>
<td></td>
<td>5,9/88</td>
<td>0,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• inadequate</td>
<td>78,4%</td>
<td>23,1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• mean</td>
<td>2,2</td>
<td>2,9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of students’ theoretical knowledge in b) nursing including nursing interventions/technology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• adequate</td>
<td>52,9</td>
<td>79,5</td>
<td></td>
<td>3,9/88</td>
<td>0,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>47,1</td>
<td>20,5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• mean</td>
<td>2,8</td>
<td>3,0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of students’ theoretical knowledge in c) nursing theory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• adequate</td>
<td>65,3</td>
<td>82,8</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,3/82</td>
<td>0,190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>34,7</td>
<td>17,2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• mean</td>
<td>2,8</td>
<td>3,1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum variable of theoretical knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• adequate</td>
<td>57,9</td>
<td>79,6</td>
<td></td>
<td>59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• inadequate</td>
<td>42,1</td>
<td>20,4</td>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• mean</td>
<td>2,5</td>
<td>3,0</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of students’ ability to apply theoretical knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• adequate</td>
<td>27,5</td>
<td>87,2</td>
<td></td>
<td>8,1/88</td>
<td>0,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• inadequate</td>
<td>72,5</td>
<td>12,8</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• mean</td>
<td>2,2</td>
<td>3,3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of students’ practical knowledge</td>
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<tr>
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<td>19,6</td>
<td>87,2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>80,4</td>
<td>12,9</td>
<td></td>
<td>42,1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• mean</td>
<td>2,1</td>
<td>3,1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,7</td>
<td>7,7/88*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of students’ ability to apply practical knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• adequate</td>
<td>26,0</td>
<td>89,5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• inadequate</td>
<td>74,0</td>
<td>10,5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• mean</td>
<td>2,2</td>
<td>3,3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8,1/71,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ETHICAL-MORAL KNOWLEDGE</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of students’ ethical-moral knowledge</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• adequate</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>81,5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>• inadequate</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>18,4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• mean</td>
<td>2,5</td>
<td>3,1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6,72/86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Comparison of the CS’s assessment and NSs’ experience of the supervisors’ assessment (columns 1 and 2)
I Assessment of students’ theoretical knowledge

The assessment of theoretical knowledge was divided into three parts: theoretical medical knowledge, theoretical knowledge in nursing including nursing interventions/technology and nursing theory.

A) Assessment of students’ theoretical medical knowledge

Regarding the theoretical knowledge of medical subjects, the difference was significant between students and supervisors (p = 0.000). Among the students 76.9% (m=2,9) assumed that the supervisor assessed their theoretical medical knowledge as adequate, while only 21,6% (m= 2,2) of the supervisors actually did.

Several students had heard positive comments about their theoretical medical knowledge, while others have not heard any comments at all, so they assumed that knowledge was reasonably adequate. Others interpreted the lack of comments negative. Deficiencies mentioned were pharmaceutical knowledge and Latin terms.

*They think, that we read too little in school about different drugs and their effects on the body and possible side effects. (Student)*

The supervisors' comments revealed that students had inadequate knowledge, difficulties in connecting theoretical knowledge with practice and that clinical studies are overwhelming. The supervisors indicated that students had inadequate knowledge especially regarding Latin diagnoses and did not have adequate knowledge of various diseases or the location of different organs in the body. Also knowledge of drugs and their effects were considered weak. Several of the informants believed that students had not taken courses in for example diseases that they will come in contact with during practice.

*Anatomy has been so common that it is not known, for example, if the student comes to a ward for abdominal surgery, where the different organs is located. (Supervisor)*

*Different drug groups are unclear to many and their effect. (Supervisor)*
B) Assessment of students’ theoretical knowledge in nursing including nursing interventions/technology

A good half of the supervisor estimated students’ knowledge in nursing (nursing interventions/technology) adequate (m = 2.5). There were significant differences (p = 0.000) between how students assumed that the supervisors considered these (79.5%, m = 3.0) and the supervisors' actual rating (52.9%, m = 2.5).

*The staff had a good attitude to if you could not quite all the technology, and they taught willingly. They knew that we don't practice much at school.* (Student).

The supervisors’ own comments indicate that students have theoretical knowledge in basic nursing, the nursing intervention to be trained and that students were in great need of supervision. The supervisor felt that the student held the basic knowledge, although the level of knowledge varied from student to student.

*They know basic nursing but are afraid of tubes and devices.* (Supervisor).

The supervisors felt that the advanced nursing procedures require more exercise, catheterization and giving shots for example. Students knew the basic principles of nursing interventions but could not apply them. The need for thorough instruction in the performance of these nursing procedures was considerable.

