

EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF DSS-D STUDENTS REGARDING THEIR CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

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The aim of the study was to investigate into the expectations and experiences of dss-d students of DIAK on their curriculum. The program leads to a double qualification in the field of social services and the recognition as a deacon in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF). In the study, I tried to explore students' opinions on different religions, beliefs, spiritual orientations and how they are addressed in the dss-d curriculum.

The study follows a qualitative research approach. The research method was an interview both in one-on-one and in group forms. Interviews were considered appropriate for the study due to its nature of direct exchange of ideas and experiences among the parties involved. Qualitative content analysis was used to identify the major themes from the interviews for discussion.

Results of the study shows students interest in having more practical lessons about diaconal studies. It shows students motivation to have such lessons in the early stages of their studies to enable them to have practical experiences on them during placements before exhausting their placement studies.

Key words: curriculum, diaconia, religion, spirituality, belief

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1 INTRODUCTION

Among the properties of educational institutions are the knowledge codes embodied in their curriculum. These embodied codes help to define the institutional structure and its educational systems (Bidwell 1992, 345). The curriculum is central to all school institutions and provides the guidelines towards the attainment of both individual and the organizational goals. However, the dynamics in institutional structures require differences in content of school curriculum in addressing the needs of our societies.

The school as an agent of change in the society relies on its curriculum and what it has to inculcate into its students. Mostly, the degree of students efficiency on the labor market depends on instructions and experiences received at school based on the curriculum. However, to measure and understand the development and outcomes of school curriculum depends on its students and stakeholders. Frederick (1992), in his compilation on students' experience of the curriculum asserts that the student's experience of enacted curriculum is significant, presumably, because it is within such experiences that learning about self and the world take place (Frederick 1992, 466.) Therefore, to make this inquiry depends on how the curriculum addresses both social issues and students aspirations.

Based on different contexts and goals of each educational curriculum, I limited my research on an inquiry into the curriculum of a degree program in social services for church sector specific studies (DSS-D), perused by Diaconia University of Applied Sciences (DIAK) in Finland. The three and a half year degree program leads to a double qualification in the field of social services and the recognition as a deacon in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF). In the study, I explored the expectations and experiences of the dss-d students on their curriculum. The program is designed to equip students with

the competency in diaconia work, understand the Bible in relation to diaconia and the skill of creating a just society devoid from social exclusion, discrimination and marginalization and among other social vices in our society.

However, regardless of the fact that the qualification leads to the recognition as a deacon in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ECLF) on one hand, many churches and religious denominations may not accept the church sector qualification for job placement, but it offers an opportunity for its beneficiaries to work in other faith-based, diaconal and some Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) both locally and internationally. As a result, the content of the curriculum was looked into in relation to how the program is designed to equip students on different religions, spiritual and other belief systems as it offers students the opportunity students to work in other organizations other than the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland.

1.1 Background of the study

As a dss-d student on a practical study placement in one of the Lutheran Church Parishes in Finland, I found out that many of the clients hail from different cultural backgrounds with different belief systems. Each one of them had their own perception of nature, I therefore realized that it requires a conscious effort on the part of the service provider, in preventing infringement and violations of the rights of their clients and to oppose all forms of discrimination on the basis of culture, beliefs and individuality and to uphold their dignity. A statement issued by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) on ethics in social work statement of principles' (2004, section 4.2.1) states that 'social workers should not engage in negative discrimination on the basis of their clients' spiritual orientations' Canda and Furman (2010, 16), on their part also accessed that genuine respect is more than tolerance thus, respect for diversity should extend to a genuine appreciation for diversity and to a competent response to the diverse backgrounds and situations of clients. It is therefore important for practitioners in the field of social work to be

prepared to understand their clients in a respectful manner and say *no* to negative discrimination (Canda & Furman, 2010, 16).

Nonetheless, discrimination can occur either directly or indirectly when the right kind of services are not offered at a given place and at a given time. Service providers can discriminate unknowingly in a situation whereby they are unable to identify the personality, background and the beliefs of their clients.

The experience I had at the time of the practical studies made me to realize the essentiality of knowing how the entire dss-d curriculum is designed to equip both current and subsequent students in responding to the diverse needs of their clients on the labor market after graduation, either within the Church or in the contemporary society. As a beneficiary of the newly implemented program, I was motivated to make inquiry into the program and to contribute my quota towards its development. As noted earlier, though the program leads to the recognition as a deacon in the ELCF, it is not only limited towards the services of the ELCF but has a keen interest in responding to humanity and creating a just livelihood for all, irrespective of beneficiaries spiritual, beliefs and religious orientations. Professionals from the dss-d program are keenly to be ordained as deacons in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland but their services will not be limited towards the inner-periphery of the ELCF as deacons but to the larger community as a whole.

Olson (1992, 17-18) asserts that the office of the deacon was created out of an ongoing need to administer charity until governments became more willing to take over the burden of social welfare. The author further maintains that, even after governments intention to take over the burden of social welfare, deacons continued to serve through visitation and the lending of helping hand to the needy regardless their religious and spiritual orientations. Deacons were therefore skeptic on the kind and way of services to be offered to their beneficiaries as they extended their services to the larger community and being agents of social welfare in many countries.

A helping profession like diaconal work is primarily characterized by the heart of passion and empathy to serve. Thus, the diaconal workers ability to accept and understand the needs of his/her client and to offer the best services available. However, understanding and accepting the needs of clients relate to understanding their personality based on their beliefs and their perception about nature (both spiritual and religious beliefs).

Nevertheless, spirituality as a basic fundamental of humanity has raised many concerns as to whether it should be the core in educating social service workers in meeting the needs of their clients' social challenges (Amy 2004, 37). People are endowed with different ideas, beliefs and perceptions of nature but the issue of 'love for one another' as a centrality of diaconal work has no dimension when it comes to the well-being of people. Diaconal work as a caring profession aims at providing services to foster people's well-being without taken into account their background and belief systems.

Often, most beneficiaries of diaconal care and other social services do not like to talk about their belief systems. Nonetheless, the well-being of individuals does not only lie on the provision of material things due to the differences in values and the different approaches to understanding well-being. Whereas some social/diaconal work clients may prefer sharing spiritual thoughts and ideas like prayers, singing hymns or other religious/spiritual rituals for their well-being, others may not. Taking into consideration of diaconal ideology, diaconal work caters for people deprived of both material and spiritual needs. Creating sustainable lives, transformation, empowerment and promotion of peace and social justice is what diaconal stands for (prophetic diaconia; for the healing of the world, 2002.) This therefore requires the professional diaconal social worker to be expert and sensitive in dealing with clients in need but with different beliefs and backgrounds.

1.2 Aims of the study

The study investigates the expectations and experiences of dss-d students of DIAK on their curriculum. In doing this, the study explores students' opinions on different religions, beliefs, spiritual orientations and how they are addressed in the dss-d curriculum.

1.3 Research Question

As a diaconal and a religious oriented program, the study attempts answer how students would like the curriculum to address religion, spirituality and different belief systems.

