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Integration of Transversal Skills into Social Work Higher Education

A Narrative Literature Review

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Abstract

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The purpose of this literature review was to find information about the competence and education of transversal skills in a social work context for the use of a Metropolia University of Applied sciences project, which aims to integrate transversal skills into social work education in Metropolia UAS and to develop teaching tools and methods for its execution. The source material consists mainly of research journals from 2015 to 2021. The scarce amount of material found concerning the topic could indicate that in general, social service students are expected to automatically behold sufficient transversal skills.

Transversal skills are character tied to an extent, but studies suggest that they can be taught and learned and that they should be taught in higher education institutions. Studies further suggest that when teaching transversal skills, various diversified methods should be used to cater all learning styles and to attain successful teaching results. Transversal skills can also be taught simultaneously with theory or field specific skills, and teaching ought to be diversified and multi-disciplinary methods should also be used. It is also important that students are informed about the aims, goals, and assessment in the study plan or syllabus beforehand. The question of whether socioemotional and interpersonal skills can be applied online, as a large part of social services tasks are conducted via the Internet, is also discussed. Studies further suggest that for example creative- and contemplative methods and human libraries could be used as methods for teaching transversal skills

Keywords: transversal skills, interpersonal skills, socioemotional skills, social work higher education

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1 Introduction

The labour market is in constant change and the job titles and duties that exist today will most likely change or even vanish in the future. According to Türken (2021), individuals should acknowledge the fact that with rapid changes in technology, in addition to human colleagues we may face the competition of robots. Therefore, individuals are greatly encouraged to cherish and elevate the skills that artificial intelligence cannot precisely copy, and these are for example transversal skills. Transversal skills refer to skills that are not particularly connected to any specific area or expertise but are needed in almost any profession. Unesco uses six example categories to differentiate transversal skills. These are critical and innovative thinking, interpersonal skills, intrapersonal skills, global citizenship, media and information literacy and others (Unesco.org, 2014).

In this narrative literary review, I will gather information about interpersonal and socioemotional skills competence and education in the context of social work for the use of a project *Integration of Transversal Skills into Healthcare and Social Care Higher Education and Curriculum*, conducted by Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. I will present up-to-date and recent material on the competence of these skills in social work setting as well as what type of education and teaching methods exists -concentrating mainly on two transversal skills and point out the results of these educational tools and methods.

As a resource I will use research articles which will only date back to 2015 for an up-to-date view. In addition to social work articles, I will use other articles in the health and welfare area as these areas of expertise are both customer-centered and holistic in the sense of human wellbeing and can be applied to social work setting to an extent.

2 Literary Review

This literary review is gathered for a project conducted by Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, with the title ITSHEC: Integration of transversal skills into healthcare and social care higher education and curriculum. The aim of the project is to help students of social- and healthcare to be able to adapt to the fast-changing pace of the contemporary working life by advocating the integration of transversal skills into the curricula and to innovate teaching tools and methods to facilitate this integration (Metropolia.fi, 2020).

There were 16700 students enrolled in Metropolia UAS in 2020, which makes it the biggest university of applied sciences, not only by student volume, but it also had the highest number of yearly applicants. Metropolia provides 71 degree programs of which 14 in English. (metropolia.fi, 2020) With the leading position in volume and in popularity, Metropolia ought to efficiently cater the needs of the labour markets being a visionary and a forerunner.

In the social- and health care field, students will have multiple different entities to work with. They will have co-workers and other staff at their own unit, others in the multi-professional service group that exist in the field, they will have clients from all realms of life, and they will interact and work with the close network of family and other important individuals such as other care takers in the clients' lives. This abundance of social communication and contact will require a more comprehensive understanding and competence of transversal skills such as interpersonal- and socioemotional skills.

The aim of this literary review is to gather information and insights about transversal skills teaching in higher education and how it is, so far implemented or could be implemented in the curricula. Because of the scarcity of information particular to social services education, studies and articles from other fields of higher education in general will be covered.

