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Teachers' Identity Tensions and Related Coping Strategies: Interaction With the Career Stages and Socio-Political Context

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Abstract

When external requirements conflict with teachers' personal beliefs and values, the resulting internal struggles can lead to identity tensions. Contributing to discussion on teachers' identity development in a challenging context, this study investigated teacher identity tensions and related coping strategies in Hong Kong. We conducted 21 semi-structured interviews with qualified teachers and then performed a deductive thematic analysis of the data. We categorised the identity tensions as positioned on the micro or macro level, and distinguished the coping strategies as emotion-focused or problem-focused behaviours. The identity tensions and related coping strategies seemed to be associated with teachers' career stages. We further found identity tensions to be related to the school's sociocultural environment and to the specific political and societal forces in the region. The study demonstrated the need for continuous and differentiated support catering for teachers' needs, and highlighted the specific social-political influences on professional identity development.

Keywords

Career stages, coping strategies, Hong Kong, professional identity tensions, socio-political context, teacher professional development

Introduction

Teachers' professional lives are characterised by continuous educational and societal changes. Despite training opportunities, including practices to facilitate transformations and innovations, teachers face multiple challenges in their work within schools and from society. When teachers' personal beliefs and values conflict with the demands of their profession or with external changes, internal struggles may lead to identity tensions (Beijaard et al., 2004). Discrepancies between personal and professional elements can further have negative effects on teachers' learning, job satisfaction, career endeavours, and may lead to resignation from the profession (e.g. Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Previous studies have pointed out the professional identity tensions of beginning teachers (Pillen et al., 2013) and different identity issues of experienced teachers (van der Want et al., 2018). To facilitate continuous teachers' professional development, identity tensions should be investigated in relation to the different stages in professional life and to the context, which comprises the school community (at the micro level), along with the societal expectations and top-down educational policies (at the macro level).

This interview study aimed to investigate the identity tensions and the coping strategies of teachers at different career stages in the Hong Kong context. The context serves as a significant case for investigating micro- and macro-level teacher identity tensions, bearing in mind that the region is eager to maintain a competitive edge and to nurture talents for future development.[1] The study was designed to contribute to a holistic and dynamic understanding of teacher-identity tensions at different sites within professional life, and to assist policymakers, administrators, and researchers in reflecting on appropriate support as professionals like teachers progress on their career path beyond initial professional training.

Literature review

Teacher identity development at different career stages, identity tensions, and the related coping strategies

Teacher identity encompasses the traditional professional assets of teachers in the school context, including teaching values and beliefs, subject knowledge, and other related competencies (e.g. Beijaard et al., 2004; Vähäsantanen et al., 2017). At the same time, personal variations in its motivational and affective aspects, such as efficacy and emotions, are significant components in its construction and preservation (Kelchtermans, 2009).

[1] "Nurturing Talents" has been the main theme of Chief Executive's Policy Address since 2017, except in 2019, when the Anti-extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement broke out.

Teachers' Identity Tensions and Related Coping Strategies

Teacher identity is not regarded as an inborn phenomenon; nor is it a static entity residing within the individual and separated from the environment. Rather, it is developed through a somewhat fluid, fluctuating, and subjective process (e.g. Akkerman & Meijer, 2011), and it is continuously negotiated with other actors and contextual factors within one's career trajectory.

As teacher identity is an ongoing developmental process of the professional self in relation to the different domains within school and society, it is important to analyse identity on different professional life phases of teachers' trajectory if one is to provide continuous differentiated support according to needs. There has been considerable research on the phases of teacher professional development (e.g. Huberman, 1993), and the career stages covered by the studies differ in number and definitions (e.g. Day, 2012; Graham et al., 2020). Regarding the operational definition of career stage in the present study, 0-7 and 8-15 years of experience are categorised as early and middle professional life phases respectively (Day, 2012). The early career life phase is further distinguished into the beginning stage (0-3 years) and the transitional stage (4-7 years), while 8 or more years is considered as the experienced stage. The rationale for such distinction is based on the wide acknowledgement of the first three years as the early career survival and discovery stage (e.g. Huberman, 1993), and also on the more stabilised career decisions in beginning teachers after the initial 3 years (Graham et al., 2020).

Identity tensions can emerge in the identity negotiation process, when teaching beliefs, values, or ideals in the personal dimension conflict with the requirements or expectations from the workplace, along with the sociocultural policy in school and society respectively (Beijaard et al., 2004; Day, 2012). Within the classroom, teaching is "emotional work" that requires whole-person involvement. Teachers must invest their authentic selves in understanding and caring for students' learning and growth (Day, 2018). At the school community and organisational level, teachers must engage in micropolitical negotiations with their colleagues related to actions, strategies, and practices, and do so within the conditions of their work environment (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). Concerning the broader social and political dimensions, forces emerging from societal discourse and educational policies interact with both teachers' internal psychic disposition, and their immediate school context (Zembylas & Chubuck, 2018). According to the study of Pillen and colleagues (2013), beginning teachers in the Netherlands experienced various identity tensions with the change of role into a fully responsible teacher. These involved (desired or actual) support for students, along with conflicting teaching and learning conceptions with colleagues and mentors. All these could negatively impact the beginning teachers' professional development and well-being, with some of the issues from an early stage persisting throughout the individual's career (van der Want et al., 2018).

When teachers face identity tensions, they must therefore acquire appropriate coping strategies. The most common coping strategy used by beginning teachers is to speak with

significant others, while some search for solutions when feeling incompetent, or else they simply accept the status of novices (Pillen et al., 2013). It appears that experienced teachers, too, may be unwilling to talk about these tensions, and that they merely put up with the situations (van der Want al., 2018). A study on English as a foreign language teachers (Raharjo & Iswandri, 2019) distinguished the strategies for dealing with teacher tensions according to whether the coping behaviours were emotion-focused or problem-focused. When external conditions are deemed unchangeable, one is more likely to adopt emotion-focused strategies, such as avoidance or distancing. In contrast, problem-focused coping behaviours are related to one's agency enactment in the situated context, with the possibility of actions to solve the tensions using the resources available.

Theoretical framework

Teacher identity tension in different contextual domains

Multiple factors in the external environment influence the development of the personal and contextual elements in teacher identity, and the balance between them (Beijaard et al., 2004; Ye & Zhao, 2019). A micro- and macro-level contextual framework can seek to capture the complexities of teacher identity tensions in the different domains within the context. The framework applied here was planned to identify the tensions emerging between, on the *micro level*, teachers' performance of their identity roles in classroom interactions, collegial relationships, and the school culture (Kayi-Aydar, 2015); and on the *macro level*, forces from the broader social and political dimensions, including societal discourse and political agendas (Zembylas & Chubuck, 2018). Further explanation of the various factors operating at the micro and macro levels in the teacher-situated context is presented below.

Micro level: Professional and social dimensions in the classroom and in the immediate work conditions

The micro level involves teachers' immediate working conditions engaging the professional and social dimensions. Teachers' everyday work consists of classroom interactions, cooperation with colleagues and school leaders, and communication with parents or with other professionals. As regards the classroom context and student relationships, teachers often encounter conflicts between the amount of support they desire to give students and the actual support they can give. This causes them to start to maintain an emotional distance and to adjust expectations of students' academic performance from an early stage in their career (Pillen et al., 2013; van der Wal et al., 2019). In addition, today's school environment requires constant collegial collaboration and active involvement in the teaching community. There are pressures to enhance teaching quality and implement changes, and various conflicts may arise among colleagues over teaching conceptions or the ways in which various tasks should be handled (Schaap et al., 2019). At the school management level, conflicting expectations between school leaders and teachers, changing priorities in instructional practices or administration policies, and a performance-driven

school culture can lead to clashes with teachers' internal beliefs and values. Outside the immediate teaching environment, teachers are increasingly engaged in communication bound up with factors such as home—school collaboration and enhanced technology. In line with this, van der Want and colleagues (2018) also found teacher-parent interactions to be a prominent identity tension issue for experienced teachers in the Netherlands.