2 THE CURRICULUM AS A STUDY GUIDE

An attempt on defining curriculum has raised discussions among authors and academicians in the field of curriculum studies; however a close look into the definitions of the term by numerous authors leads to one common key thing about the subject. For instance, Cuban (1979, 221) defines curriculum as a series of planned events intended for students to learn particular knowledge, skills, and values organized to be carried out by administrators and teachers which stresses on content and the outcomes for students. Also, Jackson (1992, 4-5) defines curriculum as the experiences children have under the guidance of teachers. He further maintained that curriculum as a plan or program for all the experiences which the learner encounters under the direction of the school.

The definitions given above seem distinct in nature on one hand, however, they all limited to what learners encounter in school. Learners undergo all forms of activities in school either planned or unplanned and either from the instructions from teachers or from peers both within extra curricula and co-curricular activities. As a result, the term curriculum can be broadly explained to include all the activities learners undergo in school either based on broad goals of the school or based on what the learner encounters consciously or unconsciously.

If one were to be asked whether students on job placement are considered students or workers, the obvious answer is; student! Since job placements are part of the school's planned activities for learners despite students' inability to receive direct or constant instructions and interactions from their teachers during their placement days. Interestingly, it was during placement when it occurred to me to pursue this study, which I consider as a great experience. Student's practical placements therefore form an integral part of DIAK's curriculum since learners undergo many experiences towards their professional development.

In an effort to explore the expectations and experiences of the dss-d students on their curriculum, the pedagogy was not taken into consideration on the reason that job placement forms greater part of students' professional development. Though the concepts; curriculum and pedagogy, seem interrelated, they are distinct in nature. Whereas curriculum centers mainly on the knowledge and skills needed to be acquired by a student or an apprentice under a course of training, pedagogy deals with the issues of 'how' such knowledge and skills can be acquired. In one way or the other, a specific curriculum directs the pedagogical process despite instructors' expertise in their field of profession. Among the key concepts in pedagogy are motivation, instructions, communications, and feedbacks to mention a few. Such are the means through which both the learned and the learner are able to reflect on whether the objectives of the curriculum are met or not.

The dss-d program is based on DIAK's core values in relation to the Christian love for one another and social justices. Among the core value of the program are promotion of social justices, solidarity, human dignity, individual participation and ethical practice based reflections on both social values and actions. Additionally, the diaconal based program aims to equip students for diaconal work and inculcates into students the skill of:

1. Understanding the bible based on diaconia work.
2. Youth and community development work and strategies for participation and empowerment.
3. Innovative methods to social and diaconal work.
4. Social pedagogical approach and group work.
5. Working with churches and faith communities, civil societies as well as public sectors.

6. Comparative approach to social policy, including policies of the European Union.
7. Theological and ethical understanding of diaconia.

In summary, the program aims to equip students the skills to engage with issues towards the growth of social exclusion, discrimination and racism, multicultural and multi faith living, the development of sustainable communities and among others (Diak Curriculum Guide, 2010).

3 THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This section outlines the key concepts of the study, how they are addressed in the curriculum and the related literature on them.

3.1 The concept of diaconal work

Diaconia is another word for “caring for each other”. It is a word of Greek origin, which often appears in the Bible in its original sense, namely: serving God and caring for one’s fellow creatures. The expression is used for a Christian, social effort towards helping people whose lives are difficult. It is rooted into the Bible and seen as an integral part of God’s care for humanity. Several accounts in the Bible, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament show manifestations of God’s diaconia action.

The basis of diaconia in the Old Testament was mainly about the maintenance of social order and the promotion of earthly well-being of people, especially the poor, guests and the marginalized. Livelihood in the Old Testament was mainly characterized by the responsibility for one another which included families, tribes and nations. Interaction between God and man was visible and also through his prophets. God in his wisdom revealed himself to people such as Abraham, Jeremiah, Isaiah etc. to tell how he expected his people to live (i.e., love and care for one another in harmony). On account of injustices that abound lives during the second century (2nd century, BCE), God gave out the Ten Commandments to Moses to serve as a legislation and social order for the lives of his people in Israel (Ex. 20:1; Deut. 4:13.) Further, God through Jeremiah ordered for justices to the victims of oppression, violence, aliens, widows and orphans (Jeremiah 22:3.) He cared for his people and taught them to live in harmony, to care for the poor and asked for hospitality towards their guests.

Also, an account given in the Book of Genesis shows God’s love and care for mankind even after the break down of the original harmony between God and

man. God gives hopes and comfort man in distress, He closes the gates of paradise to prevent evil from gaining eternal life; even before the first people in his creation could be thrown out of the Garden of Eden, God made a garment out of skin to cover themselves against the hard surrounding (Lindstrom 2005, 33). Among God's care and diaconal deeds are further demonstrated in the book of Exodus where God through Moses saves his people from a massive political oppression in Egypt (Ex 7:12). He shows love and care to his people during their wanderings on the desert on their way to the promise land, he protected them against enemies, fed them and offered them water to drink. (Ex. 14; 17:1-18).

Respectfully, several stories in the New Testament also show God's love for his people and how he wants us to do to others. In the stories about the prodigal son (Luke 15: 11), the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and Jesus' sermon on the mount, he teaches about the love for one another, even ones enemy and the awaiting kingdom of God (Mathew 5:7.) Jesus, as the representation of God in spirit showed love and care to people both spiritually and materially and asked same from us in return. In the early Christian church history, love and services were joint task of the congregations as communal and mutual care used to be an idealistic thought of the people of Israel where alms giving and social aid were communal tasks in the Old Testament. The accounts given in (Acts 2:44-45) and (Romans 15:25-27) outline the measures made available to the poor. Thus, distribution of meals and funds to the sick, old and the hungry. Other accounts were given in the Gospel as well. The gospel according to Luke in the New Testament shows God's love for mankind. "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:16-20.)"

Ideally, the entire life and teachings of Jesus Christ shows his diaconal mission and love for one another. He did not only proclaim the kingdom of God but to serve the broken humanity and to comfort the oppressed and the poor. Once in

the gospel according to Luke, Jesus is described as a deacon. "He is the deacon who have come to serve broken humanity (Lindstrom 2005, 37.) When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without shepherd" (Luke 22:27, John 13: - 17). The deeds and works of Jesus are manifested both in creed and in action such as his teaching on God's love for mankind and the cleansing and healing of the leper. Diaconia is thus regarded as God's love in Christ and it is manifested through the actions and deeds of the Church. In a document issued by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the importance of diaconal work in the church was highlighted,

" Diaconia is central to what it means to be the Church. As a core component of the gospel, Diaconia is not an option but an essential part of discipleship. Diaconia reaches out to all persons, who are created in God's image. While Diaconia begins as unconditional service to the neighbor in need, it leads inevitably to social change that restores reforms and transforms. (Prophetic Diaconia: for healing the world. Lutheran World federation 2002.)"

The church is a representation of God's people gathered before him in worship. Its members are expected to lead lives as a true reflection of Christ, thus, to show love, care and compassion for one another as directed by Christ to love thy neighbor as thy self. Early Christians in their quest to follow Christ's example and diaconal deeds cared for widows and orphans, fed the hungry and housed the homeless (Olson 1992, 17.) This was and has been a core duty of the church since its founding.

