Mobilising a Confessing Technology and Techniques in Vocational Teaching and Assessment

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to problematise how confession operates as a technology that shapes and fosters subjects within vocational education. By rehearsing parts of Foucault's genealogy of confession as emerging among the Stoics and within Christianity, an in-service training program for care workers within elderly care is analyzed. Learning conversations and log-books are identified as confessional techniques through which care workers come to know who they are. These techniques work through the freedom of those they target and thus these techniques need to be problematised

Introduction

[T]he confession became one of the West's most highly valued techniques for producing truth. We have since become a singularly confessing society…Western man has become a confessing animal (Foucault 1998, p. 59).

One of the main arguments by Foucault (1998) is that verbalization has become a central way through which people make themselves visible to themselves and to others, and through this, people come to know who they are. In his writing, psychoanalysis is used as an example of how previous Christian practices of confession have become appropriated by a secular *scientia sexualis* (Foucault, 1998) which have spread to most aspects of private life. Confession in this way of speaking does not specifically limit itself to the confession taking place in church, but it also signifies the most private and intimate relations we have with our lover, family, friends, and with ourselves. Confession has become scientized. Within vocational education and education in general such scientization has taken the form of different pedagogies aimed at activating pupils. For example, through the use of reflective practices which that become a conspicuous part of education and work life. Not least in the wake of the publication of Donald Schöns (1983) book *The Reflective Practitioner*, published in 1983. Much research on reflection and reflective practices has been conducted, and there is no room here to rehearse these. Shortly, one could say that there is much research that focus on improving educational practices through the use of reflection (cf. Larrivee, 2008; Van Manen, 1995), while others argue that reflection and reflective practices needs to be problematised as part of how governing operates in the present (cf. Erlandson, 2005; Edwards & Nicoll, 2006; Fejes, 2010).

This article aims to connect to the latter strand of research by firstly outlining a genealogy of confession as it emerged among the Stoics and with Christianity based on Foucault's writing (1983, 2003a, 2005). Secondly, by analysing how reflective practices are mobilised by vocational teachers in an in-service training programme for care workers within elderly care in Sweden. As a basis of the analysis, two different kinds of material are used. Firstly, I turn to the writing of Foucault as a way to provide a theorization that can be used to interpret contemporary practice of confession. Secondly, I draw on interviews conducted within a research project concerned with elderly care work. The interviewees were all involved in an in-service training programme aimed at increasing the level of formal competencies among employees at elderly care homes. By recognizing health care assistants (HCA) prior learning in relation to the certificate from the health care programme at upper secondary school in

Sweden they would be able to become licensed practical nurses (LPN). One of the central ideas of the programme was to use reflective practices as a means of assessing prior learning. Six nursing homes for elderly people participated in this programme. All six managers, five of the six supervisors and five vocational teachers were selected for interviews. Further, one third (26) of the participants were interviewed. The sample consisted of a total of 42 persons. In total, 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted where the aim was to see how the interview persons perceived their participation and work within the framework of the programme. 20 interviews were conducted with only one interview person at a time, and 10 interviews were conducted with 2-5 interview persons together. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed.

Foucault and confession

In this section, I will present parts of Foucault's (1983, 2003a, 2005) genealogy of the care of the self with a specific focus on the genealogy of confession. A genealogy questions the constant search for origins and beginnings, or for truths about human nature. It questions the search for essence or stability. The starting point is rather to destabilise and question the taken-for-granted ways we think and go about doing things in the present. It acknowledges that histories are not objective, and that the authors cannot detach herself from the discourses in which she is part. As argued by Taylor (2008) "Genealogy is also autobiographical in that it is always given from the perspective of the author, betraying her biases. The difference [compared to totalizing histories] is that genealogy recognizes and even affirms this situated perspective – genealogy is self-consciously and overtly political" (Taylor, 2008, p. 5). Authors provides one possible story to tell about our present, and such story aims at illustrating how the present is not a logical effect of the past. The present is rather an accidental construction made up of diverging elements with different historical trajectories. The focus of the genealogist is to trace the decent and emergence of those ideas that make up the taken-for-grantedness of the present, so as to disrupt, question and destabilise the present and thus get people to "'no longer know what to do', so that the acts, gestures, discourses which up until then had seemed to go without saying become problematic, difficult, dangerous (Foucault 1991, p. 84)" Such ambition is political as the aim is to open up a space to change in practices that seems to be immutable. This does not mean that the genealogist is aiming at providing another universal truth or meta-narrative of the present, or to define what is good or bad. It is rather an ambition to provide alternatives. As Foucault argues:

