

## CHAPTER 8

# Ethical and Care-Oriented, but Still Psychological and ‘At Risk’

## Teachers’ Constructions of Young People’s Transition from School to Society

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During the last decades, the phenomenon of therapeutic education has been launched internationally. This trend is not only part of a general stress on health and well-being as a counterweight to increasing numbers of young people’s ill health. It also addresses *transitional* trajectories of welfare, addressing the relationship between life in school and life in society for young people to relate to or occupy as part of their societal membership and training for ‘proper’ citizenship (cf. Lundahl & Olofsson, 2014; see also Chapter 7). In this chapter, the role of teachers in relation to this trend is highlighted. More precisely, the main question raised is: what descriptions of young people and their alleged transition from life in school to life in society stand out in compulsory teachers’ talk about their therapeutic teaching? We take our point of departure in a previously carried out empirical study in the Swedish context, where teachers who are assigned to teach therapeutic education programmes are interviewed about their teaching

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practice and their professional role in it. Through the descriptions, trajectories of young people's transitions from school to society are scrutinized. Taking on these descriptions, and on the notion that therapeutic education relies heavily on psychological trajectories of young people's well-being, young people's transitions emerge through a general positioning of being incapable to face their future outside of school and thereby risking not attaining social, mental and emotional well-being but instead falling into psychological illness in a 'society at risk', if not being prepared for a life in society through therapeutic teaching. However, the teachers not only express their role as health promoting instructors in psychological terms. They also express other enterprises and reflections that connect to other discourses than the psychological one: discourses that are established within the professional context of therapeutic education itself, and thereby not as sensitive to the notion of 'children of today' and their alleged lack of emotional and mental well-being. In these additional, and at the same time traditional lines of descriptions of the teachers' therapeutic teaching, the students come into being as more capable and in need of normative guidance rather than of emotional care. In the ethical discourse of care they also, we argue, come into being in more reciprocal senses than in the other discourses.

The emerging differences in the teachers' descriptions are linked with different approaches to a therapeutic culture (Furedi, 2009; Wright, 2011). This culture can be related to an international educational trend marked out by therapy and the concept of well-being, and also to certain notions of welfare (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2009; Brunila, 2014; Petersen & Millei, 2016). From a regional perspective, we may speak about a therapeutic Nordic welfare state that establishes itself and its citizens as the object of allegiance. As a consequence, an altered cultural depiction of young people emerges where the citizens of the therapeutic state are to be empowered, emancipated, esteemed, affirmed and actualized through education in specific *ways* and with specific *objectives*. This can be seen in light of a more widespread neo-liberal educational turn, where children and young people are to learn how to work upon themselves in order to become autonomous and 'free' to choose their own destiny, often in terms of employability and self-realization through work and career (Irisdotter Aldenmyr, Jepson Wigg & Olson, 2012; Olson et al., 2017).

The strengthened impact of so-called psy-discourses (e.g. psychology, psychiatry, psychoanalysis) can be seen as closely allied with this educational (and therapeutic) empowerment of children and young people. Psy-discourses provide a grid of intelligibility for certain identifiable and controllable propensities of the young, such as motivation, intelligence and attitudes. It is further elucidated how political claims are being made on the very basis of the experienced and inherent vulnerability of youth. These claims tend to be coupled with different kinds of therapeutic (often psy-oriented) solutions, aiming at empowering them or helping them cope.

Taking on this critical perspective on therapeutic education, it could be argued that the current demand for youth recognition in education not only takes on a specific psychological form but is also framed within a therapeutic discourse

of assumed vulnerability and fragility (cf. Harwood & Allan, 2014; see also Chapter 7). This research points to the need for schools to include programmes with concrete solutions for mental health interventions, in order to prevent and counteract mental illness among young people in school. The arguments—from research and from policy—are generally connected with suggestions for teaching practices that entail large-scale measurements and positive (developmental) psychology (cf. Bywater & Sharple, 2012; House & Loewenthal, 2009). Other arguments refer to the widespread notion of a crisis of well-being among young people that defines them as not only vulnerable but also incapable. Nonetheless, they tend to be made responsible for their own future and life in society (cf. McLaughlin, 2012; Brunila et al., 2016; Brunila & Rossi, 2017). What therapeutic education needs, according to this critical understanding of therapeutic education, is not more intervention but rather more critical reflection on the intervention programmes that are in use in many schools in Western society (see also Gillies, 2011; Myers, 2012; Ecclestone & Brunila, 2015).