Macro level: Societal and political dimensions of the specific region

The macro level encompasses the forces of authority, laws, rules, and traditions, plus the principles, rights, and responsibilities related to the teacher's position. It comprises factors in the societal and political dimension, including the implicit expectations, norms, and values assigned to teachers' roles. It also includes education policies and further, the institutional rules and regulations of the society in question. The societal image of teachers varies across cultures and regions, as does also their status. For instance, teachers are executors of state education policy in China (Ye & Zhao, 2019), while Finnish society has traditionally held the professional status of teachers in high regard (Sahlberg, 2014). In recent years, the demands of the "neoliberal cascade" (Connell, 2013) and of the "Fourth Industrial Revolution" in respect to technological know-how have induced the authorities to impose many educational changes and policies. These have been found to lead to overwhelming but meaningless workloads for teachers, with possibilities for harm to school morale (Davies & Davies, 2013). Moreover, when ideologically-oriented regimes or authoritarian contexts possess the power to penetrate through to frontline actors, a "politics of use" perspective can impel teachers to become larger political agents of central missions, and may override institutional and organisational structures (Schulte, 2018).

Research questions

To identify teacher identity tensions and related coping strategies, this study was guided by the following research questions:

> (1) What are the identity tensions perceived by qualified teachers at different career stages in the social-political context of Hong Kong?
>
> (2) What kinds of strategies do teachers at different career stages adopt to cope with these identity tensions?

Methods

The research context: Teachers' working conditions in Hong Kong

The study participants were qualified teachers in Hong Kong who worked at the primary or secondary level and taught various subjects. Hong Kong was a former British colony until its sovereignty was handed over to China in 1997. A series of education reforms were launched in the early 1990s, covering the political transition period. These were also seen as a response to globalisation, and they emphasised excellence, competition, and accountability.

The centralised-decentralisation approach in education governance positioned the government as the centre of reforms and changes, while schools were designated with managerial power to be the agent of policy implementation (Ng & Chan, 2008). The management and staff structure within schools were hierarchical. Teachers are ranked according to qualifications and years of experience, while the decision-making power often rests with the upper management and principals (Ko et al., 2016). In addition to increasing institutional demands leading to extremely long working hours, the changing political and societal sphere in Hong Kong has also influenced teachers' work (Tsang, 2018). Civic society has itself become a stronger force affecting educational issues, as demonstrated in the 2012 protesting the introduction of "Moral and National Education"[2].

Participants

In total, 21 teachers representing different schools, subjects and teaching experiences agreed to participate in semi-structured interviews for this study. The teachers were invited via email using the researchers' personal and professional contacts. Before the study began, we verbally informed the teachers about their rights as research participants and obtained their written consent. The teachers were working in different privately or publicly funded schools in Hong Kong. Table 1 illustrates the work profile of the participants. Pseudonyms are used to ensure privacy. The average age was 32 years. The gender ratio of the participants closely reflected that of teachers in Hong Kong, where female teachers comprise 76% and 56% in the primary and secondary education respectively (The World Bank, 2022). They also taught different subjects and were involved in various administrative duties.

[2] As part of the nation-building assemblage after 1997, the Education Bureau announced the introduction of "Moral and National Education" (MNE) as a compulsory subject in 2010. Yet, the issue remained controversial. This resulted in numerous public protests and 24 civic groups opposing the subject, which led to the subject's withdrawal in 2012.

Table 1. Background profiles of participants

	Participants	Gender	Years of Experience	Career Stage	School Level	Employment Term	Subject(s) Taught
1	Dortha	F	9	Experienced	Secondary	Regular	English
2	Gordon	M	4	Transitional	Secondary	Regular	Mathematics
3	Peony	F	1	Beginning	Primary	Temporary	English & French
4	Felix	M	7	Transitional	Secondary	Regular	Mathematics
5	Camelia	F	10	Experienced	Primary and Secondary	Regular	Mathematics, Integrated Science & English
6	Louis	M	8	Experienced	Secondary	Regular	Liberal Studies
7	Howard	M	8	Experienced	Secondary	Temporary	English
8	Xavier	M	3	Beginning	Secondary	Temporary	Mathematics
9	Nicholas	M	7	Transitional	Primary	Regular	Mathematics & English
10	Beatrice	F	8	Experienced	Secondary	Regular	English
11	Sophia	F	9	Experienced	Secondary	Regular	English Literature & English
12	Queenie	F	5	Transitional	Secondary	Temporary	Mathematics
13	Rosie	F	15	Experienced	Secondary	Regular	Biology, Integrated Science & Liberal Studies
14	Ian	M	3	Beginning	Secondary	Temporary	Liberal Studies
15	Opal	F	7	Transitional	Secondary	Temporary	Chinese
16	Elsa	F	0	Beginning	Secondary	Regular	Visual Arts
17	Violet	F	11	Experienced	Secondary	Regular	Chinese
18	Lisa	F	7	Transitional	Secondary	Regular	Chinese
19	Karl	M	6	Transitional	Secondary	Regular	Economics
20	Mathew	M	7	Transitional	Secondary	Regular	Mathematics
21	Terrance	M	11	Experienced	Secondary	Regular	English

Interviews

We collected the semi-structured interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) to understand the current tensions encountered by the teacher participants and their respective coping strategies. The interviews were conducted in Cantonese by the first author in the summer of 2018, and held in venues where the participants felt comfortable and safe to express thoughts and feelings regarding their work situation. The interviews lasted 51 minutes on average. The following were discussed: (i) participants' professional values and beliefs, (ii) their perceptions of how family, social circles, and society comprehend their profession, (iii) their work situation, especially the struggles and obstacles encountered, (iv) their relationships with management, colleagues, students, and any interpersonal conflicts in the

workplace, (v) their professional prospects. In addition, the teachers were asked if they found any belief or value discrepancies in issues related to (ii), (iii), or (iv). When disagreements, conflicts, struggles, or tensions were mentioned, the researcher followed up by asking if the interviewee had devised any coping strategies to help deal with the situation.

Analysis

We used thematic analysis to analyse the identity tensions and the coping strategies from the interview data translated from Cantonese to English (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and utilised ATLAS.ti for analysis.

The initial coding of the data started with adopting the teachers' identity issues in previous research on beginning and experienced teachers in other cultural contexts (Pillen et al., 2013; van der Want et al., 2018), e.g. *time for teaching* vs. *time for other tasks*. Apart from using the codes in previous studies, new codes, which are mostly related to the macro level in the societal and political dimensions, e.g., *feeling more inferior to other professionals*, are generated from the current data. Then, the coded data were re-read according to each interviewee's context and discussed within the research group. Subsequently, the codes were refined for better categorisation. For the first research question, the codes related to identity tensions were reviewed and grouped within six domains at the micro and macro levels, such as student relationships and government policy.

For the second question, the codes were categorised under two main themes: emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies. All the codes were read again. At this point, some quotations associated with those codes were removed, as they merely illustrated conflicts occurring in the workplace without triggering any internal struggles or negative emotions in the interviewees. Next, all the subthemes under the main themes were discussed and modified by all researchers in the group to ensure comprehensiveness in covering the tensions and strategies described.

We then counted the number of teachers who mentioned a theme pertaining to either of the research questions. In this way we gained a picture of the themes in their totality, and their relative prominence within the data. Moreover, the thematic analysis gave a rich overview of the phenomena under investigation across the entire group of teachers. To illustrate those phenomena from the viewpoint of different career stages, we pick out extracts that had been noted during the thematic analysis (See Table 2 and 3). Additionally, we used narrative method (Riessman, 2008) to provide more details on how the identity tensions in different domains impact on the professional life phases. Three teachers, who encountered the largest number of identity tensions in the respective career stage group, were selected to further illustrate the phenomena.