In the Acts of the apostle, seven men were chosen to administer the daily distribution of food and other material things to widows and the needy in the society and this account to the church's diaconal call to serve. Due to the increasingly charitable work in the church, the office of the deacon was created to manage the daily distribution of charity in the church. The diaconate therefore became an integral part of the church and was made to function in diverse

ways. Though the deacons in the early history of the church, were primarily responsible for charity works, they also had a role to play in the liturgy. According to (Lindstrom 2005, 29), diaconia is neutral in responding to people's needs as it is inspired by Christian theology. Center to diaconal work is to transform, reconcile and to empower the individual. Therefore diaconal work is not only regarded as effecting change in people's lives only in action but in deeds as well. Thus, the possibility to promote enhancement both materially and spiritually.

3.2 Functions of diaconia

The functions of the deacon and for that matter the diaconate can be accessed into three folds; a) celebration of the liturgy (*leiturgia*), b) proclamation of the gospel (*kerygma*) and c) the service (*diakonia*) offered at the table (Diakonia in context 2009, 29.)

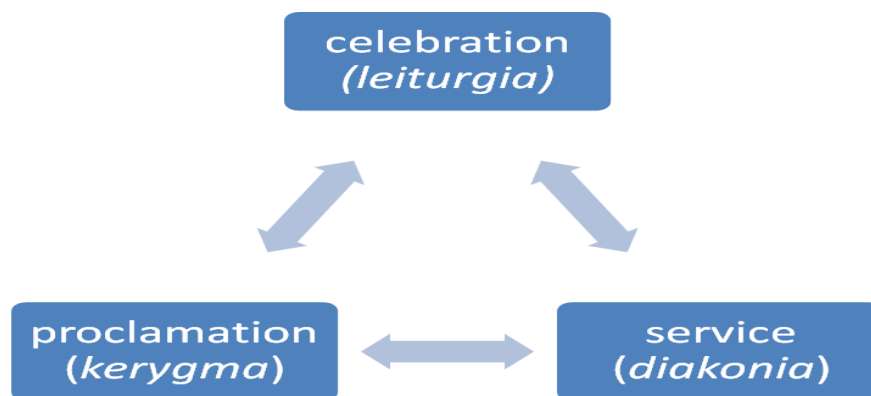


Fig 1. Functions of diaconia. (Source: Diaconia in Context 2009, 29.)

The instances outlined above shows the numerous responsibility of the care ministry. In the first instance, it manifests in a sacrificial offering God made both in prayer, thanks giving and the Eucharistic (*liturgy*), proclamation of the word and the latter, being the charitable deeds for the needy. It is therefore important to examine these functions and the required skills needed by deacons in

executing their duties as part of their primary duty to serve and in following Christ, in deeds and in actions respectively.

3.2.1 Liturgical functions of diaconia/deacon

The church as a representation of God's people in worship before him has duties to accomplish. Among such duties are the proclamation of the word and the administration of the sacraments (Nordskokke 2011, 26.) Through the word, God is made visible to his people, He is always present in the gathering of two or more people in his name. (Mathew 18:20). God is made visible during the Eucharist and it is only those who are justified by faith in Christ are empowered to participate at the altar of God during the celebration of the Eucharist.

According the Brodd (2005, 19-20), diaconia is an expression of God's love in Christ which is manifested in the "*Kerygma*" (proclamation of the Word) and "*Koinonia*" (sharing at the Table) which are witnessed through deeds and the sharing of the body and blood of Christ during the Eucharist. He further asserts that diaconia is described in sacramental categories as mystery and prophetic signs expressed through the church as sacrament of the kingdom of God for the world. Additionally, he maintains that the church is borne by people who have been endowed for this special gifts of the Holy Spirit, diakonia comes into focus at the center of the church, the Eucharist which is the supper of reconciliation. Christ offers his body to his people at the altar of God for reconciliation (Brodd 2005, 19-20). Although the diaconate has been the lowest in the ministry's hierarchy, after the Constantine shift, deacons had the sacred commission like that of Jesus to carry out another's will and were regarded as the Bishop's deputies (Collins 1990, 240.) They were tasked to perform in the liturgy, administration of the sacrament and the Holy Communion. The deaconate however served as the basis of priesthood in many churches of the world. In the Roman Catholic and the Anglican Churches for instance, the early deacons were made to serve for less than two years and were due for ordination into the priesthood (Nordskokke 2011, 18.) To be a deacon is to be able to recognize

God with others either in flesh or in spirit and in relation to God's actions that abounds humanity till our present generation.

Though the church's diaconal tasks have not perished since the history of the Church and in relation to following Christ's Mission on earth, there has been concerns pertaining to becoming a deacon in relation to their numerous tasks either within the church or outside the church. Questions such as what skills are needed by the deacon in responding to the people, what tools are needed by the deacon in responding to people of different faith and religions are mostly asked. Diaconia as noted earlier centered on service to God and man in relation to Christ's teachings on 'the love for one another and service to humanity' based on its call for transformation, reconciliation and empowerment.

3.2.2 Service/care functions of diaconia

Outside the church, diaconal works undoubtedly goes on and this seem to overshadow its key role in the Eucharist and in the liturgy as well. Thus, addressing issues pertaining to human dignity and promoting social justices. Aside the functions deacons play in the liturgy, they are also responsible for considerable visitation services to provide 'care' or 'services' both spiritually and materially in upholding the character of the church as *koinnoia*. Responding to the victims of social injustice, poverty and marginalization through provision of education, health, food and promotion of human rights for sustainable livelihood forms part of the diaconal social responsibilities. Through this responsibility, people with diverse religious, spiritual and cultural backgrounds experience Gods love and care for humanity. Diaconal work as noted takes into centrality of the 'whole person' and regards all human beings as an image of God. Therefore, responding to the needy in the society corresponds to Christ mission of service to humanity. As a results, any idea to differentiate such mission may depend on the praxis in which such a person sees it.

Nordstrokke (2011, 16) outlined three different dimensions in understanding the diaconia ministry. Thus, contextual, ecclesiological and praxeological approaches.

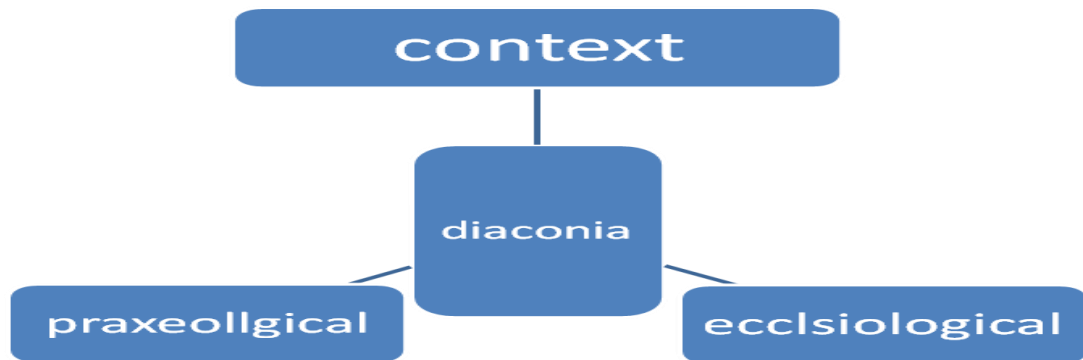


Fig 2. Approaches to understanding diaconia ministry. (Nordstrokke 2011, 16.)