In this tension-filled educational research landscape, where therapeutic intervention in school is seen as on the one hand necessary and on the other hand part of a 'responsibilization' of an allegedly vulnerable youth, a dialogue has been initiated between these two strands (see also Ecclestone et al., 2010; Ecclestone, 2012). This chapter can be seen in light of this approach as it stresses the need to map and discuss the very conditions through which different notions of the therapeutic culture are being played out in education (see also Irisdotter Aldenmyr & Olson, 2016). Here, its implications and effects for young people's future are in question, which emerge in terms of *transitional conditions* which are, according to teachers, made possible for them to occupy.

### Psychological intervention in education—reinforced by what?

During 2010–2012, a group of researchers, including one of the authors, carried out interviews with 17 school principals and municipal officials who held key positions in the introducing of therapeutic intervention programmes in youth education in six different municipalities in Sweden. In these interviews, a pattern was identified in the descriptions, which can be described as 'a declaration of misery', which in turn seemed to be the main motive for introducing various types of intervention programmes. As an example, one principal refers to general notions about young people of today. She talks about official figures of mental illness, drug abuse and criminality among young people. These are, according to her, the 'origin problem', but the programme she uses (Social and Emotional Training) has proved to be helpful for social relations as well. Another crucial factor in this principal's story is the problematic parent generation, who cannot provide a safe social environment for their children. Owing to these factors, she claims children today are 'a bit lost'; they are egocentric and 'more fragile' than before.

The discursive patterns that emerged in the material from the interviews with the principals and municipal officials may be understood as part of a

widespread discourse about a well-being crisis that urges Swedish schools to take therapeutic action (Gunnarsson et al., 2013). The conviction that children are at risk and in need of therapeutic support seems to underpin the development of intervention programmes to promote well-being among schoolchildren. The understanding of this argumentation as part of the wider therapeutic trend in Swedish society is supported by Dahlstedt, Fejes and Schönning's (2011) Foucauldian analysis:

The image of worsening mental health among youth constitutes parts of a general trend in society whereby individuals are being increasingly and intensely encouraged to work on themselves, to find their 'real selves' and to become more aware of themselves, their limitations and abilities, to improve their self-confidence, and to learn to manage their emotions. (Dahlstedt, Fejes & Schönning, 2011, p. 402)

The quotation addresses the ways in which therapeutic exercises such as confession or 'telling about oneself' are part of current educational practices that construct or shape subjectivities desirable in the present context (see also Nielsen, Dalgaard & Senger, 2010; McCuaig, 2012; Brunila, 2011, 2012; Tamboukou, 2003). In a therapy culture, this is partly done by means of counselling, sharing and mentoring. The act of counselling may be 'used to bring the insides of people's heads into the domain of power/knowledge' (Fairclough, 1992, p. 59).

From this discourse-analytical perspective, therapeutic action raises questions like: what makes it possible and relevant to talk about mental illness, psychodiscourse, crisis, a toxic childhood and the need for educational intervention in our time and in our context? These are crucial questions that help to identify notions that otherwise might remain implicit as self-evident. However, raising these important and relevant questions may not cover all aspects of the rise in psychological interventions in youth education. If critical research merely takes as its point of departure the assumption that *all* activities of psychological intervention are underpinned by the same rationales, value systems or discursive patterns, there is a risk of neglecting important nuances and aspects, not least those that depend on what individual teachers rely and reflect upon.