*In concrete nursing procedures the students know the principles, but do not know how to apply them to practical nursing.* (Supervisor)

C) Assessment of students’ knowledge in nursing theory

Students perceived that the supervisors assessed knowledge of nursing theory, as adequate (82.8%, m = 3.1), which was in accordance with the supervisors’ assessment (65.3%, m = 2.8). There is no statistically significant difference between the groups, but they agree that the knowledge of nursing theory was adequate. There were supervisors who appreciated the students’ caring science knowledge. Positive comments on ethics and ability to see the patient as a whole had been given. Some students were seen to have greater knowledge in nursing theory than the supervisors.

*Sometimes there was a feeling that you knew more about nursing theory than those who worked in the department* (student).
Students had also experienced that supervisors felt nursing theory took a too large part in nursing education, being the only thing students learn thoroughly and they made no demands on students’ knowledge in nursing theory.

They could not see the point of so much nursing theory in school. Therefore they had no requirement that I should know nursing theory (student).

Students had experiences of supervisors who did not pay regard to, discuss or care about the students' knowledge in nursing theory.

The supervisors felt that although it appeared that the students had knowledge in nursing theory, the students were not very good at applying it, it did not appear evident.

It might be difficult for students to transfer nursing theory into practice (supervisor).

Supervisors own poor implementation is also put forward as an explanation for that students' ability is not so good either. Among the supervisors there were also a few that clearly expressed a negative attitude to nursing theory.

I don’t care, because nursing schools pass through the clouds with their fine words, nor does it touch the practice - could be "normal words (supervisor).

**Overall assessment of the students’ theoretical knowledge**

To be able to compare supervisors’ assessment and how the students experienced the supervisors’ assessment with the students’ own assessment of theoretical knowledge, a sum variable of the different parts of theoretical knowledge was calculated (see table 3).

A total of 59% of students considered their theoretical knowledge as adequate, which agreed well with the supervisors' assessment (57.9%). The students' experience of the supervisors' assessment differed, however, clearly in a positive direction.

In conclusion, the supervisors felt that students have somewhat knowledge, but find it difficult to relate theory to practice and integrate their knowledge into practice. The supervisors also pointed out that the practice is an overwhelming experience for students and that one can’t ask so much when they are on their first clinical placement in secondary health care in a hospital setting.
Assessment of students’ ability to apply theoretical knowledge

Students estimated that they to large extent (87.2%, m = 3.3, see Table 3) could apply their theoretical knowledge in clinical practice. Supervisors assessment, however, was that students' ability to apply their knowledge was inadequate (72.5%, m = 2.2). Here there is a clear difference in the assessments (p = 0.000). Students felt they could apply their theoretical knowledge in clinical practice, but to varying degrees of success and extent. Only 12.8% of students felt that they only to some extent had been able to apply their theoretical knowledge. Several subjects had been applied, but they felt nursing theory was the hardest to apply.

Some theoretical subjects such as anatomy, pharmacology and so on, but not nursing theory, I think. (student).

Supervisors view is that students in their first clinical placement in basic nursing practice in secondary health care in a hospital setting are not very good at applying their theoretical knowledge in nursing practice. The ability to apply that knowledge varied. Students show cautiousness in using their knowledge.

They have knowledge, but are cautious with using it.

Some students can, with supervision apply theory to practice, while a large number of students can’t. This can maybe not even really be expected, since this is what they are in practice to learn.

Some students can with supervision apply theory to practice. (Supervisor).

In the beginning of clinical placement, you cannot require that students can manage nursing procedures. In the end of clinical placement, they should already know more (supervisor).

II Assessment of students’ practical knowledge

Based on their experience during clinical placement the students assessed their practical knowledge as adequate (57.9%, m = 2.7). Students state that they have some basic knowledge now, and that their practical knowledge is adequate, based on this level of education and the current clinical learning objectives. To have been able to work independently was seen as evidence of this.

For clinical learning objectives yes. For the context in question not entirely - life is a long education (student).
Unfortunately 42% of the students experienced that their practical knowledge inadequate. Those who made their entire clinical study period in only one specialty (e.g., surgical ward) believed they have adequate practical knowledge in that, but not in another specialty.

Should be able to work on a abdominal surgical ward. But also practice on medical wards (= in other department) is required (student).

