

***Life Orientation for Professionals
A Narrative Inquiry into Morality and Dialogical Competency in
Professionalisation***

The underlying normative question in this research is ‘What is good professionalisation?’. The perspective in this study to answer this question is the attention for personhood formation. Different contributions from the humanities have stated that personal development should be an integral element in education and professionalisation. The question is how we translate this assertion into daily practice. The claim of this research project is that (normative) professionalisation is a mode of worldview education, which has morality and personal positioning regarding ultimate life questions as its core. In professionalisation, this personal positioning is part of moral and existential learning processes. Our claim and the urgency for researching practices of personal development in professionalisation result in the following general research question ‘What is the meaning and contribution of a personal life view articulation to professionalisation?’

As a result of our conceptual study, we propose to replace the static ‘worldview’ for the processual concept of ‘life orientation,’ which we define as:

An existential positioning process pertaining to the meaning of the human being, the world, and the meta-empirical, directed towards the horizon of the good life.

This processual concept addresses an inclusive perspective on human being and includes the dialogical dimension of meaning-making. As professionals, people have to decide what is good to do in a specific situation. This decision-making is inherently dialectal because a decision has to be taken for which all bear a shared responsibility. The philosophies of Taylor and Ricoeur on the relationship between narrative, morality, and the self were important insights to describe how life orientation and professionalisation are related to each other. The definition of normative professionalisation specifies the process of life orientation:

Normative professionalisation is an (inter)subjective dialectical reflection on the quality of the professional’s practice in connection with the societal context, from the dialogical perspective of a personal life orientation.

The educational context of this research is a half-year university minor programme in *Philosophy. World Religions. Spirituality*. For this programme, we developed a list of facilitating questions to support students in articulating their life orientation. We collected 68 narratives that students developed during the minor and during their juniorship period. For the analysis of these documents, we drew on the dialogical self theory to develop two narrative analysis instruments that enabled us to describe the development in articulation as well as the integration of a life orientation into professionalisation.

The analysis resulted in a description of seven typologies that show how ‘ambivalence’ functions in students’ articulations of their life orientation. The students’ descriptions show differences in development regarding articulating new positions, integrating new insights, and reflecting on the relationship between life orientation and professionalisation.

The main conclusion is that education through life orientation stimulates moral and existential learning processes into professionalisation. This education improves the dialogical competency and the awareness of personal positions. In differing degrees, students need time to articulate their personal positions, to explore different positions and to integrate their new perspectives into their professionalisation.

Education through life orientation should be integrated in the general curriculum, instead of regarding this education as a sort of add-on. Teachers must be vigilant that reflections as part of a moral and existential learning process do not turn into an instrumental approach of professionalisation. Students develop differently in these reflections, which requires a teacher's approach that regard every single student's life orientation as a unique narrative relevant for a personal professional development.