Throughout history, the task of schools to foster and attend to moral development has been characterized by different individually held teaching aims and working methods, mirroring the current moral and social norms in society. Joakim Landahl's analysis (2006) shows how chastisement, punishment and grades for behaviour and order were used in the first half of the 1900s in the Swedish context, while the fostering dimension of teachers' work today is dominated by working on the strengthening of social relations and the development of self-esteem. David Hansen (2007) talks about today's intellectual and moral attention to students being present in every teacher–student meeting. In this interpretation, the fostering dimension is an inevitable quality in every educational event. Understanding the fostering tasks or dimensions as integrated in

all teachers' work and part of a long-term teacher tradition of pastoral care may from this perspective make it less significant to refer to psychological intervention one-sidedly as an answer to an urgent need for therapeutic attendance among the young.

Of interest is whether there are *alternatives* to the discourse of psychological well-being and educational intervention efforts in the context of teachers' traditional task of giving pastoral care and promoting self-development within the framework of established school subjects (cf. Pett, 2012; Cigman, 2012). Is there a possibility that this kind of reasoning and qualities are present when teachers interpret and perform the intervention programmes? And, if so, what discourses of youth transition from school to society can be scrutinized in these and other descriptions of the teachers' therapeutic teaching? Cigman (2012) continues: 'Good teaching *provokes* and *elicits* children's emotional responses; it cultivates them in distinctively Aristotelian ways' (p. 456). This reasoning brings to the fore a set of questions that puts education and teachers in the spotlight as powerful stakeholders that constitute youth. Regardless of what intervention programmes of psychological rationales are in use, it is the teachers, together with their students, who in everyday life determine what happens in the classroom. The constitutive voices and interpretations of the teachers are not, we argue, sufficiently well illuminated in either the debate on therapeutic education or its impact on the implications for young people's future. Taking this argument forward, we put questions to the teachers on what they see themselves to be part of when carrying out various types of therapeutic education, and how their points of view relate to the fostering task of the teachers and of (therapeutic) education itself.

### **Life competence education and well-being intervention—the Swedish context**

In Sweden, therapeutic intervention of various types has been labelled *livskunskap*: life competence education (LCE).<sup>1</sup> LCE is a phenomenon that has developed in Swedish compulsory schools over the last two decades. The character of this phenomenon is not easy to grasp, since the actual activities behind similar labels may differ. In most cases, however, manual-based programmes, with exercises for students and teacher manuals, are used. Most programmes focus on socio-emotional training, empathy training and group exercises in order to strengthen personal development, self-esteem, self-reflection and self-knowledge (cf. Löf, 2011; Irisdotter Aldenmyr, 2012). Despite some attempts during the nineties and the beginning of the 2000s by some political parties to make LCE a compulsory school subject, it still has no official syllabus (Löf, 2011). However, interest groups in the field, both researchers and political lobbyists, are still active in trying to promote making LCE a compulsory subject (cf. Sevéus & Terjestam, 2011).

In some Swedish municipalities, the decision to conduct LCE on a weekly basis has been made by municipal officials, although most schools conducting these activities have done so as part of local initiatives (cf. von Brömssen, 2013). There are several working programmes or manuals available, among which three are represented in this chapter and presented below. There are a number of similar activities in other countries, even if they are not all connected to a clear psychological orientation but sometimes to more traditionally established school subjects, such as religious education or physical education.

### Purpose of the chapter

The present chapter aims to analyse descriptions of Swedish teachers conducting the teaching and exercises of LCE, in order to identify notions of young people's futures in these descriptions. We deal with this aim through the following questions:

- What lines of arguments and logics stand out as central in teacher descriptions of LCE teaching in Swedish compulsory youth education?
- What discourses of young people's (needs in the) transition from school to life in society stand out in these descriptions?

A further question for discussion in the chapter is the extent to which the LCE teachers seem to have adopted the rationale of a well-being crisis, and, if so, with what kinds of expressed logics or regularities they identify.

### Method and analytical grids

The material in the present study consists of interviews with 10 teachers in youth education in Sweden (ages from 10 to 16). We have used the phenomenon of LCE as a platform and point of departure when interviewing the teachers about their experiences of therapeutic intervention in education.