3 Information Collection

As sources I used research articles and journal articles from international social- and healthcare- and educational publications. I used the Metropolia UAS Metcat Finna, China and Ebscohost, where I searched with multiple different keywords and keyword combinations, so I could find not just specific social work articles, but also material, that could be applied to the social work context. I gathered articles from Science Direct, Elgar Online, ProQuest, ProQuest Central and Taylor and Francis online. In addition to this, I did search engine searches and looked through international magazines of social work and social work education. All the articles used were published in 2015-2021 (except one of which the release date is November 2014) for an up-to-date view.

4 Transversal Skills

In modern working life one of the key concepts that exists in conversations, requirements for positions, and in everyday work is soft skills or, in other words, transversal skills. These skills refer to those which are, as the latter title suggest, transferrable to other jobs or positions, as they do not include the technical or theoretical content of a particular position. They are mere the necessary skills which one needs to successfully work for example as a part of a group and with others. It can be debated whether in the social work context it is, in a way, quietly assumed that individuals who study to be social work professionals, would naturally possess these soft skill qualities, such as interpersonal- or socioemotional skills. Leon, (n.d.) states that soft skills are built into the expectations an employer or others have for a competent social worker. In addition to recognizing these skills in oneself and learning them in higher education or on the job, Arendt (2017) suggests that social work professionals should also be able to identify the variety of their soft skills and learn to portray them efficiently in CVs and other alliances. Arendt also states that in social work context, soft skills can be considered *hard skills*, profession specific and crucial to the work performed.

4.1 Socioemotional Skills

The term socioemotional skills, refers to a set of skills a person acquires starting from a very early age concerning self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD (n.d.) divides socioemotional learning into five domains which are task performance, emotional regulation, collaboration, engaging with others and open mindedness. Each of these five domains include subcategories to further describe domains and what they are set to include. For example, collaboration includes empathy, trust and cooperation and emotional regulation entails stress resistance, optimism, and emotional control. (OECD, n.d.)

4.2 Interpersonal Skills

Interpersonal skills are skills needed not only to work in social work setting, but in any work setting successfully. Leon (n.d) lists interpersonal skills to include those of the ability to work well with others, being able to manage a conflict, solve a difficult situation, being able to communicate efficiently, having proficient verbal and writing skills, being able to not take things personally and maintain objectivity, and the ability to accept and acknowledge one's own role in an unsuccessful situation.

5 Competence and Capacity

Today, Universities and other institutions of higher education gather individuals from all over the world. The transfer of staff and students brings diversity into the classroom, provides new viewpoints and additional information, but it also creates a great need for further flexibility and understanding which corresponds to efficient socio-emotional skills.

An empirical study was conducted in the Catholic University San Antonio of Murcia in Spain among students studying pre-school education and primary

school education, with collaborative learning. The meaning was to link the systematic and explicit incorporation of co-operative learning structures to develop competence in socio-emotional skills. The study was conducted before and after a course led with collaborative learning and its evaluation was conducted on the Likert scale from 1 to 5. Students were asked detailed questions with the headings of empathy, assertiveness, and consensus. The results of the study suggest that co-operative learning methodologies in a university setting increases students' socio-emotional capabilities. Empathy stood out as the most valued skill in the study. What is noteworthy is that the relatively high scores received in the study propose that students were able to recognize the improvement in their own skills and awareness. It was also pointed out, that these methods should be accompanied with continuous teacher training. (López-Mondéjar et al., 2016)

6 Transversal Skills in Higher Education

6.1 Studies Concerning Transversal Skills

As transversal skills are not specific or absolute theoretical information, there should be specialized conventions to measure the skill level of an individual concerning these skills or to measure whether a course or other educational tools and/or methods have increased the individual's knowledge on the topic. These studies or estimations are done for example with a pre-test – post-test combination and comparing the differences of the two.