Findings

Concerning the first research question, an overview of the identity tensions encountered can be found in Table 2. The tensions correspond to identity tensions experienced in (i) student relationships, (ii) the collegial community, (iii) the school organisation, and (iv) parent relationships (at the micro level), and further to tensions involving (v) society and (vi) government policy (at the macro level). Each theme pertaining to each level is elucidated by an example, and the number of teachers mentioning that tension is noted.

The analysis of teacher identity tensions in relation to the career stages showed that most teachers (14/21), regardless of career stage, identified with tensions related to the hierarchical structure, and experienced as a restraining expression from the bottom up (tension iii). By contrast, only a few teachers (4/21) across all the stages indicated tensions associated with parents (tension vi).

The number and domains of the tensions encountered varied between different career stages. Identity tensions were reported most among beginning teachers and least among experienced teachers. Over half of the beginning teachers in the present study encountered identity tensions in nearly all the themes, at both the micro and macro levels, except for those related to parents and social status. In contrast, many teachers at the transitional stage reported identity tensions associated with having an inferior professional status (tension vii). Nearly all the identity tensions at the beginning stage lingered on into the transitional stage; however, out of all the stages, the transitional group showed the fewest tensions related to the collegial community (tension ii). Regarding the experienced teachers, two identity tensions were demonstrated by most teachers in this category. These were related to the hierarchical structure (tension iii) and the collegial community (tension iv), with the former persisting throughout all stages, whereas the latter was an issue among beginning and experienced teachers but not so among those in the transitional stage.

Table 2. Findings on teacher identity tension

Domains within the Context		Domains	Tensions and Examples	S1^	S2^	S3^
Number of teachers				4	8	9
Micro Level (Classroom & Immediate Work Conditions)	Social and Organizational Dimensions	Student relationships	i. Wanting to support students' intellectual and moral growth vs. feeling frustrated by students' attitudes and low motivation (7/21)	**	**	*
			"If the students are being very unreasonable, they won't listen to me. It is very exhausting." (Xavier, beginning stage, mathematics*)*			
		Collegial relationships	ii. Having teaching methods and working styles that conflict with those of colleagues (11/21)	**	*	**
			"Working in the subject group is a mental battle. [I have to] know when to dodge, not to fall into traps or to be framed by somebody." (Beatrice; experienced stage, English language)			
		School and organisation	iii. Wanting to express ideas and opinions vs. feeling restrained under the hierarchical school structure (14/21)	**	**	**
			"Those with low seniority, [and who tell] in fact, a 'poor man's tale' cannot be heard." (Mathew; transitional stage, liberal studies)			
			iv. Feeling exhausted by nonteaching duties and meaningless tasks (11/21)	**	**	*
			"[The management] used a lot of government resources and manpower on school promotion, but not directly on our students with special education needs." (Peony, beginning stage, English and French language)			
			v. Wanting career development vs. feeling negatively towards the prospects (8/21)	**	**	*
			"I didn't stay in the school and prepare for my lessons, even if I want to witness the students' growth. Because I needed to leave school and send job application." (Howard; experienced stage, English language)			
		Parent relationships	vi. Wanting to be education partners with parents vs. feeling the need to give way to parents' demands (4/21)	*	*	*
			"When parents want to protect certain rights for their children, they would despise teachers, and they don't believe in the [teaching] profession." (Opal; transitional stage, Chinese language)			
Macro Level (Societal Expectation and Top-down Policies)	Societal and Political Dimensions	Society	vii. Being a professional with specified expertise in education vs. feeling that teaching is inferior to other professions (11/21)	*	**	*
			"Other professionals, such as doctors and lawyers, may think teaching is a very ordinary job." (Lisa; transitional stage, Chinese language)			
			viii. Being expected to uphold extremely high moral standards and be accountable for social problems (8/21)	**	*	*
			"You don't get away from teachers' moral obligations after work for 24 hours, 7 days a week." (Elsa; beginning stage, visual arts)			
		Government policy	ix. The imposition to carry out top-down policies and changes vs. wanting to have a voice in educational matters (11/21)	**	**	*
			"[The government] wants to push different policies into schools. They only give some money as support, and that's it. There is little information transmitted from the bottom up." (Karl; transitional stage, economics*)*			

^S1= Beginning Stage, S2= Transitional Stage, S3= Experienced Stage
** Less than half of the interviewees encountered the tension*
***Half or over half of the interviewees encountered the tension*

The teachers mentioned multiple ways to handle the identity tensions. The coping strategies were classified as either emotion-focused or problem-focused behaviours for the tensions and tension-causing experiences. Table 3 lists the strategies mentioned by the participants. Most teachers (11/21) were willing to tolerate the situation to avoid further conflict, and no other strategy was prominently mentioned over the different career stages.

Within the different stages, half of the beginning teachers mentioned *all* the emotion- and problem-focused behaviours in seeking to cope with the tension, while most of the experienced teachers coped by means of various strategies, including, for the most part, *tolerating the situation*, or *actively communicating about the problem*. However, less than half of teachers at the transitional stage indicated that they had adopted the coping strategies appropriate for each category.

Table 3. Findings on coping strategies

Emotion-Focused Behaviour	**Example**	**S1^**	**S2^**	**S3^**
i. Tolerating the situation (11/21)	*"There's nothing you can do about it (meaningless tasks), just do it… or try my best to act in concert with it."* (Violet; experienced stage; Chinese language)	**	*	**
ii. Having and giving emotional support among close colleagues, or sharing with family and friends (4/21)	*"My family often listen to me talking [the issues in school], and they understand that teaching is hard work*." *(*Queenie; transitional stage, mathematics)	**	*	*
Problem-Focused Behaviour	**Example**			
iii. Communicating and negotiating actively (8/21)	*"I would try to accommodate or to explain to those colleagues who have different opinions, and try to make them understand." (*Camelia; experienced stage, mathematics, integrated science and English language*)*	**	*	**
iv. Reflecting on the self and the situation (6/21)	*"I was not a 'straight A' student, I understand the students struggle with their studying. It probably doesn't work by forcing them [to study]." (*Dortha; experienced stage, English language*)*	**	*	*
v. Finding spaces for one's individual voices and aspirations (6/21)	*"I would first fulfil the basic requirement and find some space to do something I want to do." (*Gordon; transitional stage, mathematics*)*	**	*	*

^S1= Beginning Stage, S2= Transitional Stage, S3= Experienced Stage
** Less than half of the interviewees encountered the tension*
***Half or over half of the interviewees encountered the tension*

Extended examples of teacher identity tensions and coping strategies at different career stages

To provide a close-up on how the identity tensions and different coping strategies play out in different domains on the teaching trajectory, three teachers were selected to illustrate the phenomena at the beginning, transitional, and experienced stages. These selected cases involved the largest number of identity tensions out of all the cases from the same career stage.

Ian (beginning teacher): An identity tension survival story

Ian was a beginning teacher in his mid-20s with three years of experience in three different schools. He started as a teaching assistant, then received a teaching position in the second school, and was now employed as an assistant again. Ian's core professional beliefs were based on the pedagogical aspect of assisting student growth.