My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism. (Foucault 1983, p. 231-232)

The theme of confession emerged in the later writings of Foucault (2005) where he started to focus on ascetic practices of self-formation. 'Ascetic' means 'the subject's attainment of a certain mode of being and the transformations that the subject must carry out on itself to attain this mode of being' (Foucault, 2003b, p. 36). Here, it is not about the liberation of the "true" self, as this would mean that there is a hidden self which can be found through practices of liberation. Instead, it is about ontology – processes of self-formation – of becomings (cf. Besley, 2005). Therefore, the interest is directed at practices of self-formation and becomings. For such an analysis, Foucault conducted a genealogy of confession and the care of the self by turning to the Greco-Roman period and to the emergence of Christianity (Foucault, 2005). In the following, I will firstly present the idea of care of the self as construed during the Greco-Roman period, especially focusing on the Stoics. Secondly, I will present the emergence of

confession within Christianity, and thirdly, contemporary practices of confession will be problematised.

Care of the self during the Greco-Roman period

During the Greco-Roman period, care of the self became a universal philosophical principle. To care for the self was to make life into an object of an art – a tekhne – it was about existence. Here, care of the self became care of the soul, but only insofar as it was the care of the activity, not the soul as substance. For example, among the Stoics, life as an art was about retiring into the self and staying there. The aim was to develop good values in life, not to develop these values aimed at a life after death as later on in Christianity. Writing became an important technique in such an endeavour. Taking notes on oneself, about the activities of the day, to be reread, and keeping notebooks, was a way 'to reactivate for oneself the truths one needed' (Foucault, 2003a, p. 153). Through such writing, the subject becomes an object of writing activity, which indicates that this trait (writing) is not a modern one. According to Foucault (2003a), writing is one of the most ancient Western traditions. However, this kind of activity is not about knowing oneself and to find the truth about onself as in Christianity. Instead, it is about finding the truths one needed to turn life into an art of existence.

With writing activity, an examination of conscience emerges. For the Stoics, this had to do with self-examination of what good and bad one had done during the day. However, one was not looking for bad intentions, as later on in Christianity. Faults were simply good intentions left undone. Here, the person became the administrator of her/himself and looked at what she/he had done correctly with the aim of finding lack of success instead of finding faults. Errors concerned strategy, not moral character. The goal was to find out how one can be successful in one's intentions, not to excavate guilt as in the Christian confession. Among the Stoics, it was not about discovering the truth in the subject but of remembering the truth, recovering a truth that had been forgotten. The subject does not forget her/himself, but she/he forgets the rules of conduct, what ought to be done. The recollection of errors committed measures the gap between what has been done and what should have been done. 'The subject constitutes the intersection between acts that have to be regulated and rules for what ought to be done' (Foucault, 2003a, p. 157). As I will illustrate later on, this is different from Christianity, where the focus came to be on thoughts – it was about verbalizing and making visible one's own sins.

Besides the technologies of writing and self-examination, there was a third Stoic technique for the care of the self - askesis. Askesis was 'not a disclosure of the secret self but a remembering' (Foucault, 2003a, p. 158). The truth is not to be found within the self, but in the teachings of the master. What one hears is memorized and turned into rules of conduct. The aim here is a subjectivation of truth. In Christianity, asceticism instead refers to a renunciation of the self and reality as a way of finding another level of reality. Connected to askesis are exercises, which test whether the person is prepared to confront events with the truths he has assimilated. Melete was meditation which, through dialogue with one's thoughts, anticipated real situations. Meditation tested your preparedness for different situations in life. Gymnasia, 'to train oneself' (Foucault, 2003a, p. 159), on the other hand, is physical exercise in real situations. It could be about 'sexual abstinence, physical privation and other rituals of purification' (Foucault, 2003a, p. 159), which had the aim 'to establish and test the independence of the individual with regard to the external world' (Foucault, 2003a, p. 159).

In summary, we can see how the Stoics construed care of the self as an activity which requires listening and remembering of rules. Such activities are a way of preparing for life as an art. Technologies of writing, self-examination and askesis are used as a way of caring for the self, which, in turn, is to train oneself for life. As will be illustrated in the next section, such techniques were also important in conjunction with the emergence of Christianity, although they were different.