The Developmental and Educational Psychology Department of University of Alicante in Alicante, Spain, conducted a randomized experimental study on whether emotional competence could be taught in higher education. The study by Pozo-Rico et al. (2018) consisted of the participation of 192 higher education students. The study was conducted using a three-modal methodological approach. The three methods were online-learning, traditional classroom learning and coaching, using an Emotional Intelligence Training Program. What was fundamental to this process was to identify the complexity of the

intelligences and talents that exists in a university student body. (Pozo-Rico et al., 2018)

The study emphasizes that even though emotional intelligence is about people, emotions and interactions, information and communication technology is an equally valid mode to enhance the acquisition of emotional competence to the more traditional modes. The Likert scale was also used to conduct a pre-test and a post-test on interpersonal intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, adaptation, stress management and mood. The classes that were included in the study were knowledge and commitment to e-learning work, exploration of skills and qualities, innovative ideas and critical thinking skills, verbal questionnaire and discussion, participation in the forum and joint elaboration of final conclusions. (Pozo-Rico et al., 2018)

The study revealed that significant improvements could be seen between the pre-test and post-test which indicates the success of the study module. The study was able to suggest that emotional competence can be taught in higher education and that the university environment provides an ideal climate for emotional growth with its varying learning methods. This study aims to exemplify this type of training at a high level of commitment in the curricula of contemporary universities. (Pozo-Rico et al., 2018)

Fuziah et al. (2019) conducted research about how Malaysian social work educators should move more towards soft skills in social work education. Social work education in Malaysia is a relatively recent area of expertise and in addition to hard skills, the aim is to acknowledge the importance of soft skills in social work training. The main tools to gain these skills in Fuziah et al. (2019) are listed as writing, speaking out, presenting, decision making and teamwork. These can be considered as relatively traditional tools with which soft skills can be practised and applied. In addition to these, the research suggests that a crucial point in enabling soft skills to be adopted by the students, is the example the educator provides. It is in key importance that the one who teaches these vital skills is highly skilled in them themselves for the students to adopt these

skills in teaching situations and to show how these skills are delivered into the working context. They suggest that a teacher should be a 'role model' when concerning soft skills. (Fuziah et al. 2019)

Despite the vagueness of the term "role model", Fuziah et al. bring out a valid point about the phenomenon of practicing what one preaches. The demand of the working life reaches the careers of the educators as well. Traditionally higher education institutions can be considered to rely on theory and specific information and skills, but the assessment or adopting of these teachable, but to a great extent character-tied skills as a requirement for educators may be too manifold to become a reality. Could or should the capabilities of teachers on transversal skills be evaluated and what would be the desired results be for the educator to be sufficient in them to teach them? The suggestion for now seems like something that can only be recommended.

6.2 Higher Education Curriculum Including Transversal Skills

There are other examples to solidify the importance of staff training. Teachers and educators may spend long times under an educational entity and focus on the theoretical side of teaching. If soft skills are not clearly defined in the curriculum, they cannot either be e.g., measured or assessed. Brady et al. (2015), provide the notion that even though educators are increasingly diversifying and adding new technology to enrich their curricula to receive better pedagogical results, there is evidence that despite the efforts, there are often issues such as capacities of the instructor, digital dualism where the online and offline are treated as two separate entities and having a cautious pedagogical reception to new technology.

A study conducted by the University of Craiova, Bitförs University and Nesna University College in 2014-2015 worked towards producing a practice guide as an auxiliary tool for the educational curriculum in social sciences and humanities, ensuring that personal and transversal skills were integrated in teaching, tutoring, coaching, and training, and to develop, foster and enhance

these competences for a better employability. The project acknowledged two beneficiaries: the students and the teaching staff. (proiecte.ucv.ro, 2015)

It is clarified in the Good Practice Guide produced by the study, how there should be e.g., specific courses focusing on transversal skills and the naming of the courses should be descriptive to entice the awareness of the learning needs of these skills within the students. If there are transversal skills studies during a course titled something else, the presence of transversal skills learning should be clearly stated in the syllabus. (Johanssón, 2015) Other tools to use are for example the flipped classroom, where the traditional order of lecture/teaching-homework order is flipped around, and the student comes to class prepared for the themes to come. Other examples are learning by developing, group work and peer to peer teaching. (Johanssón, 2015)

These methods are to increase a student's interpersonal skills by communicating, discussing, and solving possible issues emerged. These skills can be trained simultaneously while studying theory or other *hard skills*. Langa (2014) states that transversal skills are learned together with scientific or technical skills – explicitly with the use of multi-, inter-, or transdisciplinary methodologies or implicitly side by side with and in the context as a secondary effect to those technical and scientific competences.