The 10 teachers work at five different schools in four different municipalities in Sweden. All teachers were interviewed for about an hour each and the main topics were possibilities, hazards and experiences from working with LCE. In relation to these topics, reflections on being a teacher, teacher responsibilities and the implementation of new educational tasks and working materials were raised. Today's students and reflections on contemporary society were also brought to the fore by some of the informants.

Among these 10 teachers, four different main approaches to working methods for LCE are represented. They are:

- *SET* (Social and Emotional Training). A Swedish programme developed with inspiration from the American programme SEAL. This programme

aims to increase children's and young people's mental well-being as a part of the efforts to prevent mental illness, drug abuse, criminality and other social problems. The programme includes five basic elements: self-awareness, managing feelings, empathy, motivation and social skills. These five basic elements are practised regularly once or twice a week, with increasing concentration over the years (Irisdotter Aldenmyr, 2012). This programme is used by the teachers Ava, Bill, Dolly and Eric.

- *Dare to Be*. A work manual developed by a working group inspired by a therapist in psychosynthesis (cf. Söderberg, 2006). This programme has clear connections to both SET (see above) and the communication theory of non-violent communication. The exercises in the work manual are structured around the four key concepts of safety, emotions, roles and needs. Activities from this work manual took place in the students' schedule every week (Irisdotter Aldenmyr & Grønlien Zetterqvist, 2013). This working manual is used by the teachers Frederic, Gary and Harriet.
- *The Dream of the Good*. A mindfulness-oriented programme developed by a psychologist and used systematically several times a week to raise the students' mental well-being, sense of harmony and concentration (cf. Terjestam, 2010). This concept includes the four activities of yoga, stillness (12 minutes of meditation while listening to a CD with a female voice talking about a walk in the mountains), life conversations (conversations in smaller groups around a certain topic presented by the teacher) and massage (where the students give each other back massage under the instructions of a teacher), all of which took place in the students' schedule every week (Grønlien Zetterqvist, 2014). This programme is used by the teachers Iris and Jill.
- *A collection of various work materials*. These work materials consist of societal issues for discussion, parts of TV programmes or movies which raise moral or relational questions, and work sheets collected from various materials where relations to others, self-knowledge and moral dilemmas or controversial issues are in focus. Caleb is the only teacher interviewed who chooses to work with his own collection of work materials within LCE.

It is important to stress that we have no intention to compare in what way the various descriptions of each teacher are consistent with other things they say. Contradictions and paradoxes are common in long interviews, and our aim in the present study is mainly to highlight the positions and interpretations *available* to the teachers, not to categorize them individually into distinctive types. Put briefly, we take our point of departure in the notion that the LCE teachers descriptions are part of larger discourses about therapeutic education, and that these discourses contribute to constructing conditions of possibility for young people's futures, here depicted in terms of their transition processes from life in school to life in society.

Our approach to the concept of 'discourse' includes what is said through speech or written text, but it is more than this. A discourse denotes not only the signs of

language but the whole formation of a group of statements, which is not limited to what is being said (Foucault, 1972). In relation to the teachers' constructions of youth transitional spaces from school to society through their descriptions of LCE, discourses are seen as being constituted *through* these statements, which emerge as possibilities at a particular time and location. In addition, these statements are considered as entities that allow for the creation of specific and repeatable relations to objects, to subjects and to other statements.

### Teachers on therapeutic education—three discourses

The teacher interviews include a wide range of expressions of descriptions and purposes for therapeutic teaching, which are provided and analysed below. The phenomenon of therapeutic education comes from notions of positive psychology and from a widespread apprehension of a fragile childhood, a dangerous society and a vulnerable youth generation. These notions are reinforced by a psychologically oriented discourse of youth transition, which is also—as presented below—strong among the Swedish LCE teachers' descriptions (cf. Lundahl & Olofsson, 2014). However, there are also other discourses identified through the teacher descriptions of their teaching practice of LCE that stand out as being more related to the professional role of the teacher; a traditional role model discourse, in which the teacher emerges as a moral authority; and an ethical discourse of care in which the teacher emerges as a 'fellow' human being with ethical responsiveness towards the student.