The analogy to be drawn from Nordstrokke's approaches to understanding the ministry is its call to service and responding to human situations in time of need.

3.2.3 Proclamation functions of diaconia

Last on the key functions of the diaconia ministry is the proclamation. Through visitations and other contacts with people, the diaconal worker has the duty to make the word of the Lord visible to people. As manifested in the gospel according to (Mark 16:15-16), "then he said to them, 'Go forth to every part of the world, and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. Those who believe it and receive baptism will find salvation; those who do not believe will be condemned'. The deacon is therefore entrusted with the task to evangelize as part of their duties towards the kingdom God promised.

3.3 Spirituality and religiosity in diaconal work

Paul in his letter to Timothy outlined some outstanding qualities of the deacon. He asserted that, the deacon must keep hold of the truth of the faith with a clear conscience (1timothy 3:9.) He mentioned that those who served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus. Keeping the faith and working with the Holy Spirit by the diaconal worker in fellowship of Christ's messianic mission in the 'care' or 'service' ministry requires a spiritual understanding and a break-through in responding to people of diverse' spiritual opinions/background. It is therefore essential that diaconal worker is well versed in issues pertaining to multi-faith and different spiritual backgrounds.

Many people in the 'care' ministry regard activities geared towards enlightenment or a 'Divine Being' as spiritual which operate within religion. The concepts, spirituality and religion are interrelated, henceforth; I addressed them simultaneously as far as this study is concerned. Though there is no concrete definition for spirituality, many social work scholars relate to it as the search for meaning and purpose of nature and enlightenment toward the ultimate being. Canda and Furman accessed that, spirituality is the universal and fundamental human quality involving the search for the meaning, purpose, well-being, morality and profundity in relationships with ourselves, others and the ultimate reality. He further argued that, religion is an institutionalized pattern of values, beliefs, symbols, behaviors and experiences that are oriented toward spiritual concerns shared by a community and transmitted over time and traditions (Canda & Furman, 2010, 59).

Spirituality is expressed either in a religious or none religious perspectives. It is inherent on people/a group of people's beliefs, faith in relation to their search for meaning or purpose of nature either attached to any organized and institutionalized (religious) pattern of beliefs, doctrines or the individuals' personal perspectives. However, the diaconal ministry transcends upon barriers of peoples' religious or spiritual orientations. Though the ministry is either attached to a religious or a faith based organizations, its services are not limited

to only its members alone but aims to operate for the benefit of all. Thus, seeking for the welfare of the poor, marginalized and the excluded as well as serving as the mouth piece of the unheard in their quest to promote a just society.

To prevent issues of proselytism and religious discrimination on the part of the care provider, it is worthwhile for the diaconal social to know and have a value based understanding his/her clients.

Whereas religion connotes with a scripture, prayer, values, rituals, beliefs, doctrines and community oriented, spirituality on the other hand connotes with the search for the meaning, purpose, well-being, morality, relationship with oneself, others and with the ultimate reality. As discussed earlier, it is difficult to come by concrete definition of the terms, spirituality and religion. However one's ability to reflect on their key indicators gives meaning to how the individual perceives and understands them regardless the fact that they are interrelated and move simultaneously.

Diaconal work in the 21st century has a different approach compared to the diaconal work in the early Christian church. The effect of globalization and secularization in our fast growing world has led to an up-rise demand in human well-being and the quest for social justice. Whereas early Christian social workers (deacons) administered on the distribution of charity to widows, orphans the hungry and among others, the up-rise increase in global world population has resulted to an increase in demand for professionals to act and respond to them in diverse needs. Thus, offer the best services available to the victims of wars, poverty, unemployment, domestic family violence, migration, old age, child poverty and other natural disasters such as earthquake and flooding. The change in trend in the daily social challenges of individuals requires a new approach towards the professional training of deacons and other responsible cooperate individuals in the 'care ministry'. Diaconal workers at present therefore ought to be versatile in their day to day activities with their clients as their training differs from their pioneers in the early history of the

church whereby their services were greatly geared towards the marginalized in their congregations despite their fellowship to Christ's messianic mission.

3.4 Diaconal work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF)

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland is among the seventy-nine member countries of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the biggest faith community in Finland. According to reviewed population statistics in Finland (on 31.12.2012), 76.4 percent of Finns belonged to the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Though the Lutheran congregation in Finland gradually ceased to be a state church since 1865, and the emergence of religious secularization, the Finnish culture is still endowed with strong mutual trust as a basic fundamental of Lutheranism (Visto Jari, lectures. 29.04.3013). The ELCF operates on the common objectives of the Lutheran World federation (LWF), the World Council of Churches (WCC) and Christ's mission on earth (i.e. .Love for one another).

In a document issued by the LWF on prophetic diakonia for the healing of the world, it stressed that diakonia work by indicating that:

“Diakonia is more than the strong services to the weak, which can lead to paternalistic assumptions and practices, and imply that some churches are unable to engage in Diakonia because of their lack of resources or expertise. We challenge this assumption. Diakonia is part of the calling of all churches and all Christians in the world. (Prophetic Diakonia: for healing the world, Lutheran World federation, 2002.)”

From the Lutheran perspective, faith is bound to yield good fruits and that it ought to do good work commanded by God on the account of God's will and not so that people may trust in such works to merit justification before God (Nordskokke 2011, 25.) “At present, 7.5 million euros of the Church's (ELCF) yearly budget is allocated to diaconal work in Finland which is used to respond to almost one hundred and eighty-four thousand four hundred and three (184,403) clients who opt for diaconal care and the six hundred and sixty-eight

thousand, six hundred and eighty-five (668,685) people who opt for free or cheap meals respectively (Visto Jari, lectures. 29.04.2013).”

Diaconal work in the ELCF upholds to the well-being of the individual both materially and spiritually based on its common mission in following Christ’s example.

With reference to Christ mission and his duty as a deacon, diaconia relates to the proclamation of the word (*kerygma*) and the sharing at the table (*koinonia*). These are however inherent in the sharing of the body of Christ during the Eucharist and the sharing of unjust power relations that are manifested in diaconia work such as between the rich and the poor as well as givers and receivers (prophetic diaconia: for the healing of the world, LWF 2010). These are among the basic operational principles of the ELCF but as a member of the LWF with a common goal of acting both in “needs” and in “deeds” taken into centrality the new approaches towards diaconal work regarding to the uprising in different socio-political views on ethics, values and faith.

4 METHODOLOGY

This section of the study is based on the methodological approach I adopted in carrying out the research. It emphasizes on the reasons for my choice of research methods.

A research method simply connotes with the various techniques employed by a researcher for his/her data collection. A researcher may choose to use either qualitative or quantitative research strategies depending on his field of inquiry. Though any of the two strategies outlined above enable researchers to obtain knowledge and information about a phenomenon, they are distinct in nature with different methodological approaches. Whereas qualitative research methods stresses on socially constructed nature of reality and the intimate relationship between what is studied and the researcher, quantitative research methods on the other hand emphasis on measurement and analysis of casual relationships between variables (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, 8). The value-laden nature of qualitative research strategy expressed in the forms of interviews, observations, casual conversations, texts and documents, audio/video recordings etc. enable researchers to seek solutions to issues of social concern and hence my choice for the qualitative approach for the study.