Based on the feedback students received during practice, their understanding was that the supervisors considered their practical skills adequate (87.2%, m = 3.1). According to supervisors themselves however, only 19.6% considered students' practical skills as adequate. A total of 80.4% deemed them inadequate (p = 0.000). There are clear differences between students, e.g. if students have previous experience in the field or not. Yet, it’s pointed out that knowledge cannot be considered adequate in the first clinical placement in practice in secondary health care in a hospital setting and that the only way to fully get it is to practice, preferably both at school and in practice. They mention different deficiencies, from elementary things such as making beds to special areas of knowledge (e.g., cardiac patient care)

Clearly, you can tell if students have experience of working in health care (e.g., summer jobs, practical nurse exam in the past). Totally "new nurse students" are more unfamiliar with eg. basic nursing care. More training in school before clinical placement in hospital is desirable. (supervisor)

Assessment of students’ ability to apply practical knowledge

Students felt that they to large extent had been able to apply their practical knowledge (89.5%, m = 3.3) in practical nursing work. Only 10.5% felt that they only to some extent had been able to apply their practical knowledge. Students own comments indicate that they had been given the opportunity to try what was practiced in school, but didn’t always have a distinct recollection of how it should be done. The capacity for implementing improved during clinical studies. The need to practice more practical knowledge in school was significant.

Many of the practical exercises we did in school, I got a chance to try out in practice. You feel a little unsure the first time you do it, since you don’t remember quite how you did in the exercises. Later during the clinical studies, I could do it (student).

Among the supervisors a quarter (26%) considered that students could apply their practical knowledge, while 74% (m = 2.2) considered the capacity to apply inadequate (p = 0.000). Some of the supervisors felt that it sometimes clearly could be noticed what had been practiced at
school and that students should practice more in school before they enter the practice. The supervision was often considerable, students needed to be carefully instructed in the realization of various elements.

*What has been practiced (e.g. in school) the students feel confident of - it's also better easier in practice (supervisor).*

*The supervisor has to guide by the hand (supervisor).*

### III Assessment of students’ ethical-moral knowledge

A clear majority of students (81.5%, m = 3.1) felt that the education had given good ethical and moral readiness for patient care. Seven respondents (18.4%) held a different opinion. Students strive to do what is right for the patient, to see the whole person and set out from her wishes and needs.

*Look at the whole patient, physically and mentally. Think 2 times before (if) my action is the right thing for the patient (student).*

Students pointed out that ethics and morals are something that is based on one’s own personality and that you act upon that.

*Ethics and morale is high in my personality. Ethics and morality is individual and should therefore be adapted according to what the patient believes (student).*

Regarding students’ knowledge of ethical and moral issues and readiness for patient care the supervisors were divided. In total, 56% believed that students have knowledge of ethical and moral issues, while 44% (m = 2.5) considered that they didn’t have it (p = 0.000).

The majority of the supervisors felt that students treat the patients very well and based on a holistic view of the patient try to see to their best. The other however, felt that students had inadequate knowledge and even had difficulties in talking to patients. Some respondents also pointed out that ethics and the moral approach depends on the students’ personality and has been founded much earlier.

*Often, the students treat patients in a pleasant way and listen to them and try to think in the patient's best interest (supervisor).*
Students have a certain disposition that makes them suitable or not. Their knowledge in ethical and moral issues that would make them willing to care for patients has been founded much earlier (supervisor).

Discussion

Assessment of nurse students’ capability is of vital importance to their professional development. This study focused on assessment of students’ clinical competence according to a holistic approach based on Aristotle’s (1955) three-dimensional epistemology. The study compared the students’ view of own competence, the students’ perception of how supervisors assess their competence and the supervisors own assessment of students’ competence. These results show an obvious difference between students’ and supervisors' assessment of student competence. Although the students have completed the courses required of them before the clinical studies, it appears they do not have the knowledge expected. One possible explanation is that teachers are unable to link what they teach to practice, theory becomes a distinct form of knowledge secluded from clinical practice. According to Corlett (2000) the teachers teach an idealized model of nursing care, which is difficult to adapt to health care reality. Teachers should relate their teaching more clearly to reality by giving concrete examples (Espeland & Indrehus 2003).

The supervisors believe that students cannot successfully apply knowledge in practice. Why is that and what is the supervisors role? Since learning in clinical settings today largely is the supervisors responsibility (c.f. Saarikoski 2002), it is important that they actually take that responsibility seriously, and also are properly resourced for the task. Beginners often have difficulty in recognizing patterns and connections between events and situations (Spouse 2001) why the supervisors must be able to help students to transfer theory into practice (Lambert & Glacken 2005). To have someone who can highlight the relevant theoretical knowledge while they are engaged in practical work provides structural support to the student's knowledge structure. According to Phillips & Duke (2001) questioning is an integral part of education as a strategy to help students apply their knowledge and develop critical thinking.