Like other beginning teachers, Ian encountered identity tensions in most domains at the micro and macro level. Within the teaching context, Ian enjoyed working with students, but he described his experiences as "shallow" and "inadequate" to stimulate students with low motivation in classrooms (tension i). Furthermore, he had to chase after the examination-oriented progress like other colleagues (tension ii), and suppressed his professional inspirations. Also, Ian observed in different schools that teachers worked in isolation most of the time. He described school as a hierarchical organisation requiring teachers' obedience (tension iii). His opinion counted merely as a "poor man's tale" in which the upper level would not be interested. Despite being a qualified teacher, Ian had to change to a different school annually, and such instability worried him and his family. He felt passive and helpless regarding his career development, and he experienced an opaque and unfair employment mechanism based on favouritism (tension v). He was not even certain he would continue teaching in the face of the unstable situation. He might need to opt for a substitute position to accumulate more teaching experiences. At the macro level, although Ian felt teachers were respected in general, society depersonalised the profession and expected them to be role models around the clock. He described Hong Kong society as "conservative"—a location where teachers could not lay down their professional roles during their spare time, because they could easily be judged by the public (tension viii). Ian also found that government education policies and new initiatives did not necessarily make teaching and learning meaningful. He criticised the examination evaluation frameworks were being very inflexible, which was in contradiction to his professional training and beliefs in the open-ended nature of the subject (tension ix).

As regards coping with the difficult career path, Ian's friends contributed significantly to his willingness to persevere as a beginning teacher (strategy ii). His friends listened to his struggles and encouraged him not to give up his career goal.

Ian's story illustrated how a beginning teacher survived the identity tensions in the school environment—tensions that stemmed from complex tasks and requirements for fully responsible teachers. As he saw it, personal professional beliefs and values, and knowledge from initial professional training, were challenged and restricted by school reality—including students' motivation, school expectations on academic performance, and the organisational hierarchical culture. Furthermore, the temporary contracts and non-transparent employment mechanism negatively affected his well-being and professional aspirations. His

main support in enduring the tensions came from the encouragement given by his personal social circle.

Felix (transitional stage teacher): An identity tension story illustrating efficacy at risk

Felix was the vice-chairperson in his subject group, and he belonged to the discipline and guidance committee. He was in his late 20s, had taught for five years, and was a permanent staff member. His professional beliefs centred on his subject matter, and his didactic methods focused on improving students' academic grades. He liked interacting with and providing guidance for students.

Like other teachers in the transitional stage, Felix's tensions were mostly related to the organisational culture at the micro level, and societal educational expectation at the macro level. Felix had a mixed relationship with his colleagues. He had positive relationships with his teammates in the subject department, but he felt negative and restricted when working with colleagues in the discipline team who acted with hierarchical attitudes, did not listen to junior teachers, and expected them to merely follow the seniors (tension iii). The other organisational identity tension involved heavy non-teaching duties (tension iv). The exhausting teachers' work nowadays made Felix feel like an "administrative staff person" who could not perform his teaching role, not to mention his professional beliefs and values.

On the macro level, Felix believed that society did not recognise teaching as a professional job (tension vii). In the current education system and the problems facing the society, he felt what teachers could contribute was "very limited", and he personally could not see himself doing the things he wanted to do.

In dealing with the tensions, Felix chose to remain silent (strategy i) most of the time. He preferred to avoid conflicts and merely fulfilled orders, as he could not influence or change anything in the current situation.

Although Felix demonstrated higher confidence in didactic and pedagogical matters, had greater collaboration with colleagues, and even assisted the subject group, he perceived himself merely as a "passive follower" at the school. Being a more experienced staff member, he was expected to have more administrative tasks, tackle difficult student cases, and experience higher pressure from management to produce academic results from students. Felix's identity tension story was accompanied by reduced efficacy. Like Ian, who was at the beginning stage, Felix also described teaching as a challenging profession with an unstable environment. In fact, he asked himself if he would be competent for future demands, as he could be "washed out" in the waves of education changes and top-down policies.

Sophia (experienced stage teacher): An identity tension story involving unrecognised effort

Sophia had been teaching for over eight years, and she was a subject leader with a master's qualification. Her competencies lay in didactic and pedagogical aspects focused on students' understanding and the learning process.

Similar to other teachers at the experienced stage, the tension-infused domains involved collegial relationships and the organisation's hierarchical structure. As a subject leader, Sophia had to coordinate tasks and ensure the teaching quality of her teammates. Nevertheless, her teaching and working methods could conflict with those of her colleagues (tension ii), and she found her role in supervising and interfering with her colleagues' work to be difficult and even "heart-breaking" when the work did not meet her minimal expectation. Also, Sophia's experiences and duties led her to communicate more closely with the seniors and the principal. Although she understood more than others about management decisions, she recognised that she did not have any influence on them (tension iii). As a teacher holding multiple responsibilities and a heavy workload, she felt powerless in terms of requesting promotion within the structure. She was very disappointed when she was not promoted within the organisation. On the societal level, she felt that the teaching profession was not well recognised and highly trusted by society; this was because no autonomous and strong trade union or professional association existed to represent the profession (tension vii).

As a coping strategy, for most issues she tried to communicate with and suggest ideas to the seniors and the principal (strategy iii). Sophia also took active initiatives in trying to provide emotional support to her colleagues' teaching (strategy ii).

In reflecting on her current situation, Sophia preferred to maintain her core beliefs in quality teaching and learning. Despite the identity tensions in her role as subject leader, Sophia demonstrated her coping skills via active communication. Moreover, her experience led her to recognise that the politics in the school restricted her promotion. She therefore diverted more of her focus from her professional to her personal life.

Discussion

Consideration of differentiated support for identity development at different career stages

Findings showed that teachers at different career stages vary in the number and domains of identity tensions. Teachers at the beginning stage encountered identity tensions in most domains, and many tensions persisted to the transitional stage. Yet, experienced teachers noted the least tensions, except those related to the collegial relationship. Thus, the present study calls for differentiated support for identity development at different career stages.

As in earlier research (e.g., Pillen et al., 2013; Ponnock et al., 2018), teachers at the beginning stage, who were relatively lacking in practical experiences, had to struggle with challenges including but not limited to changing roles and expectations from student-teacher to full-time teacher, relationship with students and colleagues (Pillen et al., 2013). All these aspects could negatively affect a person's professional identity, career development, and psyche. In line with previous studies (e.g., Sarastuen, 2020), appropriate support, including mentoring and induction practices, is needed to facilitate beginning teachers so that they can recontextualise their knowledge from professional training to school reality, engage in steep learning in teaching, discover potentials, and realise their aspirations in the profession.

As regards teachers in the transitional stage, the study revealed (as with beginning teachers) the persistence of identity tensions related to students, non-teaching tasks, and career prospects. These teachers required continuous support to further polish their professional skills, despite of fewer identity tensions associated with colleagues after the induction phase. Transitional teachers are given more administrative tasks and responsibilities than their beginning counterparts; hence, at this career stage, heavy workloads and excess accountability for students' academic performance could potentially affect well-being, lessen job satisfaction, and make work seem meaningfulness (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). The conflict between work and private life can persist from early to mid and late careers (van der Want et al., 2018). Another interesting point is that many of the transitional teachers in the present study showed identity tensions regarding their status and voice in society—a factor which was not obvious in the other stages. Ponnock and colleagues (2018) found that teachers who survived the beginning stage may have greater motivation and a heightened sense of self-efficacy. To take advantage of this, and to sustain transitional teacher development into the mid-career phase, school leaders should open channels for teachers to contribute opinions for organisational development, facilitating as far as possible negotiation for agency with the larger forces influencing educational policies in the immediate school environment (Zembylas & Chubuck, 2018).

Teachers at the experienced level demonstrated the fewest identity tensions relative to the other teaching stages. As in the Dutch context (van der Want et al., 2018), the identity tensions related to pedagogical expertise and to student relations diminished when the experienced stage was achieved. Most of these teachers were assigned more duties and responsibilities at the school, and they became more sophisticated in optimising their resources, prioritising the time spent on tasks (Philipp & Kunter, 2013), and negotiating their workload with the management. However, most of the experienced teachers showed identity tensions relating to collegial collaboration. Being trusted with leading positions, they had to manage new roles and negotiated their identity with other colleagues and the environment. Apart from having expectations for the teaching community, management needs to pay more attention to teachers' career aspirations, particularly the experienced

ones. The absence of promotion and leadership opportunities could lead teachers to disappointment and shift their life focus from professional to personal matters as demonstrated in Sophia's case. Thus, communication skills and leadership development may be crucial in sustaining the commitment and engagement of teachers over the longer term.