Christianity and the emergence of confession

With Christianity, as it emerged in the 3rd and 4th Century AD, the care of the self was reconceptualised. It was no longer about creating the self as an art – as existence. Now, everyone has a duty to know who she/he is, to search oneself and acknowledge one's faults, recognize temptations, to locate desires, etc; and one needs to disclose these things either to God or to others in the community, and thus bear public or private witness against oneself (Foucault, 2003a, p. 162). Among the Stoics, the problem of aesthetics concerned existence. Through the emergence of Christianity, the problem of aesthetics became linked to the question of purity. The reason for taking care of your self was to keep your self pure. Physical integrity rather than self-regulation became important. The self was no longer something to be made (art of living) but something to be renounced and deciphered. In Christianity, writing becomes a test which 'brings into light the movements of thought, it dissipates the inner shadow where the enemy's plots are woven' (Foucault, 1983). In other words, here, it is about finding the truth about one's self as a way of accessing the light, which is accomplished by making visible one's inner thoughts – disclosing one's self. Previously, writing was about constituting the self by writing down the truths of the masters, and by keeping notebooks of deeds of the day, which were then meditated on.

Disclosure of the self was during early Christian times conducted through the ritual of exomologesis – which 'was a ritual of recognizing oneself as a sinner and penitinent' (Foucault, 2003a, p. 162). The bishop was asked to impose upon the individual the status of a penitent. This act in relation to the bishop was not a confession, only a ritual where the status of a sinner is made public and confirmed. Thus, exomologesis is a status, rather than an act. The sinner was then, over a period of several years, required to make visible her/his sins through self-punishment, suffering, shame and humility. Here, we can see how what was private among the Stoics (meditating about the activities of the day), have become public. Through the ritual of exomologesis, the sinner erases her/his sins and restores the purity acquired through baptism, at the same time as her/his status as a sinner is confirmed. This paradox of confirming the status as a sinner and erasing one's sins at the same time was most commonly explained by the model of death, torture and martyrdom. With this model, the sinner would die rather than abandon her/his faith. She/he illustrates that she/he is able to renounce both life and the self.

During the fourth century, exagoreusis emerged as another technology for the disclosure of the self. Exagoreusis has to do with self-examination related to two principles of Christian spirituality: obedience and contemplation. Obedience for the monk was total obedience to the rules and the master, in comparison to the instrumental and professional relationship between the master and the disciple among the Stoics. In exagoreusis, every act conducted without the permission of the master is seen as a theft. This was about the sacrifice of the self, of the subject's own will, which is a new technology of the self. 'The self must constitute itself through obedience' (Foucault, 2003a, p. 165). The second aspect is contemplation which is seen as the supreme good. It is the obligation of the monk to turn his thoughts continuously to

that point which is God and make sure that his heart is pure enough to see God. The goal is permanent contemplation of God. This contemplation is directed towards present thoughts, not on past actions of the day as with the Stoics. The monk needs to scrutinize his thoughts to see which ones are directed towards God and which are not.

Thus, we can see how self-examination has been construed differently with the emergence of Christianity compared to the Stoics. Among the Stoics, self-examination concerned the way our thoughts relate to rules and to our actions of the day. Among the Christians, the examination of self was focused on the relation between hidden thoughts and an inner impurity. 'At this moment begins the Christian hermeneutics of the self with its deciphering of inner thoughts. It implies that there is something hidden in ourselves and that we are always in a self-illusion that hides the secret' (Foucault, 2003a, p. 166). As a way of making this kind of scrutiny, we 'must care for ourselves, to attest to our thoughts this kind of scrutiny' (Foucault, 2003a p. 166). There is only one way this discrimination between good and bad thoughts can be made: 'to tell all thought to our director, to be obedient to our master in all things, to engage in the permanent verbalization of all our thoughts' (Foucault, 2003a, p. 166). Confession can thus be seen as a mark of truth and it allows the master to discriminate between good and evil. Even if the master does not say anything, 'the fact that the thought has been expressed will have an effect of discrimination' (Foucault, 2003a, p. 167).