I chose interviews as a tool for my data collection due to its nature of direct exchange of ideas and experiences between the interviewer and the interviewee. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), interviewing is an active process where interviewer and interviewee through their relationship produce knowledge. The authors maintained that, interview knowledge is produced in a conversational relation; it is contextual, linguistic, narrative and pragmatic. Talking to people in the social sciences and in the humanities is among the keen means to understanding them; their world and their lives. Through conversations we get to know other people, learn about their experiences, feelings, attitudes and the world they live in. In an interview conversation, the

researcher listens to the dreams, fears, and hopes of interviewees; he hears their views and opinions in their own words (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, xvii).

Prior to the beginning of the study, I had decided to conduct focus group interviews among the three classes (dss-d c29, dss-d c31 and dss-d c33) pursuing the dss-d program as of the time the study was conducted. Ideally, focus group interview is useful in exploring and examining what people think, how they think, why they think the way they do and encourages variety of viewpoints on topics of social concern (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 150). Consequently, time and different schedules of interviewees did not permit a successive focus group interviews in all the three classes listed above. In effect, two forms of interviews, one on one and focused group interviews were adopted later for the data collection process.

4.1 Research design

I primarily selected qualitative research technic for my data collection and analysis based on the in-depth investigation and understanding I opt to gain from the studies. MacMillan and Schumacher (2001, 316), referred to qualitative research design as a means of using an interactive strategies in a real-life experiences based on participants perspectives with the aim of understanding a social phenomenon or an issue of concern.

Morse (1998), identifies two keys to selecting qualitative research topics. a) Identifying something that hold one's interest over time, through reflections on what is of *real* personal interest to the researcher. b) A problem noted in the course of clinical practice, or from a significant experience that occurs in the course of everyday living (Morse 1998, 57). As an experience based chosen topic, I considered qualitative research technic suitable for the study as it discovers students' opinions about the curriculum interactively in the form of interviews and conversations. The interviewees form part of the knowledge and

beneficiaries of the program, hence my interest for their participation in the study was to get their perceptions and experiences about the program.

4.2 The research process

Nine students participated in the interview. Out of which, three students were involved in a focus group interview and the remaining six students in a one-on-one interview. Despite the different pathways of the interviewees, criteria for their selection was not based on random selection. I had considered that, participants are representatives of the same experience or part of the knowledge embodied in the curriculum, hence they were not basically selected because of their demographic reflection of the general population (Morse 1998, 74). Prior to their selection, I booked time to meet the classes' dss-d c31 and dss-d c33 in course of their instructional period(s) where I had the opportunity to introduce my topic, research goals and my motivations for the study. Students present were given leaflets to fill. Thus; interested students filled and return the leaflets with their contact details to be contacted for the interviews.

Earlier, I decided to conduct focus group interviews for the data collection amongst three year groups. However, the different schedules of participants from dss-d c31 and dss-d c33 resulted to a one-on-one interview technic. In effect, I was able to conduct six individual and one focus group interview/s with dss-d c29 (my class). It involved three students who were available and volunteered to be interviewed on the interview day. Prior to that, I had informed the group about my topic and the need to have their opinions in an interview. Though students whole heartedly agreed to participate in the discussion, there was a problem meeting the full complement of the students for the interview due to the diverse schedules of the students.

The entire group of seven students from my class was ideal for a focus group interview, however, I considered the three students who were present and volunteered for the interview to be appropriate. It is worthwhile to acknowledge

that, considerations were not given to the interviewees, sex, age, class, cultural or religious orientations. The timing and venue of all the interviews were chosen by the interviewees themselves in order to make it easy for them to participate. Interestingly, all the interviewees considered Jarvenpaa campus to be appropriate for a non-disturbed conversation after normal school hours.

According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), research interview is an interpersonal, a conversation between two or more partners about a theme of mutual interest. To the authors, knowledge is created in an interview, the points of view of the interviewer and the interviewee/s (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 123). Therefore, to produce such knowledge, I moderated the interviews with guided interview questions. Additionally, I created permissive atmospheres to allow individual expressions and to bring forth different opinions on the issues discussed. Heritage (1984) was of the view that the method of recording and transcribing interviews prevents the natural limitations of human memories and provides the opportunities for meticulous assessment of people's views (Heritage 1984, 238). As a result, all the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed for further analysis

4.3 Ethical considerations

The publication of a research report usually raises moral questions about what kinds of effects the report leads to (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 272.) Choosing a topic within the confinements of a noble institution like Diak needed to undergo series of stages and through the school's administration for scrutiny and approval. As part of the ethical consideration towards research orientation in professional practice in Diak, permission was first sought from the stakeholders of the DSS program to interview my colleague students for the data gathering after the acceptance of the thesis proposal.

Uosukainen (2002, 106), asserts that undertaking curriculum studies to generate and produce new ideas requires the commitments of both teachers

and students. However, having considered my colleagues as the population for the study, I had to make sure, not to cause harm to any member of the population, thus; whether involved in the study or not. In accordance to the principles enacted in the Research Ethics Framework, published by UK Economic and Social Research Council, a) researcher is obliged to communicate the methods, objectives as well as the results of his work to the people involved in his research, b) the research should not cause any disadvantage to the participants, c) involvement of the participants has to be voluntary and among others (Bulmer 2008, 158) In cognizance to principles "a" and "b" stated above, and in pursuit of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethical guidelines of informed consent and confidentiality (S.5.02e), all participant were informed of the research goals and methods adopted for the study.

At the initial stage of the studies, I had the opportunity to introduce myself, topic, research aims, motivation for the study and a brief explanation of the research methods to the classes involved in the study. To avoid students' exclusion from the study, all the students within the chosen population were given the opportunity to decide for themselves as to whether to participate or not. However, though students' participation was voluntary, I was prejudiced about the adequacy and appropriateness of data in respect to a given number of participants. These raised an issue of harm or rejection, should an interested student denied the opportunity to participate in the study. I was therefore circumspect about the question of rejection and its impacts on participants.

In the end, I valued the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants and made conscious efforts in reporting the findings in such way that the participants will not be harmed or get uncomfortable from the results of the study.

Barsky (2010, 85), on the contrary accessed that whereas some participants may be concerned about their confidentiality in an interview based on the value of their cultural or individual motives, others may be concerned for the

sensitivity and the possible consequences of their information. As a result, I made an agreement with the participants on the disclosure of any identity information to others. They were assured that none of their names and identity shall be made public as far as the study was concerned. In the situations whereby some information were traceable, I made alterations in the data obtained (meaning did not change) and provided anonymous names where possible.

4.4 Trustworthiness

The concept of trustworthiness in a qualitative research ascertains its validity and reliability. In that, it outlines whether the approaches employed in the study measure or describe what they were intended for. (Bell 1999, 104.) However, Validation in a qualitative study can be complicated. Fielding (2008) points out that critically measuring a peculiar matter of social concern in an unfamiliar setting can intensify the researchers' responsibilities as there is no exact tactics for the readers to verify the statements or discoveries that have been argued by the researcher (Fielding 2008, 276.)