When coping with identity tensions, strategies like tolerating situations, speaking to significant others, and communicating problems were mentioned, as has been found in previous studies (Pillen et al., 2013; van der Want et al., 2018). It appears that putting up with the situation is the most prevalent coping strategy, regardless of the career stage or the geographical context. Depending on personal and workplace affordances, some teachers in our study were able to communicate their tensions, reflect on themselves, and find spaces to implement their pedagogical ideas. However, the study revealed that most teachers tolerated the tensions without active orientation or special activities, seeking merely to avoid further conflicts. Their perception was that top-down decisions could not be influenced under the existing hierarchical management culture. It would be interesting to discover whether such toleration of difficult circumstances is a universal coping strategy for teachers, or whether it is only prevalent in certain sociocultural contexts, also including epochs and generational experiences.

Specific sociocultural and political forces within the schools and society of Hong Kong

In addition to underlining the teacher identity tensions within the prevalent school environment, the present study also demonstrated how specific identity tensions are related to the societal-political situation in Hong Kong. First, the findings showed that the major identity tension for teachers at all career stages was the hierarchical structure that restrained expression from the bottom up. The hierarchical school structure made teachers feel restricted in communicating ideas and problems. Discouraged by predetermined decisions and by the neglectful attitude of management, teachers responded with inaction, silence, and acceptance of their powerlessness within the profession (Tsang, 2018). For example, Ian and Felix described their professional identity as one of "being obedient", involving a position of being "a passive follower". To facilitate teachers' development and encourage collegial collaboration, school leaders and policymakers should encourage more effective and evenly distributed leadership (Tian et al., 2016). This would further involve greater recognition of teachers' voices and the granting of resources to facilitate the enactment of professional agency.

Secondly, under the centralised-decentralisation system, the locus of control in educational policies is currently in the hands of the government rather than a professionalised teaching force. Top-down educational changes and initiatives are often imposed on schools, and bottom-up channels are limited or non-existent, with no means for teachers and schools to voice concerns and criticism. In the absence of recognition of teachers' professional agency

or of interactive communication in the formation and evaluation of the region's educational issues, teachers cannot interpret the meaningfulness of new policies or work towards genuine pedagogical changes. The identity tensions in this domain are likely to be intensified in the region, due to stricter political control after the 2019-2020 protests. With the disbanding of the largest pro-democracy teachers' union in 2021, individual and collective professionals' voices became vulnerable and even muted, owing to a fear of prosecution based on the newly enforced national security law in 2020.

Thirdly, regarding societal cultural aspects, teachers' identity tensions are rooted in the region's high expectations regarding teachers' performance and moral standards. Academic achievement is heavily enshrined in regional values, to the extent that low-achieving students and weak university acceptance rates remain a source of pressure for teachers. As teachers are viewed as role models for subsequent generations, the beginning teachers in our study were particularly uncomfortable and depersonalised, because of the extremely high moral expectations imposed. However, the high expectations were not accompanied by high status or respect for the profession. The perception of an inferior status among transitional teachers, regardless of their specialised educational skills, is in line with the study of Morris (2004), who noted the extent to which teachers were treated as semi-professionals and criticised by persons outside the field.

Fourthly, in contrast with other cultural contexts (van der Want et al., 2018), identity tensions associated with parents were not equally prevalent across all the career stages in the Hong Kong context. One explanation could be that Hong Kong is a Confucius-heritage society, with teachings emphasizing the notions of respecting teachers and obeying seniors to maintain societal order and relational harmony. Moreover, beginning teachers were not usually assigned major classroom teacher roles; hence, relationships with parents were mainly handled by more experienced staff to strengthen parents' trust in the school.

Limitations

The study has several limitations. Firstly, the data in the present study was based on 21 teachers who voluntarily shared their feelings and thoughts regarding their own career experience. Due to personality and character differences, not all the teachers experienced the tensions most typical of a given teaching level. Secondly, the interviews were conducted face-to-face at the end of the 2018 academic year; hence, this study could only explore the internal tensions presented at the indicated time point and might now be superseded by other positive or negative factors.

This study indicates the need for further exploration of qualified teachers' identity tensions in terms of career stage, the school climate, teaching positions, and the socio-cultural and regional context. It is worthwhile to explore the identity tensions experienced by teachers in different regional environments and enhance the understanding of the challenges and support of the development of positive teacher identity related to the school organisational

structure and the specific political socio-cultural contexts. Furthermore, a longitudinal study, along with other research methods such as observation or learning diaries, would delve deeper into the topic, contributing to a better understanding of changes in identity tensions, with possibilities also to design better support for teachers.

Implications and conclusion

The present findings demonstrate that teacher identity tensions are not limited to the early stage of the teaching career, and do not emerge only in response to educational reforms. Many of the struggles and tensions mentioned have existed for over a decade. On the macro level, policymakers should pay more attention to teachers' voices and research recommendations, and address teachers' needs at the forefront of educational policy. Within schools, supportive leadership and a collegial collaborative culture need to be cultivated, as these would prompt teachers to become active agents in improving the school. The study itself contains a framework that offers teachers, researchers, and policymakers a way to identify the locus of tensions in teachers, with implications for strategies that will support teachers at different professional life phases and promote their well-being in the relevant contexts.

The current working conditions for teachers in Hong Kong are characterised by high or even harsh societal expectations regarding teachers' abilities and personal lives. As Hong Kong has been undergoing dramatic societal and political changes, further research should address the vulnerabilities that currently exist in the professionalism of teachers in the region.

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Connective Enactment and Collective Accomplishment in Professional Practices

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Abstract

Working with others is key to professionalism but little attention has been given to how specific actions contribute to collective practices to secure shared ends in work. This essay considers how professionals' actions connect with one another in distributed (multi-participant) work practices. Recently, Hopwood, Blomberg, Dahlberg and Abrant Dahlgren identified a new way of viewing how professionals in distributed practices coordinate their actions to accomplish shared ends, in terms of phenomena they describe as "connective enactments" and "collective accomplishments". In this essay, we explore the possibility that these phenomena have far more general application than the cases studied by Hopwood et al. We use the theory of practice architectures to outline this more general account and test its viability in by examining a case of culinary services practices. This more generalised account may offer new ways to understand features of distributed work practices and enhance professional practice and learning.

Keywords

Connective enactment, collective accomplishment, practice, practice architectures, interprofessional practice, professional collaboration

How do the actions of different participants in a practice mesh together as the practice unfolds? This question was largely overlooked in the literature of practice theory until Hopwood, Blomberg, Dahlberg, and Abrant Dahlgren (2022) threw light on the intermeshing of different health professionals participants' actions in a healthcare simulation. The intermeshing occurred in two phases which they described as "connective enactment" and "collective accomplishment". In this essay, we take the opportunity to revisit their ideas, stretching them over a wider theoretical and empirical canvas, in a dialogue between authors, ideas and texts. Thus, we (1) briefly outline these notions as Hopwood et al. described them, then (2) explore the possibility that they may open the door to a more general understanding of how participants' actions intermesh in practices. We do so by presenting an argument, based on the theory of practice architectures (e.g., Kemmis, 2022; Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008; Kemmis et al., 2014), that connective enactment and collective accomplishment occur when the sayings, doings, and relatings of different participants in practices interact with one another. We then (3) argue that this elaboration opens the way to a more general conceptualisation of connective enactment and collective accomplishment that will help practice researchers to give compelling accounts of how the actions of participants intermesh in a wide variety of practices. Next, we (4) test this possibility by briefly analysing a case of culinary services practice described by Mary Johnsson in 2012, nearly a decade before Hopwood et al. identified the phenomena of connective enactment and collective accomplishment. This argument leads us to (5) conclude that the more general conceptualisation we have outlined offers a promising new way to understand how the actions of different participants intermesh in the conduct of practices.