Having a clearly defined aims in the curricula and naming the courses in a way that they, in advance, manifest what is to come during the course, will most likely assist students to be open about embracing and absorbing the information and practical practise concerning the topic. When a student knows the aims of a course or a study module, it is most likely easier for them to start processing on what they should learn during the course, therefore being able to reflect on the topics that arise. If one does not know what they are supposed to learn, the learning process can be considered incomplete.

By diversifying teaching methods and tools using for example the flipped classroom is an excellent way to cater different personalities and learning styles. By using various tools and methods educators can most likely increase

the possibility that each student will correspond well or above well to a method in class which is also fair for students. With transversal skills, variety is key, as communication skills are improved when students are subjected to different situations and different ways of working and studying.

In the curriculum of Bachelor of Social Services in Metropolia UAS study year 2019-2020, there are courses with titles that briefly visit the subject area of soft skills, such as Professional Communication and IT-Skills or Innovation project. It is stated in the course description, that for example with innovation project, the aim is to *use the student's personal skills and abilities to work and collaborate in multidisciplinary teams*. (metropolia.fi, n.d.) The aim is very useful and productive but can still be considered to lack the aim specifically described to enhance and improve these skills using certain methods. However, from the study year 2020-2021 onwards the latter course has been titled *Multidisciplinary Innovation Project*, which is more descriptive and further informs the students about the aims of the course.

Zhang (2017) brings out the idea of flipping the education system to be led by soft skills. Zhang suggests that classes should be switched around in a way that for example the subject areas would be soft skills and the hard skills would be the application areas. A class of conflict resolution class would go through history for example discussing wars or other historical conflicts, or mathematics could be applied in ways where students could provide solutions for problems with mathematical show of work. (Zhang, 2017)

The issues with flipping the education system could be for example the vagueness of understanding or intaking theoretical content. Also, there would be the need to assess the scale according to how and to what extent emphasis in the curriculum is placed on theoretical knowledge and teaching and to what extent on soft skills. However, the suggestion is still compatible with the results of other studies, which indicate that soft skills should be incorporated with all teaching.

According to Serpa and Jose (2018) there needs to be a curriculum that meets the requirements of the contemporary working life, where students face the micro, meso and macrosocial levels of communication. They state that the education paradigm is shifting from an informative academic preparation towards formative academic preparation and headed towards personal and professional development.

According to Serpa and Jose (2018), there needs to be a type of an overhaul in higher education curriculum. The expectations, regulations, formal, non-formal and informal learning, clear definitions on transversal competence and the curriculum and its implementation, the academic culture, the culture among educators, teaching processes which encourages the more active role of a student, new forms of technology and assessment and the institutions' relationships with its stakeholders all need to be changed for the higher learning institutions to be able to develop, promote and equip their students with efficient transversal skills. They also point out the occasional disparity in the expectations of students and employers concerning transversal competence.

Serpa and Jose (2018) suggest that higher education would adopt the constructivist paradigm as the main way to host the development of transversal competence with intentional and systematic applications which facilitate cognitive learning and its application in specific contexts. Learning methods should be diverse and include interactive campuses and learning spaces, external experiences, different learning styles of students i.a. There also needs to be a permanent co-operation with the labour market to ensure current needs of the working life and promotion for the graduates to engage in lifelong learning. (Serpa and Jose, 2018)

There can be difficulties, such as defining what is actually required and coordinating versatile learning methods and schedules. Serpa and Jose (2018) also highlight the importance of assessment. Points such as knowledge integration, feedback, reflection, metacognition, instrumentation, and agents are

to be taken into consideration in assessment if possible. Assessment should also be a learning opportunity and it should have a formative meaning.