As has been illustrated, there is a big difference between exomologesis and exagoreusis. But, what they both have in common is that one cannot disclose without renouncing. In exomologesis, 'the sinner must "kill" himself through ascetic macerations…disclosure of the self is the renunciation of one's own self' (Foucault, 2003a, p. 167). In exagoreusis, one constantly verbalizes oneself and obeys one's master, thus one is renouncing one's will and one's self. Foucault (Christianity and confession) describes exomologesis as the "ontological temptations of Christianity" and exagoreusis the "epistemological temptation of Christianity". While the former was positioning the ontological being of a person as a sinner, the latter position her as in constant search for self-knowledge (cf. Taylor, 2008). The practices of exomologesis and exagoreusis continued until the 17th century. However, as Foucault (2003a) argues, the relation between the disclosure of the self and the drama of verbalized renunciation of the self is important throughout Christianity. But today, he argues that verbalization has become the most important one.

From the eighteenth Century to the present, the techniques of verbalization have been reinserted in a different context by so-called human sciences in order to use them without renunciation of the self but to constitute, positively, a new self. To use these techniques without renouncing oneself constitutes a decisive break. (Foucault, 2003a, p. 167)

In this section, I have illustrated how care of the self in Christianity becomes a renunciation of the self. The aim was for the self to become pure which was accomplished through techniques of disclosure (either dramatic or verbalized) and renunciation of the self. Power operates through these techniques, where the subjects is both being positioned and, at the same time, positioning her/himself as a sinner and as a "good" Christian. Thus, confession emerged as an important technology of the self in Christianity, which was later taken up and re-shaped with the emergence of the human sciences. With the human sciences, a different kind of rationality of governing emerges that aims to shape and foster subjects who, at the same time, are being governed and who governs themselves and others – the conduct of conduct (Fejes & Nicoll, 2008).

Reflection and reflective practices within vocational education

The aim of presenting Foucault's genealogy of the care of the self has been to create a starting point for problematizing contemporary confessional practices related to reflection and reflective practices as mobilised within vocational education. In the in-service training programme analysed, two confessional techniques were identified that shapes and fosters subjectivity; Learning conversation and log-books. These techniques draw heavily on ideas about reflection as something good that will enhance learning.

Learning conversations

Learning conversations were a central pedagogic practice used in the training programme as a way of developing the HCAs' abilities to reflect on their work experiences. These were designed in the following way: five to eight HCAs participated in a one-hour seminar led by a teacher or a supervisor. At the beginning of the seminar, the teacher or the supervisor raises a problem of current interest that is faced in the nursing home. Each person is then invited to reflect on this for five to ten minutes and to take notes about their reflections. This is followed by an invitation to share their reflections with the rest of the group. After each person has shared his/her reflections, a discussion takes place. During these learning conversations, there is also a passive person present (one of the supervisors or teachers who is not leading the seminar), who takes notes about the discussions. At the end of the seminar, she/he provides a reflection on the similarities and differences of experience and opinions raised during the discussions. The main aim of these conversations was to engage the HCAs in reflection about how to develop the work practice, at the same time as they were part of the process of being assessed in relation to the curriculum of the health care programme. The ambition was also to implement these conversations as a tool that the nursing homes would use in the future as part of developing the quality of care provision and the competencies among its employees. The focus on the experiences and reflections from the HCAs is emphasized by one of the supervisors in the following quotation where she describes her role as seminar leader:

The important thing is to be neutral in the discussions, at the same time as being active. That is my role during learning conversations. Then it is not about my opinions and beliefs but about what other believes and thinks, and to raise their knowledge and make it visible. And that is what I believe we have – that kind of strength. I'm very grateful to have learnt this technique of learning conversation. (Megan).

In such a mobilisation of learning conversation, reflection is construed as a desirable activity that should produce better care work and nursing practice. As we can see, reflection is also construed as desirable both in groups and by individuals themselves, as each individual needs to prepare by him/herself at the beginning of the seminar, and they need to make visible their reflections in relation to other individuals' reflections. Such reflective practice is seen as making it possible to discuss and solve problems faced at work. The idea is that people can learn from each other and learning conversations are seen as a tool that can enhance the work practice in the future, as explained by one of the managers:

I was thinking, that in some way you could – through supervision, through these techniques - through them create those opportunities for the reflection we often lack. With a deeper cultivation of these questions which are problematic – questions that we have here everyday at our nursing home. It is a way of raising the issues…the knowledge which is actually here already. Instead of searching for it outside. (Miriam)

Here, the idea is to use the knowledge already available at the nursing home, i.e. the knowledge that the care workers already have. As a way of using such knowledge, it needs to be made visible, and learning conversation is one practice where this happens. Through such reflective practice, the individual is encouraged to contribute his/her knowledge – to confess

to others. By making one's knowledge visible, by disclosing themselves to others, the HCAs are objectified and made visible for scrutiny and assessment, i.e. they make their experiences available to others to engage with. The process is constitutive, by the act of reflecting the HCA becomes constituted as a reflective practitioner.

