

The Pedagogy of Dialectical Inquiry

Marika De Ruiter , L.-M. Van Klaveren , S.m. Peerdeman , J.a.m. Bramer , S.m.e. Van Der Burgt

Amsterdam Umc University Of Amsterdam, Netherlands

Abstract

In complex healthcare systems, health professionals face many uncertainties. To equip the future workforce, higher education must train health professional students how to navigate dynamic clinical environments. These social-cultural settings are characterized by a multiplicity of values and perspectives. Although working in the healthcare system requires coping unordered situations, students in the health professions are still predominantly trained within ordered domains. Such an instrumental approach to teaching - based on the principles of outcome based education - is insufficient for fostering the competence to attune with dynamic socio-cultural practices. In contrast, a dialogical pedagogy of dialectical inquiry can facilitate students to grow into metastable attunement and transformative agency. Dialectical inquiry is a critical practice utilizing critical dialectical discourse. However, teaching and learning based on dialectical principles is not common practice in higher education. This competence is deeply rooted in dialectical modes of reasoning. To explore if and how health professional educators utilise this meaningful reasoning style while guiding undergraduate students, a cross-sectional collective case study was employed. Through a coding system based on Cultural-Historical Theory and Critical Dialectical Realism, deductive and in-depth analysis revealed that educators predominantly focused on task-performance using instrumental formal reasoning. Dialectical inquiry was constrained to contextual comments and reasoning on present processes. Attention to interrelations, emergence over time and leadership agency was virtually absent. This qualitative study demonstrated the urge for faculty development in dialectical inquiry to train the future health workforce in coping uncertainties, balancing conflicting demands and appreciating a multiplicity of values and perspectives.

Keywords: Research, Dialectical Inquiry, Pedagogy, Critical Practice

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