Stephen Kemmis initiated the writing of this essay as a response to the Hopwood et al. (2022) article. He sent a copy of an early draft to Nick Hopwood to invite comment about it. In the subsequent correspondence, Nick's role transformed into that of co-author, thus becoming a respondent to himself.

Connective enactment and collective accomplishment

Practices in many work settings are *distributed*; that is, they rely on contributions from multiple people performing distinct actions in coordinated ways. In our view, accounting for these contributions and the connections between them is important in understanding distributed professional practices and how they unfold as they do. Equally, understanding these phenomena is important for professional education, that is, for initiating learners into professional practices that rely on the coordinated efforts of different people in interprofessional practice, in the relationships between professional practitioners and those

they serve (e.g., between health professionals and patients, teachers and students, and architects and clients), and in many kinds of distributed practices in everyday life (e.g., among players and others in a football game).

Hopwood, Blomberg, Dahlberg, and Abrandt Dahlgren (2022) identified previously unnoticed ways in which practitioners in distributed practices engage with one another to accomplish shared ends via *connective enactments* and *collective accomplishments*. They studied three cases of a simulation in a Swedish healthcare professional learning setting for interprofessional teams including clinicians, midwives, and nurses. The simulation focussed on dealing with shoulder dystocia, an unpredictable emergency that occasionally arises in childbirth when the baby's shoulder gets jammed against the mother's pubic bone. Swift action is necessary to successfully release the baby; without it, the baby can suffer serious injury or even death. Hopwood et al. presented vignettes of the simulation, showing how the participants spoke to one another during the simulations, narrating what they were doing so the others could follow their actions in relation to the HELPERR mnemonic, which denotes a sequence of things that need to be done to address the emergency.[1] In enacting HELPERR in the simulation, each participant adapted their actions to take account of the actions of the others, sometimes switching roles, to collectively accomplish the (simulated) delivery of the baby.

Hopwood et al. identified two phenomena that occurred during the simulations: first, the *connective enactments* by which participants oriented together as a team towards what needed to be done, and second, their *collective accomplishments* as they coordinated their actions to secure a safe outcome. These concepts highlight features of practice that cannot be produced by individuals acting alone, but which depend, rather, on interwoven individual actions that collectively accomplish the ends towards which the practice is undertaken.

Referring to the sayings, doings, and relatings that compose practices, Hopwood et al. (2022, p. 8-9) articulated how individuals' connective enactments (reaching out to connect with one another) and collective accomplishments (collectively working towards outcomes) were manifested in these simulations:

> Sayings, doings and relatings were found to hang together through three distinctive connective enactments:
>
> 1. Narrating, listening, and attuning. Giving verbal commentary on one's actions and their consequences, which become connected with the actions

[1] The mnemonic HELPERR calls for the following actions from health professionals identifying a case of shoulder dystocia: H=call for Help; E=evaluate for Episiotomy; L=Legs (the McRoberts manoeuvre); P=suprapubic Pressure; E=Enter manoeuvres (internal rotation); R=Remove the posterior arm; R=Roll the patient (Baxley & Gobbo, 2004).

> with others through listening and attuning. [In this essay, we refer to this as CE1]
>
> 2. Questioning, seeking, and giving confirmation. Expressing uncertainty about what to do, echoing assertions or commitments. [CE2]
>
> 3. Directing actions. Instructing, guiding or suggesting to others, decision making, and directing continuation or change in actions or roles. [CE3]

These connective enactments were momentary, concrete actions. Three collective accomplishments were also identified:

> 1. Fluid role-switching. Taking roles that vary from those assigned to professionals in "normal" practice, and taking turns in performing specific actions. [CA1]
>
> 2. Coordinated, responsive sequencing and pacing. Collectively determining what to do next, when to continue and when to change actions, based on specificities of the unfolding situation. [CA2]
>
> 3. Producing calm and security. Enabling practitioners and the mother to feel calm and secure in what is happening, despite the urgency and risk of the situation. [CA3]

The collective accomplishments were key to how praxis was enacted, and the connective enactments were the means to realise the collective accomplishments.

The notions of connective enactment and collective accomplishment arose in the interpretation by Hopwood et al. of the evidence in this particular case. Working with others is common in many if not all professional practice contexts, however. This begs the question of whether these phenomena occur in other cases of professional practice. If they do, connective enactment and collective accomplishment could be useful new concepts to capture and further study how the specific actions of individuals contribute to collective ends—exemplifying the notion of the "collectividual" (Stetsenko, 2019). That is, these concepts further reveal the sociality of distributed professional practices, without evacuating the contributions of individuals. Improved understandings of how connective enactment and collective accomplishment occur might thus help educators more sensitively to prepare aspiring professionals to participate in the distributed practices typical of their professions.

This essay proceeds from the conjecture that connective enactment is that part of distributed practice which achieves *participants' mutual orientation* to features of a situation, while collective accomplishment is the part which *guides and coordinates*

participants' individual actions as their collective practice unfolds, as they respond, individually and collectively to the feedback they attune to as they act, so their distributed efforts do indeed accomplish their common end: the object of the practice. Probing this conjecture, we now revisit and expand on the relationship between the specific concepts used by Hopwood et al. (2022) and the wider theory of practice architectures. We begin by focusing on intersubjective space, because it is in this theoretical terrain that the specific concepts might gain wider purchase.

The theory of practice architectures: Intersubjective space

In practice, the phenomena of connective enactment and collective accomplishment occur in particular kinds of intersubjective spaces, some of which have their own recognisable "signatures". In the Hopwood et al. (2022) shoulder dystocia simulations, "narrating, listening, and attuning", for example, happened in semantic space, and flowed into actions in material space, coordinated by relationships in social space. The focus in "coordinated, responsive sequencing and pacing" might appear to be action in material space-time, but it was guided by ideas about what should be done, in semantic space, and by the relationships between the different actors as they coordinated with one another. Similarly, "producing calm and security" might seem to focus on the social space inhabited by the health team and the mother and baby, but it was also shaped in semantic space (e.g., ideas about what will produce calm) and in material space (e.g., acting in measured ways intended to produce calm). The simulation of the shoulder dystocia emergency Hopwood et al. describe has its own distinctive "signature" as an emergency that requires calm, interprofessional coordination. For example, in relation to

> 1. the sayings of this distributed practice, the health team talks and thinks in the language of shoulder dystocia and the acronym HELPERR;
>
> 2. the doings of the practice, they also engage in coordinated ways with the embodied mother and baby, the embodied actions of the health team, and the furniture and equipment in the site; and
>
> 3. the relatings of the practice, they work as a team, in a spirit of engaged collaboration, with fluid role-switching and coordinated mutual action to free the (simulated) baby and preserve the wellbeing of the mother.

Once shoulder dystocia was identified, some features of the delivery and the delivery room faded into the background, while those aspects essential to addressing the dystocia moved into the foreground.

The theory of practice architectures provides a framework to understand aspects of professional practices where people work together. The concepts of connective enactment and collective accomplish are embedded in this framework. Practices are not simply the

realisations in action of individuals' intentions; they have three "extra-individual" dimensions (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008) that together compose the *intersubjective spaces* (Kemmis, 2019, 2022; Kemmis et al., 2014) in which practices occur. According to the theory of practice architectures, people encounter one another in intersubjective space as

> 1. interlocutors in semantic space, in the medium of language, among prefiguring (Schatzki, 2002) cultural-discursive arrangements that include shared languages and discourses;
>
> 2. embodied persons in physical space-time, in the medium of activity and work, among prefiguring material-economic arrangements that include bodies, tools, and other material objects (including specific set-ups of objects in time and space, as, for example, in a workshop or clinical simulation setting); and
>
> 3. social beings, in the medium of social space, among prefiguring social-political arrangements that include lifeworld relationships of mutual recognition and system relationships ascribed by organisational roles.