What we can see is a situation where we have those doing a verbal confession (everyone, at least those who are speaking) and those who are the confessors (everyone who is listening). The person doing the confession and the confessor are thus the same person. Through the working of power, participants are positioned as in need of confessing to a wider audience at the same time as they are the confessor to others. Thus, here we have a situation of public confession, where one directs the confession towards "real" others. However, there is always the possibility, through the act of freedom, to decide not to make the confession public, either by refusing to speak or to say something else that differs from what had been noted at the beginning of the session. But by making the confession public, the participant is internalising the norm at the same time as she/he is positioning her/himself as a "good" example of how to behave. Thus work is being done upon the self and upon others – a conduct of conduct. Drawing on a governmentality perspective inspired by Foucault, here, subjectivity is not determined but rather elicited, fostered and shaped (cf. Fejes & Nicoll, 2008).

We can see similarities with the Christian confession, as described by Foucault, in its focus on disclosure through verbalisation and the public nature of the confession. However, in the practice analysed here, there is not only one master (the priest or monk) to whom one needs to confess; instead, everyone has become a master in the sense that they are positioned as subjects who can discern good from bad and who represent the norm. I.e. as we can learn from each other, the correct knowledge is somewhere to be attained among ourselves.

Log-books

All the HCAs participating in the programme was encouraged to write a log-book, where they took notes about how they perceived what they were doing during the programme. It could be any reflections they had, and they were not required to share the log-books with anyone else. As expressed by one of the teachers:

We encouraged them to write a log each week. Just to write what they think about the past week, personal things. (Sandy)

However, if you had any idea or thought in your log-book that you wanted to raise in one of the seminars, that was OK. It was up to you to raise issues or not. One of the supervisors explains the uses of the log-book:

We have a log-book that everyone should take notes in. And if someone believes they have written something good or if they have any queries about, then they can raise that during our sessions…there are questions in the log book that you can. Or, think! Thoughts, so you can think really. Write your thoughts in the log-book concerning things you can do to pay attention to your own way of communicating and collaborating in the job. So, then you need to think and then write. (Helen)

What is emphasized is the individual's aptitude to reflect about her/his own progress in the training programme or any other issue related to her/his process. Through the log-book the HCA is encouraged to take responsibility for her/his own learning – something made possible through individual reflection. Here, the log-book is mobilised as a confessional technique in which the HCA verbalizes her/himself in relation to her/himself. You are expected to write a log-book with 'personal things' and about 'your own way of communicating'. What is written

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is not expected to be read by anyone else if one does not wish to raise any issue from one's own log-book. In this sense, it is possible to say that such a confession is a private one, i.e. there is no public others to whom we need to confess. Instead, the log-book activates ourselves as confessors where we need to scrutinise ourselves in relation to the work tasks and our own behaviour. However, when we confess ourselves to ourselves, there is always a virtual other present, i.e. a norm in relation to which we assess and judge ourselves, our thoughts and our actions. The virtual other takes the role of the master or the priest – to compel us to speak (reflect on) the truth about ourselves and to interpret and assess such truth in relation to the norm. The log-book is thus part of a wider discourse on learning and governance, where the desirable norms produce subjects at the same time as they are reproduced by the HCAs (subjects) themselves. Writing the log-book is about writing the self – of becoming a new and improved self.

Here, we can see some similarities with the practice of writing among the Stoics. Log-books are used here by HCAs to take notes on themselves and about the activities of the day that could then be reread. Among the Stoics, keeping notebooks was a way 'to reactivate for oneself the truths one needed' (Foucault, 2003a, p. 153). In both cases, there is a focus on action according to the rules that can fulfil good intentions. By taking notes about what action was good and what intentions were not fulfilled during the workday and during the training programme, the HCA can reflect on those actions, and change her/his behaviour and conduct her/himself in a better way next time. However, if the truths needed among the Stoics were directed at knowledge that could help turn life into an art – a tecknhe, among the HCAs as described here, the aim is to change themselves in order to enhance the work practice, thus knowledge needed is limited to the 'a consideration of the relationship between the outcomes, evidence and knowledge held as resources' (Edwards & Nicoll, 2006, 128). Accordingly, there are different kinds of knowledge's positioned as important.