#### *A psychological discourse of well-being and the threats of contemporary society*

Six of the 10 teachers express lines of arguments and purposes of LCE that relate to contemporary notions of the need for therapeutic intervention. Some of these teachers draw attention to the surrounding society and resources schools need to deal with. These meta-reflections, especially those formulated by Bill, are in line with the deconstruction of the notions of children at risk in terms of vulnerability and victimhood (cf. Löf, 2011; Brunila & Rossi, 2017).

Bill takes as his point of departure today's society; without a further definition of what kind of society he refers to, he suggests that schools ought to be understood as something 'wider ... it seems reasonable in today's society. ... I'm sure it is cheaper too' (B7). By referring to supposed economic gains, Bill uses a kind of market-oriented logic that expresses a suggested correlation between people's mental health and the prosperity of the country (cf. Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2009).

Iris formulates a similar concern when she talks about the stressful world that children today are growing up in. She feels that the pressure is increasing and there is no time to reflect and take it easy.

These reflections on today's society all end up in the increased need for therapeutic or fostering input from teachers. LCE is put forward by both Bill and Iris as something helpful and potentially fruitful in relation to the needs and circumstances of today. Eric formulates an explanation in which he tries to place LCE as a phenomenon in a larger context. While doing so, he recognizes the discourses of a society where children are put at risk, although he dismisses LCE as a solution.

I think one tries to find simple solutions to a societal problem. We have problems in school with order and discipline, with bullying. ... And ... well, you are supposed to do something. The politicians want to show how good they are. So they introduce a new subject. ... 'Look how good we are, we have Life Competence Education! Now, no one can say that we aren't doing anything to prevent bullying' ... and that is why they don't dare to evaluate this because I think it would be much criticized.

Harriet wants to promote what she defines as 'human development' and Frederic also formulates 'the personal development of the student' as a goal. In addition to this, Frederic mentions the importance of 'knowing oneself and others' in order to reach well-being. A similar approach is expressed by Iris, who wants her students to 'find themselves' in order to feel good. Jill sees LCE as an opportunity to teach the student how to relax and unwind. These types of aim relate in a wide sense to the contemporary idea of the importance of promoting emotional as well as mental well-being. Seeing children and young people as being in an emotionally risky situation is especially elaborated in relation to the students' situation at school. Achieving academically is important, and, since the pressure of education is high, school ought not just to help students to reach their potential academically but also to compensate for the emotional and mental harm this may cause.

Ava expresses the importance of getting to know yourself, but her underlying motive is 'to be able to learn'. This connection between well-being and school results is also formulated by Caleb, who says that a better working atmosphere is an important result of LCE. Bill also identifies academic goals as an underlying motive for LCE when he says that 'seeing the students also shows that I have expectations of them'. An ambition to promote well-being is connected here to a discourse of measurable achievement and competition.

LCE as a therapeutically oriented activity with desirable academic side effects is further developed by Ava. She describes LCE as a platform for her as a teacher to encourage pupils, to give them feedback and to motivate them to study. Iris also mentions LCE as an opportunity to 'get information that helps the teacher to evaluate and grade the achievements of the student'. This statement, and the other descriptions that express the values of LCE in terms of positive side effects, can be criticized as a way of manipulating and controlling students in the name of well-being (cf. Gillies, 2011).

Altogether, the types of statements gathered here confirm a picture of the teachers taking therapeutic responsibility for their students. This responsibility is connected to the well-being of the students in a general sense, but mainly seems to be an expression of the school *compensating* for the competitive, result-oriented context of an educational market (cf. Brunila, 2012, 2014). The competitive school agenda needs to be combined with a therapeutic, caring discourse in order to be successful and acceptable on the market (cf. McCuaig, 2012; Brunila et al., 2016).

