INTERPROFESSIONAL COOPERATION AS COLLECTIVE ETHICS WORK

A contribution to inter-professional ethics

Ed de Jonge PhD
University of Applied Sciences
Utrecht Netherlands

Thesis: Ethics work (Banks 2012, 2016) is a stimulating concept for the ethical improvement of inter-professional cooperation.

Outline:

- **Starting point: ideal-typical professionalism**
- **Introduction to ethics work**
- **Professionalism requires inter-professional cooperation**
- **Inter-professional expansion of ethics work**
- **Final remarks and further challenges**

Starting point: professionalism

Social work is a profession. (cf. global definition; IFSW, 2014)

But what is a profession?

Professionalism is basically about realizing specific humanitarian values under complex circumstances within a specific domain.

Cf. the three classical or learned professions:

- **Medical profession: physical domain: health**
- **Juridical profession: social domain: justice**
- **Religious profession: spiritual domain: salvation**

Conclusion: professions are ethical occupations → ethics work

Professions require ethics work   (Banks 2012, 2016)

Ethics work: "the effort people [professionals] put into:

- developing themselves as good practitioners,
- seeing ethical aspects of situations,
- working out the right course of action and
- justifying who they are and what they have done."

Aspects of ethics work:

- Identity work: ethical self (personal and professional), integrity
- Framing work: self (agency), situation, context
- Reason work: perspectives, decisions, justifications
- Emotion work: managing (suppressing, displaying, creating)
- Role work: selecting and positioning
- Relationship work: dialogue, engaging, caring
- Performance work: (demonstrating) actions and interactions

Challenges for professions (and education)

Professionalism: dealing with complex problems and challenges, within a specific domain and on the basis of a specific value.

However, the most complex problems and challenges are
- not confined to a specific domain.
- not confined to a specific humanitarian value.

Inter-professional cooperation is required to deal with complexity.

Note: inter-professional cooperation is ethical cooperation.

So (individual and monodisciplinary) ethics works has to be expanded to collective inter-professional ethics work.

Social work: (cf. global definition; IFSW, 2014)

- **No specific domain: "interaction between human beings and their environments": material, psychic, social, societal etc.**

- **No specific core value: well-being, dignity, equality, liberty, empowerment, justice, solidarity etc. etc.**

Valuation of social work:

- **Classical point of view: social work is a lesser profession, a semi-profession.**

- **Modern point of view: social work is better equipped for dealing with complexity as well as for inter-professional cooperation than the classical professions.**

Ethics work is basically about individual development within a profession, but it can be expanded as collective and inter-professional ethics work, which would be in the spirit of the work of Sarah Banks. (cf. e.g. Banks 2010)

Definition of collective interprofessional ethics work:

(cf. Banks 2012, modifications are underlined)

"the effort cooperating professionals of various disciplines put into:

- **collectively developing themselves as good practitioners,**
- **collectively seeing ethical aspects of situations,**
- **collectively working out the right course of action and**
- **collectively justifying who they are and what they have done."**

Collective inter-professional identity work starts with developing the right attitude towards inter-professional cooperation:

- **Not pessimistic (to negative)**
- **Not optimistic (to naive)**
- **Not realistic (to detached)**
- **But positive:**
  - **Looking for common ground from a humanitarian value perspective**
  - **Relating conflicts and negotiations (concerning values, objectives, interests etc.) to communality**

Collective inter-professional identity work leads to the development of common ground for inter-professional cooperation: a collective inter-professional framework.

This framework, however, is of a dynamic nature and requires framing work as an ongoing collective and inter-professional activity.

Collective inter-professional framing work requires basically (re)framing the individual intra-professional activities as a contribution to collective inter-professional agency in a complex situation within a broader context, based on shared humanitarian values.

Collective inter-professional identity work and framing work require collective inter-professional reason work.

Collective inter-professional reason work is basically collective deliberation.

True deliberation requires besides communicative and reasoning skills above all trust, transparency, openness etc. (cf. positive attitude).

Collective inter-professional emotion work is basically about sharing emotions.

Sharing emotions should be a part of inter-professional deliberation, because emotions: (cf. Keinemans 2014)

- **Help us to understand the ethical aspects of situations**
- **Reveal our ethical point of view**
- **Motivate our ethical actions**

Sharing emotions requires trust, openness etc. (just like deliberation), but also empathy, compassion etc.

Suggestion for ethical deliberation: start with the question: what touched you in this case?

Collective inter-professional role work is basically combining (and altering) several intra-professional roles to a collective inter-professional script.

Creating a collective inter-professional script means relating the individual contributions to each other in order to create a meaningful whole (for the service users and based on humanitarian values).

Note: Because of the complexity of the work the script can only be developed as a rough sketch.

Collective inter-professional play work is so to speak an enlargement of the professional stage and the involved actors: from a solo performance to a collective play.

The focus of the play work is on the audience: realizing humanitarian values on behalf of the service users.

Note: Because the script can only be a rough sketch, play work (like all professional performance work) requires (quite) some improvisation.

Collective inter-professional relationship work is the dialogical basis for cooperation : creating a caring relationship.

Relationship work is omnipresent in all aspects of ethics work:

- Identity work: positive attitude
- Framing work: collective agency
- Reason work: collective deliberation
- Emotion work: sharing
- Role work: script
- Performance work: play

By way of relationship work colleagues from other professions become visible persons, partners in a collective endeavour, interlocutors in an ongoing dialogue.

Inter-professional cooperation requires collective ethics work.

Collective ethics work is related to virtue ethics (finding the right attitude towards inter-professional cooperation) and to ethics of care (caring about: oneself, other professionals, professional relationships, and above all the service users).

Collective ethics work should be based on individual ethics work: it is an expansion in stead of a replacement.

Collective ethics work is not a panacea, but a good start.

Ethics work (individually and collectively) should be part of the training of all professionals, including social workers.

Challenges for further research:

■ **The influence of power, status and hierarchy.**

■ **The representation of the service users in deliberations.**

Thesis: The combination of these two points could strengthen the approach: representation of service users in ethical deliberation could not only be a valuable addition in itself, but also be a threshold for hierarchical influences in deliberations, because service users would point out that such influences don't help them any further.

References

Banks, S. (2010). Interprofessional Ethics: A Developing Field? *Ethics and Social Welfare, 4*(3), 280-294.

Banks, S. (2012). Negotiating personal engagement and professional accountability: professional wisdom and ethics work. *European Journal of Social Work*, 2012, 1-18.

Banks, S. (2016). Everyday ethics in professional life: social work as ethics work. *Ethics and Social Welfare*, DOI: 10.1080/17496535. 2015.1126623.

Jonge, E. de & Gillet, F. (2015). Interprofessional Cooperation as Collective Ethics Work, *European Journal of Social Education, 26/27*, 76-90.