According to the theory, practices *happen* in intersubjective spaces, which are spaces constituted not by individuals alone or even in aggregate, but by collective histories that form malleable and evolving site-specific cultures and discourses, material and economic circumstances, and social and political conditions.

When people enter the intersubjective space of a particular site, they *think* and *talk* in relevant, site-specific ways. At work, for example, they use the site-specific discourses of different occupations (e.g., share-trading, carpentry, plumbing, or community nursing). These cultural-discursive arrangements usually precede the practitioners' presence in the site; they are pre-existing elements of the culture of the site (e.g., a building site, a clinician's office, or a science classroom). Moreover, people follow strong patterns of distributed talk-in-interaction regarded as appropriate for communication in different kinds of sites: highly routinised talk in air traffic control, the informal talk between hairdressers and clients, the liturgical patterns of the church service, the patterns of classroom interaction in classes dominated by teacher talk. In this way, sites are pre-patterned and prefigured (Schatzki, 2002), to be places where particular kinds of language and discourses are used, where particular kinds of things are talked and thought about.

Secondly, sites are prefigured for different kinds of *activity* and *work*: very often, the material-economic arrangements found in a site already announce the kind of place it is and prefigure the kinds of activities and work that ordinarily happen there (e.g., the office for conducting business affairs, the clinical setting for delivering healthcare, the kitchen for cooking). On the other hand, most spaces permit multiple uses: a carpentry workshop is not just a place to learn the practices of carpentry; it may also be an excellent place for an adolescent apprentice to talk about social anxieties with a sympathetic adult. Many material

arrangements are also, themselves, constructed, often through practices, in the way a carpentry workshop for the production of roof frames was itself constructed through the practices of carpenters, who used tools previously manufactured by toolmakers. It is not only the memories of carpenters that make that place recognisable as a workshop; it is laid down in the set-up of the material arrangements themselves—set-ups that the carpenters may change and develop over time, to accomplish different purposes.

Thirdly, different sites and locations are prefigured for different kinds of relationships of *solidarity* and *power*: the university class, the supermarket, the telephone call centre. The workplace prefigures a range of workplace role relationships of power and authority alongside lifeworld relationships of collaboration, solidarity, and friendship. When they enter a new setting, newcomers know to observe how established relationships are played out there; experience teaches them that it can be easy to misunderstand how relationships are arranged and enacted in this place.

Combinations of these three kinds of arrangements form the *practice architectures* that enable and constrain participants' practices in the site. To use an ecological analogy, the arrangements form the niche conditions that make a particular practice possible and determine whether it will be sustainable. Together, practice architectures give a signature spectrum of semantic significances, action potentials, and emotional valences to the intersubjective space in a site (e.g., the different kinds of atmospheres of the dentist's surgery, the football game, or Otto's share house).

People in a site thus encounter one another not across empty space, but in spaces always already coloured or crowded with *cultural and cognitive significances*; *potentials for embodied*, *material action*; and *social and emotional valences*—for themselves and for others. By bringing these significances, action potentials, and valences to a site, people reproduce it as a site of a certain kind and, as they engage with the arrangements present in the site, their possibilities for practice are mediated—enabled and constrained—by their engagement with such locally-specific, historically formed features of intersubjective space.

The notion of intersubjective spaces in which people encounter one another also helps to make more tangible the dialectical idea of the "collectividual" ("collective" + "individual") suggested by Anna Stetsenko (2013, 2019). Marx's (1845, n.p.) third thesis on Feuerbach expressed a version of this idea as follows:

> The materialist doctrine that [people] are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed [people] are products of changed circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is [people] who change circumstances and that the educator must [her or] himself be educated.

Figure 1 aims to depict this idea in the form of a lemniscate to capture the movement of the dialectic, the back-and-forth flow, between the individual and the social. The lines in the

lemniscate are deliberately roughly drawn and overlapping, to evoke the somewhat disordered way the dialectic unfolds moment-to-moment in everyday reality.

Figure 1. The dialectic of the individual and the social. Reproduced with permission from Kemmis (2022), p. 97.

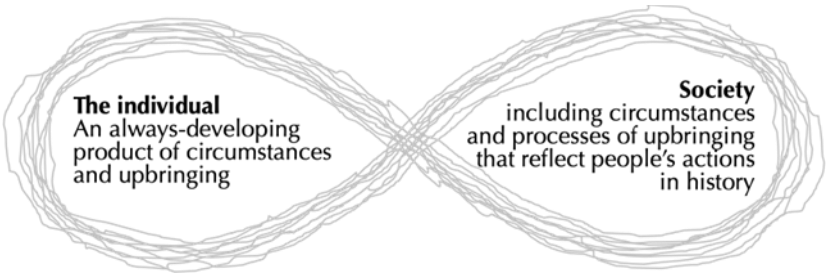
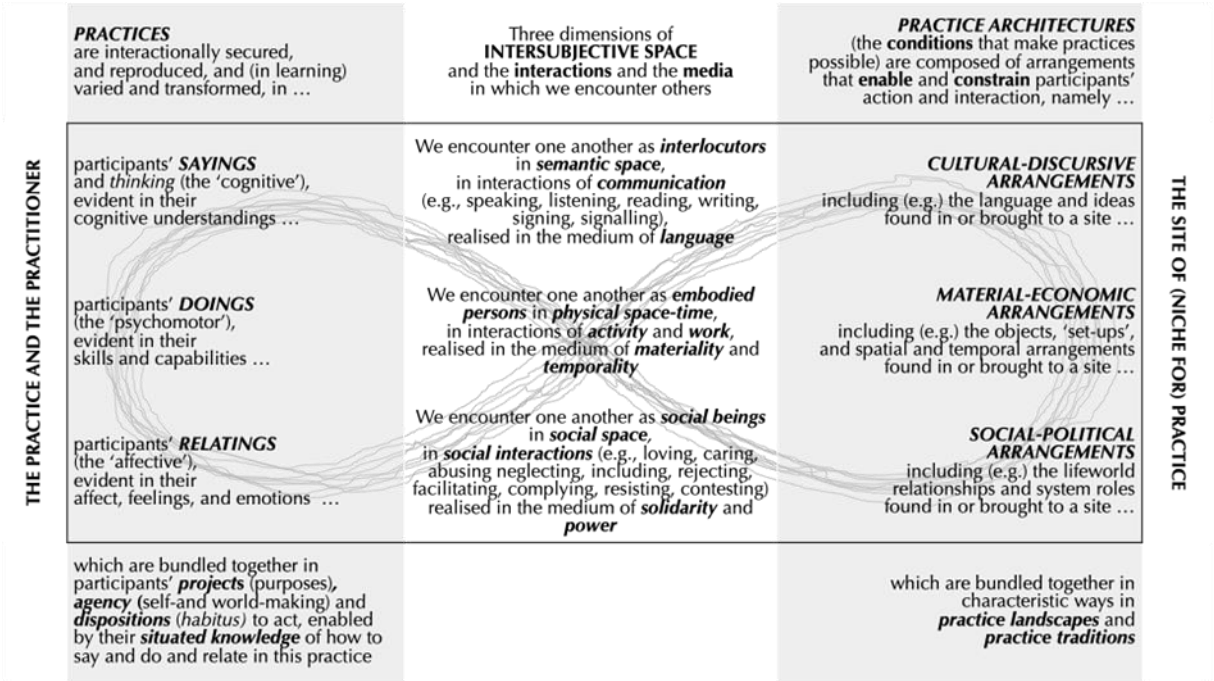


Figure 2, which extends this idea and summarises key elements of the theory of practice architectures, includes this dialectic of the individual and the social as it plays out in the dialectic between the sayings, doings, and relatings that compose people's practices and the different kinds of arrangements that together form the practice architectures that enable and constrain practices.