A common line of thought within a therapeutic rationale is that someone (the teacher) leads someone else (the student) towards a better (more secure) state of mind by using the tools of therapeutic intervention. Knowledge about psychology as well as effective strategies are crucial in this therapeutic line of thought. These notions are underpinned by a discourse of psychological research results and the descriptions formulated within the intervention programmes and manuals. And they point towards a widespread well-being crisis among the young (cf. Kimber, 2009; House & Loewenthal, 2009).

#### *A moral role model discourse*

LCE is also described by the teachers as a fostering project in a more traditional and moral sense; the adult and professional person has something to teach the younger person and may figure as a role model in ways of behaving and following rules and norms. This discourse, as the therapeutic, psychological discourse of risk above, is built on hierarchal relations between teachers and students. However, it does not refer to a crisis of well-being or special therapeutic needs (cf. Irisdotter Aldenmyr, 2006; Hargreaves, 1995) and is practised by five of the 10 teachers.

Caleb talks about a society where children are spoiled by their parents, less disciplined and stressed by their use of computers, computer games and television. All these kinds of input, together with a generation of inadequate parents, make children feel unbalanced. Caleb is concerned about the attitudes and language use of today's children. These concerns involve notions of a childhood in crisis, although Caleb's concerns are not mainly about the emotional well-being of the students but about their behaviour and norms. He expresses the aim to 'learn how to treat each other right'. Harriet is more specific when she states that LCE is an opportunity to 'prevent racial and homophobic tendencies'.

Jill describes LCE as an opportunity for students to 'learn what it is to be a person, and to know what you stand for'. She also states that the activities in LCE are about 'concrete things that we don't have room for within the other subjects' and she sums it up by using the phrase 'all-round education'. The normative, moral fostering aspects of LCE emerge when Jill claims that it is about 'learning how to treat others'. Frederic expresses a similar line of thought as Jill when he suggests that LCE is about 'knowledge about things that the subjects

do not cover, like for example the ethics of the web.' These knowledge-based acts of fostering are also present in the words expressed by Gary when he states that LCE is about 'meeting the opinions of others.' His own role as a teacher is 'to be a role model, to take a stand.' In these expressions, LCE is likened to other subjects, although it handles issues that are not covered by the established school subjects. As in any other subject, the focus is on a particular content and not on the individual's emotional state. Treating LCE as an additional subject rather than as an approach or dimension on its own may be in line with a traditional moral education based on discipline and order (cf. Landahl, 2006) or connected to a line of thought that, as mentioned above, is provoked and elicited through children's emotional responses in moral (Aristotelian) ways (Cigman, 2012, p. 456).

Describing the practice of LCE in these rather traditional ways, making it less notable when it is likened to other subjects, could be one way of resisting ideas of a crisis of well-being among young students, or the dominance of therapeutic features, not only in school but also in contemporary society. The teachers avoid taking on the role of therapists when they describe their use of psychological intervention programmes as working with just another subject content. Instead, they extend their role as teachers in certain subjects and include a moral fostering aspect that is well anchored in a traditional school-teacher norm-oriented role.

### *An ethical discourse of care*

Another discourse emerges where the teachers emphasize their responsibility to guide, correct or intervene with the personal and emotional aspects of their students' lives: a frame of reference in which the responsibility of caring resonates with an ethical value base rather than a psychological or moral one. This discourse reveals one particular quality that distinguishes it from both the discourse of contemporary therapeutic needs underpinned by psychological features and a more traditional role model discourse. This comes to the fore in that the project of LCE is *not* described in hierarchal terms, where someone leads someone else towards a certain emotional state or a proper way of behaving, but in terms of mutuality and humility as valuable ethical qualities in human encounters that the school offers space for.

Three of the teachers formulated the characteristics of LCE in ways that to some extent could be interpreted as part of a discourse of psychological needs, as in the above. However, one crucial difference is that, in rather prominent ways, the teachers *include* themselves as equal fellow human beings in the caring project. They are participants without being in a clearly hierarchal position towards the students. In that sense, these descriptions produce qualities other than the other two discourses. A quality of caring seems to relate to an overall act of *compassion* rather than attending to the urgent and contemporary

therapeutic need of students in a competitive school environment, or to ‘moral awakening’ through teacher efforts.