Based on responses during clinical studies, the student's perception was that supervisors took their theoretical and practical knowledge as adequate, given how far they advanced in their studies. However, when students rated their own perception of their theoretical and practical knowledge they considered it worse than what they assumed that the supervisors did. Students appeared to believe that supervisors assess their skills far better than they actually do. Students are more critical of their own knowledge than what they think the supervisors are. The
supervisors own assessment is clearly closer to students' assessment. The results seem illogical. One explanation may be that students have other demands on their competence than supervisors do. The findings of previous research (eg Saarikoski 2002, Sarajärvi 2002, Sandvik & Fagerström 2010) show that supervisors do not know the students learning objectives. If supervisors are not aware of the relevant learning objectives, how do they know on what level and according to which requirements they will assess? According to Landmark et al (2003) supervisors are uncertain about their responsibilities and demands they are expected to meet as a supervisor and they express a need for additional training to develop their clinical supervision and want elucidation of is expected from them. Another explanation could be that the supervisors did not discuss expected requirements and achievement with students, why students may not get a clear picture of their level of knowledge. Yet another reason for differences in the assessment of knowledge could be that students have an unrealistic idea of their competence. Students have, according to Baxter and Norman (2011), a tendency to overestimate their abilities. Response and communication between student and supervisor could be improved. Attention on deficiencies enables students’ competence development. (Kevin 2006, Kapborg & Fishbein 2002).

Methodological considerations
The presented study was a small scale cross-sectional study. The questionnaires used were developed since no tested and standardized instrument fitting the focus of the study was found. The validity and reliability was strengthened by pilot testing, but for ensuring the trustworthiness of the questionnaire further testing is needed. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in the study. The results show that the qualitative statements supported the quantitative assessments, which can be considered a strength.

A limitation of the study is that it only included one nursing school and one hospital and that no comparisons with other organization were done. The response rate was high in both groups, but due to the small samples the results must be interpreted with caution and no generalizations can be made.

Conclusion
This study shows, despite a more holistic approach, results in line with previous studies; significant differences in students and supervisors assessment of students’ clinical competence. As this study also investigates the students perceived perceptions of the supervisors’ assessment, a lack of supervisor-supervisee communication is revealed. The gap between students’ and
supervisors’ ratings are much smaller than the gap between supervisors' assessment and the assessment perceived by the students.

It seems that these Finnish supervisors give the students the impression that they are doing better than they actually are. Their actual position is not clearly expressed to the student. It is suggested that differences in competence assessment can be an issue of communication rather than students merely overestimating their competence.

The students need for feedback is not new and has been stated in earlier research (c.f. Sarajärvi 2002, Kevin 2006, Lőfmark et al 2006, Sandvik & Fagerström 2010), but it seems that this is a matter that needs to be highlighted more. The results of Zijlstra-Shaw et al (2005) shows that an assessment discussion based on students and supervisors assessment can be a useful aid in students’ professional development. Similarly, a discussion on clinical competence, used throughout the education, could raise the students’ awareness of their actual competence level and thereby make a progressive development of professional competence possible. This is a challenge for clinical nurse education and an area for further research.

**References**


The Experience of being a Preceptor for Nurse Students in Clinical Practice
A Cross Sectional Qualitative Study

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Abstract
This study examined the experience of being a clinical preceptor. A purposive sample of 15 nurses from Västerbotten, Sweden, and 15 nurses from Ostrobothnia, Finland, served as informants. The data were collected through interviews and analysed through qualitative content analysis. Three themes were examined: supervision; reflection and critical thinking; and the connection between theory and practice.

Variations were found to exist in how the supervision was carried out and how the preceptors planned and prepared themselves for it. The students’ learning outcomes were neither clear nor considered important to most of the preceptors. They maintained that as they had too little time for supervision, the students simply had to follow the preceptors in their daily work. Feedback was, however, considered important in supporting the students’ learning process, but reflection and critical thinking were not familiar concepts to most of the preceptors. Most of them also had difficulties in combining theory and practice. The preceptors maintained that the cooperation between the faculty and the preceptors should be enhanced in order to narrow the gap between theory and practice. However, there was a willingness to be a preceptor and the informants considered themselves to be important role models. It was found that the preceptors need pedagogical support from nursing educators and the organisation. Moreover, the nursing educators should prepare the students for their clinical practice and take part in the supervision. In the future, new e-based pedagogical methods could be used to enhance the contact between the student, the preceptor and the nursing educator.