Serpa and Jose bring out the need of higher education institutions to change a major part of their functions to be able to meet the needs of current working life and for transversal skills to be more efficiently implemented into higher education to steer towards cognitive learning. They name e.g., interactive campuses and learning spaces as needs which a contemporary higher education institution needs. Metropolia having a brand-new campus has already catered for students' needs in this sense. By providing different comfortable lounging areas and offering facilities ideal for group work, Metropolia supports students' development of interpersonal and socioemotional skills with areal design.

6.3 Methods and Tools to Cater Altering Learning Styles

As interpersonal- and socioemotional skills are both character-tied but can also be taught and learnt, it provides educators a conundrum and a possibility to take educating to far ends of the spectrum to gain results in learning these skills. Social work is an area where the importance of transversal skills can be considered even higher in importance than in many other positions or can be even described as a demand and expectation for a social worker to behold. Therefore, it can be assumed, that the training of these skills could or should also be taken a step further. Different methods in social work education could consist of those for example human libraries, different creative methods, contemplative practises, and interdisciplinary learning.

6.3.1 Human Libraries

Human libraries are a learning platform created in Denmark in 2000 and the main objectives are to enhance diversity and inclusion and fight prejudice (humanlibrary.org, 2021). Human libraries enable individuals to have conversations about mundane or difficult topics with people they would not necessarily otherwise converse with. This may help individuals to enhance their

interpersonal skills and increase their levels of empathy. Giesler (2020) proposes whether human libraries could have potential or be adapted in social work teaching to increase students' levels of empathy and to create intergroup dialogue between the participants

Higher education institutions naturally use e.g., guest lecturers, visitors, and experts by experience, but they are designed to be in the curriculum based on what they have knowledge about or are proficient in. Human libraries, however, have individuals from all realms of life, and they would not be aware that the "reader" to whom they are telling their story, would be a social services student, making the conversation in a way "real" and free of field-specific bias. The stories would be authentic and possibly difficult in nature, like the ones students will hear when venturing into the working field of social services.

Giesler (2020) used phenomenological research in his study, where the researcher identifies the fundamental nature of human experiences and the participants describe them, to discuss whether human libraries are a viable choice for social work education. Giesler acknowledged limitations such as bias, narrow take of participants and lack of generalizability, but with his findings he concluded that attending the human library experience offers unanticipated self-knowledge to the participants. The sessions mainly began with discomfort about the narratives and the weighted goal for awareness raising and education but evolved to a mutual dialogue supported by self-exploration and the story. (Giesler, 2020)

By talking to a stranger with for example a difficult life story, could be assumed to enhance students' skills in empathy, communication, and other socioemotional- and interpersonal competence. Many students do not necessarily have experience in facing people with difficult issues and one could assume that it would be beneficial for the students to listen and, in a responsibility free environment, to search and reflect their own emotions and feelings concerning what they hear and rehearse how to respond in an emphatic and sensible manner. Serpa and Jose (2018) mentioned external

experiences as part of a curriculum that meets the working life, and human libraries as a concept could be considered an external experience which is easily connectible to the social field.

According to Blakemore and Agllias (2019), social work students are frequently subjected to material, concepts, ideas, and expectations that can be confronting, uncomfortable or even feel threatening. Therefore, the social work curriculum should entail creative, supportive, and transformative methods and methodologies. (Blakemore and Agllias, 2019)

6.3.2 Creative Methods

Creative methods are used in social work education. For example, the curriculum of Metropolia UAS fosters courses entirely dedicated to the topic. Tarkiainen et al. (2021) have studied students' learning reflections when using fiction in social work education. The study suggested that students did find that using fiction in learning helped them to identify their own actions, non-actions and the use of language and power from new perspectives. Students found this type of exercise to be helpful when meeting clients with varying backgrounds and saw the analysis of fiction supporting their understanding of diverse situations in social work practise. Students also found out that reading fiction they could recognize feelings such as anger, amusement, frustration, resentment, second-hand embarrassment, and distress in themselves and correspond to their feelings and because of this emotion-evoking nature it is a good tool to improve e.g., empathy. (Tarkiainen et al., 2021)