Nonetheless, a mere absence of information on any research set piece often makes it difficult for readers to draw conclusions about the trustworthiness of the findings. The nature of curriculum studies and its development requires a conscious efforts and commitment of all individuals either within or outside its peripheries, hence the involvement of the key beneficiaries of the curriculum in the research process. However, the entire process was a bit challenging as there was scanty information on students' experiences on the curriculum due to the non-existence of prior studies and any pioneer graduate beneficiaries of the dss-d program.

Consequently, regardless the scanty information on students' experiences on the curriculum, the outcomes and findings from the study were supported by the data. In that the discussions played a key role in relation to the neutrality,

conformability, and the originality of both the responses from the interviews and the literature reviewed in the theoretical framework. All themes and other categories addressed in the study were drawn based on the researcher's knowledge and responses from the interviews.

4.5 Data gathering

The data for the study was conducted in spring and autumn 2012/2013 and 2013/2014 academic years respectively. The data was collected in three parts. First section of the collection took place in Diak South, Jarvenpaa campus. It involved a one on one interview with students from dss-d c33 and the dss-d c31 groups during and after placements. The second part of the data collection involved dss-c29 students in a group interview. It took place on the same campus but in autumn after students practical study placements. The third part on the other hand also took place in autumn 2013/2014 academic year at Sturenkatu; it involved some dss-29 group in a casual conversation.

The population for the study was considered appropriate due to their involvement and participation in the entire dss-d program. During the final stage of the data collection, I had a review on existing literature related to diaconal work and curriculum. The essentiality of making reference to the existing literature was to gain the basic understating on diaconal studies and how it is structured to suit students' professional development.

4.6 Qualitative content analysis

The data collected were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. In that, the audio tape-recorded interviews were transcribed into text form. The transcription process was highly time consuming due to the large volume of data recorded Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, 180), argued that, transcribing data from audio recording to text involves a series of technical and interpretational issues, particularly, concerning verbatim oral versus written style, for which there are

not many standard rules, but rather a series of choices to be made. However, they maintained that; transcribing interviews from an oral to a written mode structures the interview conversation in a form of amenable to closer analysis, and it is in itself an initial analytic process. In all, seven different interviews with a minimum of forty minutes each were transcribed into readable text format.

After the transcription, the readable text materials were carefully studied to identify the major themes. Based on the research topic, the major themes were categorized in accordance to students' expectations and experiences in a tabular form. This contributed to an easy identification of responses from the various classes and their expectations and experiences on the curriculum.

5 FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the results from the qualitative content analysis. The analysis outlines the major themes that emanated from the study of the qualitative content analysis. In all, two Major themes emerged. However, results from the analysis enabled me to identify sub-themes out of the two major themes.

The findings are summarized and presented below in table form. The sub-themes were considered essential for the study due to their frequent occurrences in the interview responses.

YEAR GROUP	EXPECTATIONS BEFORE STUDIES	EXPECTATIONS AFTER STUDIES	EXPERIENCES GAINED
DSS-D c33	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -knowing the background of ELCF -knowing what is expected of the diaconal social worker -spiritual enhancement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -to be able to work in the ELCF -to be equipped spiritually. -to gain more employment opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -introduction into the Bible

DSS-D c31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -spiritual enhancement -gain more insight into other religions -Knowing what is exactly expected of the diaconal worker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -to be able to work in the ELCF -to be equipped spiritually -to have more employment opportunities -to be a competent diaconal social worker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -devotions -dss-d mass service -insight into Lutheranism and reformation -parish placement
DSS-D c29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -knowing more about ELCF. -gaining more insight into diaconal work -spiritual enhancement -to be qualified to work in the ELCF -broadening theological understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -gain options to work in the secular environment -to be equipped spiritually. -to be competent to serve people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - devotions, -dss-d mass service -retreat -parish placements

Fig 3 summary of interview responses

Based on the two themes, the interviewees acknowledged that, they were expecting to enhance their spirituality, broaden their theological understanding, gain more insight into diaconal work, and to have a broader knowledge about the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. Additionally, they accessed that, they were expecting to be competent diaconal workers, ability to work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and to gain greater employment opportunities after graduation, Experience wise, the interviewees mentioned about some practical experiences in exercises like devotions, dss-d campus mass services, retreats and dss-d parish placements. Theoretically, they mentioned about the lectures on the theology of diaconia and other related theoretical studies about diaconia work.

6 DISCUSSIONS

In this chapter, I discussed the various themes of the interviews presented in the research findings in chapter five. I have explained the findings and made references to the theoretical framework and the literature review described in chapter two. Also, I have included and referred to some direct quotations from the interviews in this chapter.

6.1 Spiritual enhancement

According to (Canda & Furman 2010, 59 & 75), spirituality refers to a universal and fundamental human quality involving the search for a sense of meaning, purpose, morality, well-being and profundity in relationships with ourselves, others and the ultimate reality. They further argued that spirituality is the sense of divine revelation; an awareness of the sacredness immanent within the self and nature and the physical world. Often, people do ask questions such as, where do we come from? What is the goal of my life? What am I meant to be? And many limitless questions that are difficult to answer by oneself. Such are non-philological questions that form part of humanity and the basis of our search for the meaning and purpose of life. Though many people tend to overlook such questions in our present day lives, they are issues that are difficult for practitioners in the care profession to ignore. One major ability of the diaconal social worker is his/her spiritual knowledge as it equips him/her with what kind of ideas and approaches in executing their professional duties.

With reference the students' experiences on the curriculum and instructions received at school, some participants acknowledged the essence of a half-day retreat exercise they undertook in school. A participant attested that;

"The course has not given me more ideas into spiritual life and I am really waiting next autumn to get a little bit deeper and little more kind of spiritual training. Mmm, I liked the retreat exercise we

undertook! It was so good and I really liked it. ...It helps you make a personal reflection on your life”

According to the Ignatian spirituality people normally develop meaning, purpose and the transcendence of life through spiritual immersion and self-meditation. Retreat as mentioned above denotes with self-meditation in a form of spiritual journey in our quest to search for answers to our personal doubts, reasons for life challenges and our relationship with the divine being. In accordance to the Buddhist tradition, its founder, Siddhartha Gautama (566-486 BCE), in his quest to seek understanding of human suffering and its remedies embarked upon years of spiritual journey of disciplines and meditations. This led to his discovery of enlightenment and the awakening into the true nature of self and reality. (Canda & Furman 2010, 144).

Further, the Ignatian Spirituality emphasized that spirituality starts within the individual soul. To them there is something in the human brains that prompts us to know what is beyond (God) and in understanding our own ideas and the ideas of others. This in the long run result to the look for what fills our heart, gives us strength, hope as well as what is within our brains and the inner senses. They accessed that spiritual exercises are a compilation of meditations, prayers, and contemplative practices that help people deepen their relationship with God and offer meanings to some live challenging questions. To them, retreat was commonly given as a “long retreat” usually about 30 days in solitude and silence. During this moment, one encounter God internally, identifies his brokenness, wounds and finds peace with his nature. It is a moment of personal reflection and preparing oneself to understanding nature.

As discussed in chapter three, both the proclamation and the celebration functions of diaconia represent the spiritual aspects of the care/diaconia ministry. Ones’ ability to participate either in the proclamation or in the celebration requires his commitment to God and the beliefs in the doctrines of the church. The retreat therefore introduced students to; a) spiritual meditations, b) make individual choices spiritually and c) strengthen their commitment with God.