Key words: preceptor, nursing education, clinical practice, experience, nursing student
**Introduction**

This paper focuses on the experiences of being a clinical preceptor involved in the supervision of nursing students during their first clinical practice. Although clinical supervision plays a vital role in nursing education, it is probably the least investigated, discussed and developed aspect of clinical education (Luojus, 2011). The clinical field has historically been an essential and irreplaceable resource in preparing nursing students for their profession. Nursing education has come under scrutiny in several countries by employers who claim that the education and preparation of graduates do not meet health-service demands. In order to address the education-service gap it is important to reform nursing education to ensure that the curriculum is relevant to health and social service needs and is sufficiently flexible to meet future service demands (Öhrling & Hallberg, 2001; ICN, 2006; Midgley, 2006; Saarikoski, Warne, Kaila & Leino-Kilpi, 2009b).

In the 1990s all nursing schools in Finland and Sweden were formed by merging college-level and higher vocational-level institutes into the higher education sector. The objective was to raise the level of professional vocational education and clarify its international comparability (Proposition 1992/93:1; Holopainen, Tossavainen & Kärnä-Lin, 2009). This has also been emphasised by the Bologna Process with the key aim of turning Europe into a competitive, knowledge-based economy, including the improvement of student and academic mobility across Europe accompanied with lifelong learning strategies. The nursing education in Finland and Sweden conforms to directives from the European Union regarding qualifications for nurses in general care (Council Directive 77/453, 1977 and 89/595, 1989). The shift towards academia implied new challenges for the nursing educators and the clinical preceptors. One outcome for the nursing educators was a reduction of their role as a clinical practitioner. Especially the hands-on teaching in clinical settings does no longer belong to nursing educators’ work. According to EU recommendations, the supervision during clinical practice should be undertaken by clinical expertise within social and health-care services (Saarikoski et al 2009b; Andrews, Brewer, Buchan, Denne, Hammond, Hardy, Jacobs, McKenzie and West, 2010). Furthermore, the preceptors have to balance between the needs of the nursing students and the need of patients in workplaces with a high staff turnover (Marrow, 2006; Holopainen et al, 2008; Hallin & Danielsson, 2009; Saarikoski, Warne, Kaila & Leino-Kilpi, 2009a).
Theoretical background

The concept of supervision has been defined as an umbrella term usually reflecting the different dimensions of the clinical preceptors’ role; teaching, assessing and supervising the nursing students during clinical practice (Lambert & Glacken, 2005; Andrews et al, 2010). The nursing degree programme integrates both theoretical and clinical studies and the nursing educators are responsible for the theoretical and clinical teaching (Heinonen, 2004, Mogensen, Thorell-Ekstrand & Löfmark, 2006). Learning in different clinical settings forms 50% of the programme according to the EU. As a result, it is important that good cooperation exists between the staff within health-care services and the faculty. The purpose of the clinical education is to introduce the students to the activities of health-care services and their value base, in order to enhance the ability of the students to reflect upon theory in different situations in practice (Löfmark, Carlsson & Wikblad, 2001; Landmark, Hansen, Bjones & Bohler, 2003; Lambert & Glacken, 2005).

Being a clinical preceptor is based on the professional knowledge and the nurses’ own experiences. Preceptors consider supervision to be time-consuming, challenging and an unrecognised responsibility. It is difficult to obtain a reduction of workload which means that the preceptors have to balance between patient care and the demands of the preceptorship leading to feelings of stress and inadequacy (Öhrling & Hallberg, 2001; Landmark et al. 2003; Carlson, Pilhammar & Wann-Hansson, 2010).

The rapid change of knowledge in a rapidly changing clinical environment calls for the education to no longer be directive but to facilitate change and lifelong learning. The cooperation between the faculty and working life is to be a goal-orientated process where the participants work together in order to learn through critical reflection. This is in order to narrow the theory-practice gap, thus emphasizing a student-oriented approach promoting self-direction and lifelong learning (Landmark et al, 2003; Lambert & Glacken, 2005). According to students, the preceptors really do play an important role in supporting the students’ professional development and the development of critical thinking (Papp, Markkanen & von Bonsdorff, 2003; Gallagher, 2007; Saarikoski et al, 2009a; Thorkildsen & Råholm, 2010). Spitzer and Perrenoud (2006) found a widening gap between theory and practice. One reason might be that what students learn in nursing programs bears limited significance to what they experience in practice. On the other hand, the limited academic background of the clinical preceptors leads to a low level of teaching in the practice settings. It seems that there has not been enough coordination and balance between faculty and practice-based teaching. Although preceptors consider the support from
colleagues to be important, they value and need feedback and support from nurse teachers to strengthen and develop their preceptor competence (Landmark et al. 2003; Hyrkäs & Shoemaker, 2007; Carlson et al. 2010). Earlier research has shown that a strong link and communication between the faculty and the clinical staff promotes a more effective integration of theory and practice (Lauvås & Handal, 1993; Öhrling & Hallberg, 2001; Midgley, 2006).