With fiction, the writer or the producer gives a chosen amount of background information of the characters. When we consume fiction, we are aware that the story is made up and we are in a safe place to read it or watch it, whatever might happen in the story. When considering whether it would be useful for social issues to be discussed with the help of fictional characters and events, one can conclude that there are many aspects in favour of it. In the study by Tarkiainen et al. the fiction used was chosen for the students beforehand and the entire group used the same story. It could also be efficient that the students

were to choose a fictional story on their own and apply course topics to a story that they themselves find familiar, easy to understand or approachable. Child protection courses can ponder the life of Pippi Longstocking, an outgoing little girl living alone in a big house with her horse and pet monkey while her father is at sea for long periods of time, and what type of social services would her and her father need and apply the child protection protocol to the events in the story. Creative methods such as the previous example are used in Metropolia UAS, but one could claim that they should be used concisely and in multiple different courses alongside other outside-of-box methods. Famous pop culture stories are relatively familiar for majority of the students and while these cases dealt with a “familiar” client, the interpersonal and socioemotional skills of students can develop by learning and observing how other students see the situation and how they would deal with the situation and what choices they would make.

6.3.3 Contemplative Methods in Social Work Education

Wang et al. (2019) suggest the use of contemplative pedagogy in social work education. Wang proposes that methods like free writing, poetry, deep listening, yoga, meditation, and mindfulness warrant consideration to be used in social work education. These practices can be considered to be generative, creative, movement- or stillness-based, activist, relational and cyclical. Wang et al. (2019) state that contemplative methods used in teaching will help students to develop not only stress reduction and coping skills, but also skills for self-regulation. In addition, integrating these contemplative practices can enable to form a supportive and open environment for learning, which in turn can encourage students to be more willing to share and converse interpersonally and build effective communication skills. (Wang et al., 2019)

There is a note that these methods should be used as a supportive method in teaching and that these methods may face some tension in incorporating them into social work higher education. There may also be the issue of a comfort barrier the teacher and students may need to overcome if using these methods and possible religious affiliations should be left out when using the methods in a

higher education learning environment. The use of these methods should also be followed by feedback and support from the instructor. (Wang et al., 2019) Wang et al. cite Cournoyer (2013) in stating that self-awareness is a necessity in social work to understand and recognize one's own biases to not impose one's own perspectives on clients.

The use of contemplative methods in higher education may be subjected to some criticism, as some of the methods are, to an extent, affiliated with religious movements. However, with clear distinction from religious orientations, contemplative methods could be an excellent supportive tool to break the monotony of the more traditional teaching methods. One could argue, all the while trying not to generalize or encourage stereotypes, that these methods could be well suited for the Finnish mental landscape, as they provide room for solitude and time and space for infiltrating.

6.3.4 Interdisciplinary Learning

In social work, interpersonal and socioemotional skills are required to be elevated in a way. The pre-set need for social workers is that they should be able to communicate efficiently with clients, but also other professionals. It could be useful, that for example sosionomi students in universities of applied sciences would have joint study modules and group work with social work students from the university setting. If these two student groups, who work in proximity in the working field, would get academically and professionally acquainted during studies, it could help their interpersonal and socioemotional skills in the professional setting in the future. As transversal skills are universally important for everyone, these two degrees are so close in the working field that one could argue that they could study these skills together.

A study conducted in Indiana University in the United States studied cross-disciplinary learning with law- and social work students with a quasi-experimental non-equivalent control group design and used the interpersonal communication inventory for the pre- and post-tests. The aim was to find whether the students of these two practises would benefit from studying

interpersonal skills together, as they interact relatively often in the working life. Law students were the experimental group and social work students were the control group, and altogether 8 law students and 8 social work students took part in the study and the intention was to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional techniques and curricula. (Boys et al., 2015) The results corresponded the hypothesis and the law students gained a high increase in their interpersonal skills when taught and working alongside social work students. Despite the small scale of the study, Boys et al. (2015) state that the outcome can be seen to support future interdisciplinary educational collaborations.