Although it is crucial for the diaconal workers to witness their faith to their clients, it is important for them to identify their spiritual paths to enable them execute their duties effectively. Canda and Furman (2010) argued that, it is possible for diaconal social workers to meet clients who might be out of curiosity and in their quest to explore nature wish to undertake some spiritual exercises like prayers and singing spiritual songs like hymns, among others. They further mentioned that, whereas some clients might need spiritual enhancement, others are curios in knowing the worker's motives for helping and other questions that seem to be beyond mans' understanding. In such situations, the worker must be aware of his/her own assumptions, values and spiritual orientations for him to be able to respond to the needs of his clients.

Though spirituality is personal and individualized, a group of people may express it religiously. Different religious movements such as Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, and Islam and among others share different beliefs in their quest to encounter nature.

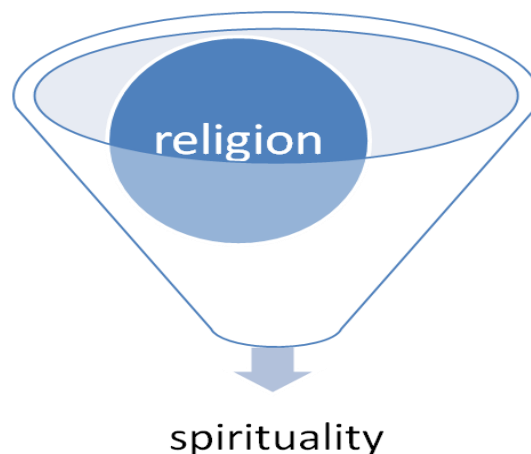


Fig 4. Religion and Spirituality. (Source: Canda & Furman 2010, 77.)

Responses from the interviews dismissed the claim for the inclusion of more instructions on different religions in the curriculum due to the differences in beliefs and doctrines of many religions. The interviewees maintained that any attempt to study more on other religions can lead to lose in track on what the

curriculum seeks to accomplish. On their part, the program is basically meant to equip students capable of working in the ELCF and other Lutheran and faith organizations and therefore the need to have more instructions on Lutheranism and diaconal work rather than other religious movements is more appropriate. Accordingly, in situations whereby one is interested in the process and outcomes of the school curriculum in affecting socio-cultural changes, it is necessary to inquire into the goals it set to accomplish. Despite the broader opportunities the program can offer its students upon graduation, the interviewees sought it to be very normative for the program to be focused on the inner periphery of the ELCF. They asserted that little bases on other issues in the contemporary society can facilitate them respond to others in times of need. Such bases on the other hand can serve as the foundation for interested students to pursue their career in the fields that suits them after graduation. With reference to the responses from the interview, it was realized that,

“There is no need to emphasis more on other religions but a bit basis is enough. Now we are going to be social workers both in the church and in the contemporary society. What we need more is to discover our own spirituality and to have to skills to work as a deacon in the church. I mean the Finnish Lutheran church and I also I think we have to be very spiritual sensitive both as a worker in the church or in the circular society.....even, I think not all clients ‘Christians’ will prefer to talk about religious and spiritual things with the diaconal and other religious and spiritual workers”

In relation to the numerous tasks of the diaconal social worker, it is essential to perceive all individuals as God’s children who were created in his own image. It is often good for the diaconal/social worker to engage in dialogue with his/her clients on other religions and spiritual beliefs but the most of it lies on the service provider’s ability to first ‘learn to identify him/herself’ and concentrate more on what s/he has to offer.

It is interesting to acknowledge that professional ethics differ from personal ethics, hence, the professional’s ability to identify him/herself enables him/her to offer the best services available to his clients. In accordance to the views of the students who volunteered for the interview, it is essential to be taught and

understand the doctrines of the ELCF to enable them whole heartedly serve within its confines. Nevertheless, serving clients outside the ELCF requires practitioners to be cautious of their own ethical and the professional ethical values without discrimination or proselytizing. Though it might be good to know more about other religious backgrounds, the diversity in beliefs and the doctrines requires diaconal/social workers to be sensitive and be reflective on the social work ethics on the job market. Consequently, an interviewee attested that;

“More teaching on different aspect of diaconal work and the different methods employed in doing their work will be really useful. Like what kind of services needed in responding to family work, addictions and what kind of work they really do in their parishes and in the larger community”

The interviewees were therefore motivated to have more lectures in the subsequent semester (s) on issues relating to practicalities of the diaconal social work. However, as outlined in *fig3* on students' experiences, the dss-d campus mass services form part of the practicalities in the care ministry. As noted in the literature review (3.2.1 & 3.2.3), Collins (1990), accessed that deacons had the sacred commission like that of Jesus to carry out another's will and were regarded as the Bishop's deputy. They were therefore tasked to perform in the liturgy, administration of the sacrament and the Holy Communion. As a result, students' participation in the mass services in a way, prepares them towards their participation in the liturgy in the absence of priest(s) as deacons in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland after graduation.

6.2 Employment opportunities

As noted in the introductory part of the study, the DSS-D program leads to a double qualification in the field of social services and the recognition as a deacon in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (*see more, 1.0*). The interview responses outlined students' motivation for grater employment

opportunities after graduation. The DSS-D students unlike their colleague social sector students have greater opportunities to be employed by the ELCF and other faith based organizations aside other social institutions in the labor market. Though the students confessed of much extra work compared to the social sector students, they were prepared to pursue the program for the said qualification(s). The students were of the view that the double qualification is worth for its demands, hence the extra certificate to earn from diaconal studies can be a consolation for any demand in extra credit hours.

“Extra credit hours for DSS-D can be good, but I think credit hours cannot give me job after school. If I graduate and I am searching for job, I will bargain with my certificate but not how much credit I have. Perhaps extra credit can lead to bias in the content of the programs. That is, either more teaching in DSS-D or less in the social sector studies or the other way round, may be what can be done is to reduce our workload and give us what we need as diaconal workers.... I hope the program will meet my expectations in the long.”

6.3 The theology of diaconia and the ELCF

Taking into consideration of the course model and the instructions received by the different year groups, it was realized that, the participants were glad with the instructions received so far on diaconal theology and Lutheranism. Thus, reflection on the history of diaconia work from biblical perspectives and governments' role in social welfare towards love for one another and the promotion of social justice in the mediaeval days offers students much insight into diaconal work (*Refer to 3.1*). Additionally, reflection on the studies on reformation and Luther's critics on the egoistic attitude of the brotherhood for taken care of their members without the others forms part of the basis of understanding into the Lutheranism and its diaconal duties. Thus, understanding Lutheranism as an antidote to abuse of power and the egoistic nature of some officials in the early Catholic Church and to strive for a safety net for all people including the poor, beggars and the rich and the enhancement in faith and love.

6.4 The experiences

The experiences outline the summary of students perspective on the instructions received. From the participants' perspectives, the experiences were both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, the participants acknowledged the significance of direct lectures received at school. However, based on the different year groups of the participants, their practical experiences were not the same. Though responses from the interviews outlined placements, devotions, dss-d campus mass service and retreats as part the general practical experiences as shown in 5.0, fig 3, each of the year groups had a different experience. While a given year group has had all of the experiences mentioned above, others have had a few of them. Respectfully, the participants showed positive attitude towards the practical experiences they have had on the curriculum. However, it cannot be argued as to where the students' best learning experiences were gained (either theoretically or practically) since none of the year groups had not completed the entire course units.