Iris’s descriptions were included in a therapeutically oriented interpretation above. However, the scale is a sloping one, and some of her descriptions may also be understood as holistic approaches of caring both for her students and for herself. She states that LCE provides space to ‘take care of the complexity of being a human being, and to do so in a professional way’. Iris makes connections between her meta-reflection on what it is to be a teacher and her activities during LCE:

... it brings us back to the question why we became teachers. Did I become a teacher in order to say ‘grammar is done, what have you learnt?, let’s have a test, check’, or do you want something more? If you want something more, the strict squares [provided by school as an institution] will limit you. Because you cannot entirely grasp or tell what happens in the classroom during Life Conversation [an activity included in LCE]. ... To be a human being is so much more complex than school with its squares. ... If we [teachers] cannot handle it without being therapists, what are we then?

Iris’s final formulations may imply that teachers ought to handle the complexity of life in order to legitimize their role as teachers. It also seems important to Iris that this is not done by acting as a therapist. Iris seems to mark out the territory for teachers, to deal with the existential dimensions of life together with students but without stepping into another profession, the profession of a therapist. To care is part of being a professional teacher.

Ava also expresses meta-reflections that seem to connect to a genuine will to develop and improve school as an institution. The underlying aim seems to be to increase school’s readiness to care for students, when it comes to both relational and academic matters. Ava says that teachers need to find new ways of looking at students ‘since my way of looking at and thinking about students, my expectations affect them’.

Ava explains how LCE may be used as an extra opportunity to develop a good approach towards her students. She also sees LCE as a chance to talk with students and give them space. Ava does not primarily seem to think of LCE as a discrete activity on the schedule but rather as an approach. This line of thought is further developed by Bill, who suggests that LCE ‘is an approach, and it is about being yourself as a teacher’. This in turn makes ‘the student feel noticed, and safe’. Bill states that ‘LCE is an approach for all human encounters’. These approaches may be in line with the ideas of Hansen (2007), speaking about a moral attentiveness towards students as a constant quality in every educational meeting. This kind of moral attentiveness does not seem to be built on hierarchical positions between teachers and students but is rather formulated as the relational core of every meeting that may lead to anyone learning anything.

## Effects of the discourses for youth transition processes from school to society

The three discourses that emerge through the teachers' descriptions of their therapeutic teaching (LCE) practice both affirm and point away from the therapeutic trend in society—education included—and its related notions of a well-being crisis among the young. What is in question in this chapter is their constitutive power not only to shape teachers' professional approaches to therapeutic teaching practices but also to give body to and regulate the actualization and direction-taking of (different notions of) young people's transition from school to society. Out of the three discourses identified: a psychological 'risk' discourse, a role model discourse and an ethical discourse of care, different feasible effects for these transition processes can be drawn upon, which are sketched below.

The psychological risk discourse calls a dangerous transition from school to society into being where the school's (and teachers') task is to protect the young students and enable them to handle the current challenges in society. One critical step in the transition involves the transgressing of the delicate and at the same time risky line between being a vulnerable child and being a capable adult, which can be seen as a characteristic feature of the historically established depiction of (the Swedish) school (Olson, 2009). This step makes young people's self-empowerment in emotional and psychological senses a vibrant condition for success in the transition process; self-empowerment where the teachers' insights into emotional matters, and openness about them, is of vital importance for the student to 'achieve' and 'work through' in order to succeed in feeling good about themselves and their life in society. What is at stake is that this psychological risk discourse marks out a world that is characterized by dangerous influences and fast change. Their success in the transition from school to society stands out as dependent on their emotional and self-empowerment. In order to (self-)manage to live a healthy life with many well-being qualities 'out there' in society, the young have to work on their bodies and souls in the (often manual-based) ways the teachers prescribe in school. If not, they run the risk of falling victim to the hazards of society.