This interdisciplinary collaboration by Boys et al. was chosen for an example due to it having a social work relation but the other party laying quite far from the social field in the Finnish context. This was to point out the importance of not only learning interpersonal and socioemotional skills in the framework of the degree programme of social services, but to demonstrate the need of cross disciplinary teaching to improve communication skills and understanding across different professions, as well as different client groups, within the framework of social- and healthcare. E.g., Langa (2014) also highlights the importance of using multi- inter- or transdisciplinary methodologies.

6.3.5 Encrypting Cross-cultural Communication into Transversal Skills in Social Work

Social work today is not just providing support for a homogenous group of peers belonging to the same cultural group. Immigration increases diversity not only in society in general, but also in the social work area. Stories and backgrounds may vary greatly from those we have heard before or can even imagine happening. When interacting with individuals with backgrounds that are very far out of our own cultural understanding, we need to be even more alert on how to express for example empathy or how to communicate effectively but sensitively.

6.4 Interpersonal Digital Skills in the Curricula of Higher Education

Blakemore and Agllias (2018) draw out a modern concern regarding social work and social media. The active use of these social mediums has led to concerns about how social media affects the skills, values, and behaviour of the current and future generations. Questions have risen on self-promotion, boundary violations, bullying and increased narcissism. The sphere of social media may have a special effect on professions like social work, where its mission, standards and collective identity contradicts with these concerns. (Blakemore and Agllias, 2018) These concerns brings out the notion of digital soft skills and their pervasiveness in both personal lives and professional lives.

Our personal lives and our working lives exist online to an extent. Although social services are traditionally or more often provided in a physical setting between the social worker and the client(s) it has yet become increasingly common, that certain parts of social services tasks and communication are conducted online. Mental health- and other chatrooms, communicating with client family networks, hosting meetings online are just examples on how social work is also happening over the Internet. There are different tools and programs to which a social work professional is obligated to document daily occurrences, aims, decisions etc. such as the Apotti-system used in most parts of the Uusimaa area in health care and social services. The question is, are the students and graduates' interpersonal and socioemotional skills digitally prepared? And are they easily adaptable or comparable?

Bastos et al. (2019) suggest that computing skills and understanding of artificial intelligence should be considered part of the skillset not necessarily particular to any profession but is needed in most of them. They refer to them as the digital soft skills. (Bastos et al., 2019) In social work and social work education interpersonal and socioemotional capabilities play a big role in communication online. The question is whether the same rules of these capabilities can be applied online as well as face to face. Online communication should also behold the same level of empathy and understanding as face-to-face discourse.

An exploratory study conducted in the University of Newcastle in Australia provided student insights on how social media affects empathy and other interpersonal skills. The study was conducted during a course of Interpersonal Skills for Professional Practice for second year students in the degree of Bachelor of Social Work. The permissions for the study and the collecting of data were conducted after the course ended, so the answers should not entail answers designed for research purposes but rather are self-reflections of students in class. 19 of 78 students gave their reflections for analysis.

(Blakemore and Agllias, 2019)

Blakemore and Agllias (2019) suggest, based on their study, that courses concentrated on interpersonal skills regarding face-to-face interaction ought to be composed in a way which would include material on social media use in a professional setting. In addition, they propose that using a variety of communication stimuli in teaching of interpersonal skills with application to social work practise comes with great advantage. Interpersonal skills courses are crucially important in understanding the processes of interpersonal communication from theoretical-, evidence-based, and ethical viewpoints.

(Blakemore and Agllias, 2019)

Blakemore and Agllias further state that it is beneficiary to use various and blended learning options which also allow teachers to develop online activities which provide students opportunities to practice these topics live. The findings of the study suggested that students found various and different activities stimulating and they started to learn how to link things that they were reading, hearing, and doing on the course. (Blakemore and Agllias, 2019)

It is important to discuss this issue of online soft skills, as the use of digital media is growing in a fast pace in the social field as well. As change takes time higher education institutions should most likely implement digital interpersonal and socioemotional skills and how they correspond to the traditional forms of these skills, as well as the more traditional skills for face-to-face interaction. If these skills are needed and are considered to be of high importance in face-to-

face communication, they most likely carry the same importance also in the digital environment. The Corona-virus pandemic highlighted the value of digital possibilities. Different services were switched online on the go and professionals and clients were left with a relatively new situation: looking at each other through a computer screen and trying to establish an ambiance similar with a live meeting.