According to Rolloff (2010), the gap between evidence and practice can be wide. For example, in Pravikoff’s, Tanner’s and Pierce’s (2005) study only 46% of the respondents (nurses) knew the term ‘evidence-based practice’. Rolloff (2010) maintains that narrowing the gap will require new educational strategies in preparing nurses for evidence-based practice.

At present, there are no specific pedagogical requirements needed to be a clinical preceptor, despite the fact that there are vast variations in the field of practice. However, the recommendations state that the clinical preceptor should stimulate the personal and professional development of the student, i.e. teaching and assessing in accordance with the learning outcomes drawn from the curriculum (Heinonen, 2004; Mogensen et al, 2006).

The development of the student’s decision-making skills is central to effective clinical practice and therefore this should be emphasised during clinical education by encouraging students to reflect on their experiences. A student-centred approach using critical thinking and reflection can stimulate learning, the growth in professional identity and a more independent role (Price, 2004; Löfmark et al. 2009; Ness, Duffy, McCallum & Price, 2010).

This article reports on the study results from the experience of being a clinical preceptor. The study is part of an international project examining the quality of clinical practice in nursing education.

**Methodology**

**Informants**

A purposive sample of 30 nurses, 15 from the region of Västerbotten, Sweden, and 15 from the region of Ostrobothnia, Finland, who had been supervising the first year’s nursing students during their first practice placements in elderly care, on internal and surgical wards. Permission to conduct and record the interviews was obtained from the hospitals and community-based units as well as from each participant. According to Finnish and Swedish research systems, ethical approval is not required if there are no patients or relatives involved. The sample
consisted of 27 female and three male preceptors of whom 21 were registered nurses and nine practical nurses. Their age varied from 24-60 years and their work experience was from one to 40 years.

**Data collection**
The data were collected through narrative interviews. All interviews were carried out between September and November 2009. A theme guide was subsequently constructed to provide structure to the interviews. The following themes were in focus: supervision, reflection and critical thinking and the connection between theory and practice. A narrative approach was emphasised during the interviews by promoting a dialogue. Furthermore, the interviews lasted between 60-90 minutes, and were taped and transcribed verbatim. All data have been stored and managed, and will be disposed of in compliance with good practice (Burns & Grove, 2005).

**Data analysis**
The data were analysed through qualitative content analysis. The process included open coding, creating categories and abstraction. The reason for this was to subsequently be able to make sense of the data as recommended by Graneheim and Lundman (2004). The data were then analysed by three experienced researchers. During the first phase the data were coded separately in both countries, followed by a second phase when categories were created. The data were continuously analysed until the researchers reached an agreement about the categories and abstractions. In reporting the study results, quotations from the original data are used to illustrate the thoughts or feelings of the persons quoted.

**Results**
The results constitute five main categories: “Being a preceptor is challenging but also a heavy duty to carry out”; “Learning by doing instead of being guided by learning outcomes”; “Time to precept and a pedagogical framework for supervision is missing”; “Reflection and critical thinking – important but not planned activities”; “The gap between theory and practice is challenging to bridge”.

**Being a preceptor is challenging but also a heavy duty to carry out**
There were variations in how the preceptors prepared before the nursing students arrived to the ward, and there was no clear structure concerning how supervision should be carried out. Although discussing with a colleague or with the students about their learning outcomes was one form of preparation, the most common was that the preceptor didn’t prepare in any particular way because of a lack of time or because they didn’t consider it to be important. The students
usually set their schedule according to the preceptors’ working schedule, and while some of the preceptors felt that they were accessible to the students during the student practice, others didn’t agree.

Well, I don’t know if I actually have time to prepare myself in any way, there is always the possibility to ask the other preceptors and so on, but often it is just that you don’t have time because there is always so much on the ward or so on … you do it when you meet the student then you kind of do it. (Swe1)

However, some preceptors thought it was important to be well-prepared before the students’ arrival.

Well, I think the first important thing is to be in touch by phone, then I get a feeling about a student’s needs and I give general information… and I prepare for this particular student. (Fin10)

One upcoming issue was the fact that the preceptors did not know enough about the students’ theoretical studies prior to the practice and what they could expect them to know. Although many approximately knew the kind of theoretical knowledge the students were supposed to have when coming to their first practice placement, the preceptors usually discussed with the students to know their level of competence. Furthermore, most of the preceptors didn’t have any pedagogic education, although they thought it would be beneficial to have some education to support them in the supervision. Although being a preceptor was seen as being important and challenging, it was also regarded as a heavy duty to carry out alongside caring for patients. The fundamental idea was the willingness to do one’s best although there was a feeling of inadequacy among many of the preceptors due to a lack of time.