7 EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The research work has been a great and an interesting experience. The process began and was intensified after the acceptance of the thesis proposal by my responsible lectures. This was followed by numerous discussions with friends, study mates, and some stakeholders of the DSS program towards a successful research study. Feedbacks and the assistance obtained from the prior discussions enabled me to limit the spectrum of my work to pursue my goal within the confines of the DSS-D program.

The mind map towards interviews and the data collections seemed to be flexible in the early stage of the study but turned to be challenging due to the target groups individual schedules and academic workloads. The data analysis section was a bit challenging due to the different experiences the interviewees had on the curriculum based on their levels and years of instructions received at school. However, responses from the interviews, regardless of the differences in participants' study paths were beneficial for a successful study. The interviewees therefore expressed concerns about what the program had for them ahead their studies since none of them had completed to program as of the time the study was conducted. This had an influence in finalizing the work since the entire study units had not been completed and the non-existence of any senior class for information about an experience into the entire program. As a result, I had to wait and get the final feedback on the course from the pioneer class before reporting. This made me apply my professional judgment and critical thinking abilities in reporting the interview responses.

8 CONCLUSION

Exploring the expectations and experiences of the DSS-D students of DIAK on their curriculum was mostly based on the futurological thoughts of the researcher. Hence to contribute in his own small way towards a curriculum that can be generative and productive for future social/diaconal students of DIAK (Uosukainen 2002, 106). Results of the study showed more of futurological aspirations based on the analysis of the present course units. Students show much anticipation for their spiritual and religious enhancements as well as the practicalities involved in the diaconal profession.

Though the curriculum has much to offer to students on spiritual and religious related issues in future, I think those are more personal and requires an individual decision. In one way or the other, the experiences on retreats and other spiritual seminars like the Ignatian spirituality seminar were in a way or the other to enable students strengthen their relationship with God and to remind them of their call as diaconal workers to be.

Based on the responses from the interviews, all the dss-d students were religious and spiritually oriented before their choice of the program. As a result, the necessary prerequisite skills needed for diaconal work in the initial part of the program can enable students have a taste of the practical diaconal work in placements before they assume full diaconal responsibilities in the labor markets after graduation. Students' skills and expertise in the labor market depends on the knowledge acquired from school. Henceforth, the practicalities in relation to this work is about the efficiency of the entire dss-d program and how it prepares students towards working in the contemporary society.

8.1 Recommendations

I have come to realize that the knowledge-hub of all educational institutions is its curriculum. It is the one that prepares both teachers and students for

academic and professional achievements in our contemporary world. It recognizes man's worldly challenges and tries to find solutions to them hence the need to evaluate existing ones to meet current human challenges. In the case of the DSS-D program and diaconal studies, I must admit that challenges in diaconal work is bit common and static despite cultural, religious and spiritual diversities. What is most important is for practitioners to be competent, versatile and ethically orientated.

During the course of the study, it was realized that the double qualification program requires extra efforts on the part of students towards the attainment of both social and the church sector specific degrees. It will therefore be convenient and a bit flexible for the church sector specific students, if the competencies of the diaconal social workers are inculcated into student's right from the onset of the study rather the last minute. Students were expecting the skills needed by the diaconal social worker early enough. This they thought could enable them put into practice during placements. The issue of more instructions on different religions was dismissed by the participants but rather advocated for more practical studies into the expertise of the diaconal social worker.

Accordingly, a participant mentioned that

“..... there is no need to emphasis more on other religions but a bit basis is enough. Now we are going to be social workers both in the church and in the contemporary society. What we need more is to discover our own spirituality and to have to skills to work as a deacon in the church...”

Among the students choice for the program was to develop and enhance both their religiosity and spirituality as a results the students advocated for the curriculum to help them to identify and enhance themselves both spiritually and religiously so as to enable them offer the necessary help clients who might request for spiritual and religious care during their practical studies at least before they exhaust all the six placements they undergo in school. According to some of the students, the Skills and Expertise of diaconal studies (SED) was

among the few courses that introduced them into the practicalities of the diaconal social worker but it comes somewhere in the later parts of their studies.

Being able to work in the ELCF and other faith based organizations as the only distinguishing factor between DIAK's social and church sector specific students, the DSS-D students only requires the practicalities in diaconal work as exhibited by Christ's ministry and if possible early enough prior to students intensive practical studies. It is therefore recommended that the stakeholders of the DSS-D program make a review into what kind of instructions is best for the increasingly social problems both in the church and in the circular society taken into considerations the task of the diaconal social worker. To them, merging some courses together can pave way to have more instructions on the practicalities in diaconal work like pastoral care, counseling, and others.

Additionally, it can be appropriate to make a review on the differences in the workloads of both social and church sectors specific studies. Thus, creating a balance in the workloads to march the 210 credit hours assigned for both sets of students.

8.2 Professional development

Exploring the expectations and the experiences of students on their curriculum has endowed me with versed knowledge in research studies. Though the study was limited to the church sector specific studies towards the recognition as a deacon in the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church, I also gained knowledge into the wider curriculum of DIAK's degree program in social services in relation to its structure and organization. The study was not into the teaching pedagogies but to examine whether curriculum objective are achieved at in the end of the entire program hence the exploration of students expectations and experiences alongside the study guide. I gained an experience into how students are motivated to study both internally and externally and the

pedagogical skills employed by teachers towards the achievement of their instructional objectives.

The interviews conducted during the research process enabled me to acquaint myself with qualitative research process and the necessary tools and preparations required for successful interviews both in academic studies and in the contemporary society. Although my professional experiences emanate from my first day in DIAK based on the practical nature of the studies, I will admit that this study has enhanced my group work and social relations skills. It has endowed with the respect for individual opinions, critical thinking in communicating my professional judgments and analysis to people regardless of sex, age, socio-cultural, spiritual and religious orientations of all individuals.

In summary, studying into a curriculum as a key to its development and enhancement is not an easy tasks but requires broader knowledge into the field of study. This task has enabled me to gather the necessary tools and independent working skills not only into curriculum studies but also in policies and other issues of social concern needed for human development and empowerment, thus; good interpersonal relations and the ability to think critically and constructively. Also, it has broadened my perception of nature and the ability to respond to people of diverse religions, spiritual and beliefs orientations and to offer the necessary help without any prejudice.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW

1. What is the reason/motivation behind your choice for dss-d?
2. What are your expectations from the study?
3. What are some of the experiences you had from the program?
4. What are your greatest learning experience?
5. How has the curriculum met your needs and expectation?
6. How would you like the curriculum to address spirituality, religion and multi-faith?
7. What do you think needs to be done about the dss-d program?
8. What would you recommend for the program?

APPENDIX 2: ABBREVIATIONS

DIAK	Diaconia University of Applied Sciences
DSS	Degree program in social services
DSS-D	Degree program in social services with an option in diaconia studies
DSS-c29, c31 & c33	Names of Diak's classes according to year groups
ELCF	Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland
LWF	Lutheran World Federations
SED	Skills and management of diaconia
WCC	World Council of Churches