7 Conclusion

Transversal skills seem to be relatively well acknowledged and defined as separate skills which can be partly character specific but can however be learned with practise. Yet, there is still a great need of unified tools of execution and estimation on how to implement transversal skills into higher education and from there to the working life. Social work professionals will work in multi-professional environments in a customer service position, where one needs to be able to maintain professional relationships with not alone professionals of different areas but also to communicate efficiently with customers who may have or most likely will have challenges in communication skills and do not use the same toolbox of skills one will learn in higher education. There seems to be a silent expectation, that individuals who seek to work in the social field would be automatically and naturally proficient in these skills. The scarcity of material concerning the topic would suggest the same.

Information concerning interpersonal- and socioemotional skills, or transversal skills in general, in social work education or in social work was difficult to find. The scarcity of the works available could in a way indicate the expectations concerning social workers and social work students mentioned in the above chapter. This point in particular highlights the importance of the need for further discussion about the matter. As the work of a social councillor consist, to a great extent, various types of encounters during the working day, transversal - or soft skills, should be considered as hard skills in the social field and they should be considered in the curriculum as such.

Studies about the topic focused mainly on implementing transversal skills in higher education in general, not necessarily in the framework of social services. The results are still applicable to social services. Whether the amount and/or extent of these studies should be vaster and more comprehensive should be considered. As socioemotional- and interpersonal skills are relatively holistic and superimposed with each other, and other skills as well, they were considered a part of a larger entity of transversal skills in this paper. As transversal skills include socioemotional and interpersonal skills, studies with the heading of transversal skills could be applied to this review.

The project *ITSHEC: Integration of transversal skills into healthcare and social care higher education and curriculum* aims to find ways to integrate these skills into the curriculum in social work education. This literary review presents studies concerning transversal skills and higher education and selected few examples on different learning tools and methods which could be used in social work education for the use of this project.

Studies presented in this paper suggested that evaluation and development of these skills is possible and that they should be implemented in the curricula of high education institutions. When there is a course where these skills are meant to be taught and learned, the goals should be clearly mentioned and defined in the course descriptions and if they are to be evaluated it should be mentioned. Transversal skills or soft skills are useful to learn together with hard skills. However, this may require more careful planning on behalf of the educator. Studies suggest that teaching methods should be diversified, and multi- inter- and transdisciplinary methodologies are recommended. Studies should be catered to all learning styles, and they should facilitate cognitive learning. When teaching and learning transversal skills, feedback and reflection are very important for a student to be able to assess their own learning.

Methods or tools that could be used in higher education institutions to enhance the competence of interpersonal- and socioemotional skills in social work students could be for example different creative methods, contemplative

methods, interdisciplinary learning, and human libraries. Some of these methods are already in use, but what is noteworthy that they should be given the value as a teaching method for transversal skills in the teaching plan and in the syllabus, rather than being an undocumented “fun” part to make the class a little less mundane or to break the monotony of theoretical content. They should be appreciated as tools to cater different learning styles and they should also be designed to be assessed and have clear learning goals and outcomes.

The need for considering online communication as a part of socioemotional- and interpersonal development was also presented in this paper. It is worthy to consider if the competence we learn in face-to-face communication is transferable to online communication and whether it is something that should be learned in concert with the more traditional soft skills.

Higher education curricula are tight and there may not be any excess teaching hours to use for additional learning concerning a topic as comprehensive as transversal skills, more precisely in this case, socioemotional and interpersonal skills. Therefore, learning of these skills should be attentively incorporated into most of the current courses and classes. As mentioned earlier in this paper, in the social field these transversal skills, or soft skills, are of equal importance to those described as hard skills which are field specific. Therefore, in the degree programme of social services, transversal skills should be penetrated into the curriculum much deeper than in other fields.

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