**Learning by doing instead of being guided by learning outcomes**

The students’ learning outcomes were neither clear nor considered important to most of the preceptors. Occasionally the students could be many days or even weeks on the ward before discussing their learning outcomes with the preceptor. Some preceptors even claimed that they didn’t discuss the learning outcomes at any time during the practice period.

They usually show me (learning outcomes) but it’s more when they have been here half of the time or towards the end. It is not the first things I am asking for. (Fin12)
The learning outcomes were not considered to be important since the students followed the preceptors during their work and were supposed to take part in the work on the ward even though they were not considered to be a staff member.

No they follow me all the time ... I want her (the student) to be close to me, at least I try to make sure that she is round about, but there are those who are so efficient that they go by themselves... (Swe15)

Since the learning outcomes were not guiding the learning process they were not discussed with the preceptor as a rule.

I cannot say that we discussed it (learning outcomes) together, but when she showed it to me I took it as a recipe for what I should show her as a preceptor. (Fin14)

The learning outcomes were often seen as vague and impossible to achieve during the practice.

Yes, there are those (students) who come with written and very specific goals that we are not able to fulfil, ...many times they are very ambitious, and then you must explain to them that we don’t do these things, we cannot use patients as an experiment. (Fin1)

There were preceptors, although few, who considered the learning outcomes as vital for the students’ learning process. They discussed the learning outcomes with the student and they served as a guide for the students’ learning process during clinical practice.

Yes, I am the kind of preceptor who most often wants their written plan as fast as possible. It is disturbing for me and my teaching if I don’t know from the first day what is their main purpose with this ... I want to know quite quickly, so I know what to have in store and make sure that there is time for them to be part of what they have as their goals. (Fin6)

The preceptors hardly ever discussed what was expected of the students during their work placement education in terms of the culture of the ward or professional identity. However, the majority of the preceptors thought that supervision and being a preceptor was important for the student’s learning process and that it was important that the preceptor was a positive role model who could also learn from the students.
My aim... is to be a questioning preceptor... to make the students think by themselves... I have my way of doing things... and I want the student to learn how to do things right but also to find their own way of acting... helping to develop their thinking ... (Swe6)

There was a consensus among the preceptors about the importance and necessity of feedback. The feedback was normally given alongside the day during work and it was seen as an important factor in the learning process. A systematic planned session where the student got feedback from their preceptor was not common. The preceptors considered that it was easier to give positive than negative feedback to the students.

**Time to precept and a pedagogical framework for supervision is missing**

The preceptors were asked how they would like to develop the supervision. A regular contact with the faculty was seen as important, by phone or preferably face to face. The expectations concerning the faculty were that the theoretical education should be developed and that the nursing educators would play a more active role in the supervision than today. The nursing educators usually participated at the final assessment and sometimes during the middle assessment. However, according to the preceptors, this was not sufficient. Although colleagues were regarded as a source of support by some of the preceptors, others didn’t feel any need for support. A broad consensus was the experience of not having enough time for the students, which resulted in facing a conflict between the duty of taking care of the patients and the needs of the students.

Often I think it’s nice to have someone with you, there is so much to tell and many students are so nice and accomplished and they want to learn and so on. What makes it difficult is if there is much work on the ward; then it might be a little more stressful, so it is… (Swe13)

Many preceptors wished that the planning and organisation of the supervision would be better arranged, for instance that the organisations could provide for a suitable place where the student and the preceptor could meet. Some of the preceptors were unable to express any visions about how to develop supervision. “No, so to say I teach the things I can teach here, anything else I cannot do in principle” (Fin5). The preceptors felt that they tried in their best way to teach the students the hands-on work on the ward. The students followed them in their work and there was no more to it.
Reflection and critical thinking – important but not planned activities

The majority of the preceptors were unfamiliar with the concept of reflection and found it very difficult to define. During the conversation many of the preceptors realised that they had actually been reflecting with the student even though there were wide varieties considering how the reflection was carried out.

It (reflection) is important. You cannot just give information to a human being, you must also be able to stop and take in the information. Therefore it’s very important, the reflections, to recognise the knowledge, to question the knowledge learnt, in other words you can be critical and wonder if this is really right. I think about the student’s role … I think it’s good that the students question and if there isn’t space for reflection then there is no time either for critical thinking. (Fin10)

The students’ willingness to reflect and the students’ activity determined how often the preceptors reflected. Reflection concerned care matters and sometimes theoretical issues. Reflection was not a planned activity in the supervision process. Some preceptors experienced it as being an important part in developing the students’ way of thinking and a way of discussing how things could be carried out in different ways. In other words, it was a way of integrating theory and practice, discussing ways of acting in different situations and what implications and outcomes one’s actions might have.

