

**Paper proposal for workshop**

**Title:** Valuation of Understanding - from a Curriculum and a 'Didaktik' perspective

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## **Valuation of Understanding - From a Curriculum and a 'Didaktik' Perspective**

An important aim for the teacher in Higher Education is that students, in order to learn, achieve understanding in terms of being able to handle knowledge in a certain way. Understanding might, on the one hand, be seen as a cognitive phenomenon and therefore, valuation of understanding might be seen as a grading of cognitive levels. In this paper, on the other hand, focus will be on understanding as a phenomenon which is permeated with values of what good understanding might be. Understanding is to be discussed as a phenomenon which in its definition is relative to the paradigm of educational thinking in which it is embedded. Valuation of understanding conforms to how understanding is defined. The concept of 'valuation' is applied in this paper instead of 'assessment' due to a focus on judgment of students' performances as an everyday teaching practice in higher education. Furthermore, valuation is applied to emphasize the content of values in acts of judgment (Dewey 1988). Judgment of students' performances in terms of finding signs of understanding is an important tool for the teacher which might be used for giving feedback to students and to adjust the way of teaching.

A teacher's intentional act of teaching, where the teacher tries to help students to achieve understanding, is influenced by values and ideas of what it means to understand, and what kind of actions students are to carry out, and what kind of learning processes they are to go through in the process of understanding. In this sense the teacher has an ideal, which might be more or less explicit, of the structure of understanding the student should achieve. The student's understanding, on the other hand, might be influenced by the way the teacher defines understanding and therefore, the teacher's ideals of understanding might become part of the self-education and the self-understanding of the student (Gadamer 2001).

Paradigms of valuation of understanding in higher education will be viewed from two perspectives: An anglosaxon curriculum studies tradition and a Central and Northern European 'didaktik' tradition (Gundem and Hopmann 2002). The thesis is that understanding within these paradigms might be described by different images of understanding movements which express different ideals of structures of understanding. Due to these different ideals of structures of understanding valuation of understanding might be different. The difference between these two paradigms are to be discussed with specific reference to how these different ideas of ideals of structures of understanding might influence valuation of understanding and how valuation of understanding has consequences for teaching and learning. Furthermore, the way valuation of understanding is conducted might have consequences for the formation of students with respect to

how they learn to deal with disciplinary knowledge during the study period and after qualification because understanding, as a kind of knowledge acquisition, is interwoven with the ethical formation of the student (Herbart 1914).

The different ideals of structures of understanding and images of movements in the process of understanding within the two traditions, exemplified by W.Klafki and J.Biggs respectively, might be described as follows.

1. The ideal of structure of understanding within the didaktik tradition might be described as a historical hermeneutical *backwards and forwards movement* alternating between wholeness and parts due to a definition of understanding as a clarification and investigation of historical conditions and underlying structures ( Klafki 2002). Furthermore, Klafki describes understanding with the concept ‘categorical formation’(‘Kategoriale Bildung’) (Klafki 1996) in terms of *openness* as a kind of double-sided openness to reality. Understanding, in the sense of categorical formation, is from the perspective of the subject to be aware of and to experience the general or categorical content in the objective reality (Klafki 1996 p.144). Taxonomies are not part of the tradition due to an emphasis on the *dialectical and circular* movement in learning, teaching and understanding.
2. The ideal of structures of understanding in the curriculum tradition might be described as a *linear and hierarchical movement* where elements of the curriculum are learned on different levels according to the levels in for example the SOLO-taxonomy (Structure of the observed learning outcomes) (Biggs 2007). Furthermore, understanding might be valued and assessed by grading performances of understanding in terms of intended learning outcomes where Biggs describes different levels of understanding by graded lists of verbs like: identify, compare, reflect etc. The categorization is inspired by Bloom’s revised taxonomy. A *staircase* might be an image for the tradition due to the model Biggs applies to illustrate ‘A hierarchy of verbs ‘that may be used to form intended learning outcomes’ (Biggs 2007 p.79). The intended structure of understanding is primarily a *forward and upward movement* due to a non-historical approach to the content of learning. Taxonomies are an important part of the tradition due to an emphasis on understanding as outcomes.

This statement of the difference between the two paradigms/traditions is to be discussed with specific reference to how different images of understanding and resulting valuation of understanding might influence understanding, learning and formation of students.

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