Log-books also have similarities with the practice of writing among the Christians, an aspect that makes them different from the Stoics. Writing among the Christians was a way of finding faults in the self, and then making this public to a confessor as a way of distinguishing good thoughts from bad ones and making oneself pure. In the training programme, the log-books also have a function of disclosure, although not as strongly as the learning conversations. As the HCAs are invited to raise issues from the log-books during the learning conversations, there might be a disclosure taking place. The participants know that if they disclose their notes written in the log-book they might provide descriptions that help enrich their assessment. In this way, the participant is positioned as one who needs to make active choices in terms of how to behave to become what they themselves deem desirable in relation to the norm. However, as already noted, when writing a log-book by oneself this is also always done in the presence of a norm – a virtual other – to which you need to relate your actions, thoughts and behaviours, especially as the HCAs are invited to use the log-books as an instrument to note 'personal things' and assess their own way of 'communicating'. Therefore, in this example there is always a disclosure when writing a log-book and thus there is work upon the self.

Discussion

Reflection is a key term, which presupposes at least two things: to reflect is to be active and through reflection a modification of behaviour is expected. The analysis has illustrated how confession operates through the freedom of those it targets. With individualising technologies there is no longer any need for a specific expert who guides us or decides what is good or bad.

Instead, the norm is both the producer and product of subjects. This construction is not one of domination, but one of subjectification. Subjects are shaped and fostered in a situation of "freedom", where the individual is encouraged to make choices of actions based on reflection. Thus, a new subject is being shaped, one who is not only responsible for desiring to become better and better, but also the one who supports her/himself in such an enterprise (cf. Rose, 1999), i.e. governing of the self.

Such notion of freedom and how it is mobilised in how governing operates can be seen in the two different types of reflection identified within the programme analysed. On the one hand, learning conversations position a public confession as desirable and "good". The participant is positioned as one who should confess to others and be the confessor of others, actions that are promoted as something that might enrich the assessment and help the participant to become better at work. Even though the participant can decide, through freedom, not to take up such position, by making a public confession she/he does work upon the self and positions her/himself as a desirable care worker. On the other hand, through the log-book a public confession is invited rather than demanded. Here, confession of the self to the self is instead positioned as desirable. The participant is invited, through the act of freedom, to take notes about the actions of the day and scrutinize these. If she/he then is willing, she/he can complement the private scrutinizing with a public one. However, in one way, a private confession is also public in so far as it takes place in relation to a norm represented by virtual others, i.e. the act of confession is being internalised. In both types of reflection, through the workings of power, reflective practice is turned into a means of normative control of both professional identity and professional practice. Through the mobilisation of reflective practices, the subject is invited to work upon the self to become that which is deemed desirable. In this way, there is a process of governing taking place that works through the freedom of the participants. Freedom is thus both the starting point and the output of governing, and can be related to what Nikolas Rose (1999) calls advanced liberal rule, where the political ambition to govern coincides with the actions of citizens.

The analysis has further illustrated how reflective practices can be seen as a confessional practice with lines of descent and emergence in relation to both the Stoic ideas about writing and action, and the Christian confession. For example, the act of disclosing through verbalisation, emerging with Christianity, is still important. However, such verbalization is related to both "real" public others and virtual others, i.e. there is no need to have a priest or monk present to whom we confess. Nor do we need a friend, parent, colleague or peer. We are positioned as our own confessors. Central techniques for verbalizing ourselves to our selves (and thus for verbalizing ourselves to virtual others) are log-books. Here, writing becomes an important technique. As with the Stoics, writing is, in the reflective practices analysed here, used as a way of taking notes of the rules according to which one should act, which is then meditated upon (scrutinized). In both cases, the focus is on how to improve one's actions and fulfil good intentions. However, these rules are not, as with the Stoics, the truth told by the master. Instead, the truths are produced through discourse, which, in turn, is both a producer of and a product of subjects. At the same time, writing is about making the self visible by disclosing as in Christianity. But this is not about showing the true impure self, as a way of renouncing the self. Instead, it is about constituting a new and better self who can deliver better care work.

This paper is political insofar as it aims to make the taken-for-grantedness of reflection within vocational education problematic, difficult and dangerous (Foucault 1991). The paper is not intended to provide any universal truth about reflection. Rather, by tracing the emergence of confession the

analysis is an attempt to provide an alternative. Not an alternative that I propose be better or worse, rather an alternative that might help disrupt that which seems immutable.

Acknowledgements

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