The concept of critical thinking was not commonly used in the preceptors’ vocabulary although many preceptors could refer to situations where students had asked about different treatments or questioned the environment or something else.

Well, I don’t know if it’s something… if I kind of ask about things or something … it happens now and then that they (students) wonder why we do this or that. There was one thing about the environment, it was quite unpleasant and one student thought about it considering that there are seriously ill people who are staying a long time on the ward. That’s good. It’s easy to become blind... I am positive about it and think that it’s good that they (students) question things. (Swe1)

The students questioning was considered as being positive by many preceptors because, as they said, they get “blind” towards certain things after working a long time on the same ward. Subsequently, they start to think about these matters and it enabled shared learning.
The gap between theory and practice is challenging to bridge

The relationship between theory and practice was quite difficult for the preceptors to explain. Many preceptors said that it was difficult to separate theory and practice because they were so closely entwined. Therefore it was difficult to explain how they dealt with it together with the students.

As I told you I have been like this ... in theory I cannot do almost anything but I am better when it comes to practical things... you have it rooted, much is routine so you don’t really think about it. (Fin12)

Many of the preceptors had difficulties to see the connection between theory and practice and they didn’t emphasize it. Only a few had discussed the connection between nursing theory, other theories and caring. Ethical questions mostly concerned professional secrecy since most preceptors felt uncertain about questions concerning legislation. The preceptors occasionally discussed how they made decisions related to caring, and since evidence-based practice was an unknown concept to most of the preceptors, it wasn’t emphasized.

Discussion

This study shows that there is a conflict between what the preceptors would like to do and what they actually can do because of a constant lack of time, since supervision is competing with the nurses’ duty to take care of patients (Landmark et al, 2003; Hallin and Danielson, 2009; Carlson et al. 2010). This may conclude to task-orientated learning, resulting in a risk of missing many learning opportunities (Midgley 2006; Luojus, 2011). Practical and theoretical learning cannot be disentangled: in a clinical learning environment practice and theory are in a state of dynamic tension that promotes personal and professional development, and cooperation between faculty and clinical setting is needed (Lambert and Glacken, 2006; McNamara, 2007). The importance of a good relationship and communication between the preceptor and the nursing educator was also identified by Saarikoski et al. (2009b). Most of the preceptors had difficulties in connecting theory and practice. Evidence-based practice was an unknown concept to most of the preceptors, as was also found by Pravikoff et al. (2005). The cooperation between the faculty and the preceptors should be enhanced (Hallin & Danielsson, 2009) in order to narrow the gap between theory and practice, and according to Rolloff (2010), new educational strategies are required in preparing nurses for evidence-based practice. Stone and Rowles (2007) described an educational intervention in which student nurses searched for research evidence concerning some clinical questions on their practice placement units. This assignment supported learning of
both the students and the nurses. Furthermore, the preceptors need support from the nursing educators in how to apply the learning outcomes to the learning process of the student. The organizations don’t seem to recognise supervision as being a pedagogical duty. Therefore the nursing students are taught how to do things while following their preceptors, indicating that there are still the remains of an apprenticeship system in existence (Borneuf and Haigh, 2010).

**Conclusions**

This study is part of an international study where we have presented the results from 30 interviews. The results are built on a broad range of material representing a wide scale of preceptors who had been supervising nursing students during their first clinical practice. In order to ensure trustworthiness (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004), an effort has been made to describe the analysis of the data and the results as clearly as possible. Also quotations from the original data are presented. The context of the study has been described so that the readers can evaluate the transferability of the findings.

On the basis of our findings the main conclusions are as follows. New educational strategies and alternative possibilities for organising clinical teaching are required in preparing nurses for evidence-based practice. The preceptorship should be recognised by all stakeholders and efforts should be made to plan the nurses’ clinical work so that there is enough time allocated for supervision. Preceptors need further education and pedagogical support in order to make supervision a planned activity creating learning opportunities guided by the student’s learning outcomes. New e-based pedagogical methods could be used to enhance the contact between the student, the preceptor and the nursing educator. The nurse educator should actively take part in the clinical education in order to narrow the gap between theory and practice by using more student-centred methods promoting reflection and critical thinking. Development of the quality of clinical supervision means a more holistic view of the student’s learning - not only skills, but of becoming a qualified practitioner.

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