Regarding the role model discourse, the transition process from school to society is not, as is the case in the psychological risk discourse, self-empowerment and self-esteem that stand out as central hubs. It is rather a matter of rule-following and good behaviour that produces success; young people should learn to crack the norm codes to adulthood and to society. Once they have done that, they will have a 'better' and more harmonious life in society. The role of the schools, and particularly the teachers, in this discourse is to prepare them for this transition, and the preparation stands out as a moral one. In the teachers' professional teaching, they serve as role models. In showing the young students how to behave, act and think as norm-oriented social beings, they

can progress from deficient beings to become well-behaved adults by following the right rules and norms. Here the responsibility mainly rests on the school and the (LCE) teachers to see to a successful transition process from school to society for the young. The success depends to a considerable extent on the capacity of the teacher to embody a decent qualification for being a role model for the students.

The third discourse, the ethical one, also stands out as being part of a professional orientation, as does the role model discourse. Here the transition from school to society for the young students is actualized in ethical ways; the key process involved is the transition from the state of being a child in need of ethical care to become an ethically cultivated person. The very notion of ethical cultivation does not stand out as being directly entwined with psychological development in the teachers' descriptions, which distinguishes it from the role model discourse. Cultivation rather emerges as a reciprocal process through which both the teachers and the students 'refine' their ethical being and approach to other people and society through mutual interaction in words and behaviour. Society itself is not central to this ethical transition process in the way that is the case in the two former discourses; it is almost totally absent. Transition from school to society thus becomes a relational 'business' that takes place, and at the same time is conditioned by, interaction mainly between teachers and students in school.

Similar to the psychological approach, the young have to achieve their own empowerment. However, this empowerment is an ethical one, and is accomplished by teachers. As in the role model discourse, the transition process lies in the teachers' professional role rather than in the students' actions. Being quite firmly related to the school context, the ethical discourse of care, affirming the professional role of the teacher as an ethical promoter, is not as sensitive to ideas about 'children of today' and their lack of emotional well-being as are the other two discourses.

Taken together, the three discourses on therapeutic (LCE) teaching in Swedish compulsory school that emerge in the teachers' descriptions have different effects for youth transition processes from school to society. If we compare the youth transition processes sketched above, two differences between them stand out as central: first, that the last two discourses—the role model discourse and the ethical discourse of care—are linked with traditional professional notions of school as fostering young students, while the first one—the psychological risk discourse—is not. Second, that the first two affirm a hierarchical discourse as regards the relationship between the teachers and the students, while the last stands out as non-hierarchical. That is, the ethical discourse of care involves a notion of this relationship where the young students are not targeted as lacking, victims to an unruly world or in need of (self-)empowerment beyond other people's (here: the teacher's) responsiveness and professional involvement in the very transition process.

These two differences, we argue, highlight two concerns. First, we emphasize the necessity for (educational) researchers *not* to take on therapeutic LCE arguments in their research on teachers and/or teaching. If researchers do that—in order to guide teachers in their professional everyday teaching practice—the therapeutic culture and its psy-discourses are ‘inserted’ into the teachers’ professional, context-sensitive and practice-related judgements in a hazardous way. Put bluntly, if therapeutic psychological culture becomes ‘mainstreamed’ as part of teachers’ professional didactical practices, it makes it difficult to separate psychological/therapeutic (research) concerns from educational ones. Even though we can never ‘escape’ or exist independently outside the therapeutic trend in education, there are constitutive processes involved that reinforce and create *other* discourses in therapeutic teaching than the psychological, hierarchical one. Second, there is a need for research that strengthens the very relationship between (teacher) discourses on therapeutic education and the discursive outcomes that they produce regarding young people’s futures and lives. In terms of youth transitions from school to adult society, this is so, we argue, as these discourses contribute to the construction of the regulation and direction setting for the transition processes themselves, but also of (the role of) school and society, as well as of the young themselves. This construction is far from unique or new. Nonetheless, it seems to have taken new directions with the international phenomenon of therapeutic education, which calls for more exploratory *empirical* research on the relationship between therapeutic teaching and its effects on young people’s futures.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The term life competence education is first suggested by Camilla Löf (2009), as a translation of the Swedish concept *livskunskap*.

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