Figure 2. The dialectic of practices and arrangements (practice architectures). Adapted and reproduced with permission from Kemmis et al. (2014), p. 38, and Kemmis (2022), p. 97.



This account of practices as enabled and constrained by practice architectures reflects practice theorist Theodore Schatzki's (2012) notion of *practice-arrangement bundles*. He regards the relationship between practices and arrangements as "fundamental to analysing social life" (2012, p. 16). He says:

> To say that practices and arrangements bundle is to say (1) that practices effect, use, give meaning to, and are inseparable from arrangements while (2) arrangements channel, prefigure, facilitate, and are essential to practices (Schatzki, 2012, p. 16).

The theory of practice architectures shares this view and regards practices as bundling not only with material entities (arrangements), but also with discursive and with social arrangements. Thus, the sayings of a practice bundle principally (but not only) with cultural-discursive arrangements, its doings bundle principally (but not only) with material-economic arrangements, and its relatings bundle principally (but not only) with social-political arrangements. In reality, sayings, doings, and relatings do not appear separately from one another; they are always entwined together, like multiple strands in a rope or the two strands in the double helix structure of DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) that contains the genetic information which guides the reproduction, differentiation, and growth of cells.

Distributed practices

Many professional practices are not accomplished by single individuals acting alone; rather, they are *co-produced* by people acting together (e.g., a doctor and a patient). Such practices are *distributed*: they are accomplished through the co-participation of multiple actors. The work of most professions is accomplished through varieties of distributed practices. As well as the synchronous co-present forms of teamwork around a patient in an emergency (in the simulation in Hopwood et al.'s 2022 paper), practices can be distributed through different responsibilities (e.g., on a building site), or different professional contributions over extended periods of time (e.g., in community care and services; Reich et al., 2017).

For example, Kemmis et al. (2020) describe how, in distributed classroom talk-in-interaction, the sayings, doings, and relatings of teachers both prompt and respond to the sayings, doings, and relatings of students, so that the nexus between the teacher's and students' actions co-produce distributed *pedagogical practices*. In such distributed practices, the sayings, doings, and relatings of one participant become practice architectures that enable and constrain the practices of another, in various kinds of reciprocal relationships between the different people involved. Such reciprocal relationships include (e.g.) one participant's mirroring, answering, continuing, or extending the sayings, doings, and relatings of another participant in the practice.

Exploring a more general formulation

Using the theory of practice architectures as a framework, we now explore the possibility that the phenomena of connective enactment and collective accomplishment can be generalised to account for the way professionals and others engage with one another to produce distributed practices.

Perhaps the connective enactments Hopwood et al. (2022) identified in the case of the shoulder dystocia simulation herald a variety of ways in which people connect and engage

with one another as they share the work of *orienting to* one another's actions in distributed practices. Perhaps the collective accomplishments Hopwood et al. identified herald a variety of ways in which people *coordinate* and *mutually perform* their actions to accomplish particular ends. No doubt it will always be an empirical question whether connective enactments and collective accomplishments can be observed in the unfolding of distributed practices, like people's practices in a university seminar, or a football game, or preparing meals in a restaurant. On this view, the unfolding phases of connective enactment are observed when people direct, suggest, signal, sign, prompt, and orient people to coordinate their efforts. Equally, in phases of collective accomplishment, participants coordinate their actions to accomplish their shared ends. If this is so more generally, we might then conjecture that connective enactment and collective accomplishment will be observable in many, perhaps most, distributed practices.

Table 1 summarises this more general formulation of the phenomena of connective enactment and collective accomplishment.

Table 1. Three faces of connective enactment and collective accomplishment.

	Connective enactments (CE):	**Collective accomplishments (CA)**:
1. In semantic space	**CE1**: Conscious, deliberate, mutual, reciprocal orientation and re-orientation in participants' *talk, thinking, hearing, writing, and reading* as they connect their *sayings* in the practice.	**CA1**: Mutually performing relevant *talk, thinking, hearing, writing,* and *reading* that accomplish mutual understanding of what is happening and the outcomes of what happens.
2. In physical space-time	**CE2**: Mutual orientation and reorientation in what participants *do* in their interactions with one another, and with the physical entities and set-ups in the site, as they connect their *doings* in the practice.	**CA2**: Mutually performing relevant *actions* (*doings*) that accomplish coordinated action and material ends.
3. In social space	**CE3**: Mutual orientation and reorientation in how participants *relate* to one another, and how they feel, in the situation as they connect their *relatings* in the practice.	**CA3**: Mutually performing relevant *relationships* (*relatings*) that accomplish feelings, emotions, and ways of being together as the practice unfolds and as the result of working together.

These three faces of connective enactment and collective accomplishment are only analytically distinct. In life, they are always interwoven, as, for example, in the case of *calm* in the shoulder dystocia example. Team members are mutually conscious of the idea "calm" (sayings): they are aware that it is a crucial professional obligation in difficult circumstances like these. They also have to enact calm (doings) and do so as a team, not only as individuals. And they are committed to relating (relatings) to one another, and to the mother, in a collectively calm and measured way. *Practising* calm is a unity that shows its face in each of these three dimensions of practices.

In the examples of connective enactment in Hopwood et al. (2022),

1. participants connect with one another in their *sayings* by (e.g.,) narrating and listening;

2. they connect with one another in their *doings* by (e.g.,) expressing uncertainty about what to do, and echoing assertions or commitments; and

3. they connect with one another in their *relatings* by (e.g.,) directing change or continuation in one another's roles.

In the shoulder dystocia example, these three strands became increasingly tightly interwoven as the participants connected and coordinated their understandings, actions, and roles to perform the distributed practice and thus jointly approached the collective accomplishment of their shared ends: delivering the baby safely and preserving the wellbeing of the mother and baby.

To test the plausibility of the conjecture that connective enactment and collective accomplishment can indeed be observed in other distributed practices, we now turn to the description of a case of distributed practice written before Hopwood et al. (2022) identified these phenomena.

Testing the viability of the more general conceptualisation

Mary Johnsson (2012, p. 58) presents a vivid account of practices associated with culinary service in a commercial restaurant. As a trial to explore whether the notions of connective enactment and collective accomplishment are to be found in other cases of distributed practice, the left column of Table 2 quotes Johnsson's description of the case, and the right column presents our annotations indicating where there is evidence of connective enactments (CE) and collective accomplishments (CA).

Table 2. Connective enactment and collective accomplishment in a culinary services example.

Johnsson's (2012, p.58) description	**Evidence of connective enactments (CE) and collective accomplishments (CA)**
It is during the pressure of service that prior practice preparations, skills, knowledge and experience must be contextually applied [by distributed participants, in ways that have consequences for the practitioner (preparing the grilled lamb cutlet), event (delivering two customer mains simultaneously to the same table), practice (the professionalism and flair of commercial cookery) and enterprise (sustaining the reputation of the restaurant). Work flow and coordinative understandings are distributed 'in the heat of the moment' across different practitioners because the typical organization of kitchens assigns chefs by station and function (e.g. individual responsibilities for meal components such as grill, cold larder, dessert), yet outcomes (e.g. customer orders) require simultaneous delivery (e.g. all the finished main orders including their accompaniments for all customers at one table at the same time).	The kitchen staff need to connect their knowledge and experience (CE1), contextually applying these in practice, oriented to and in light of each other's actions (CE2), and to establish appropriate relatings (CE3). The prepared lamb cutlet lamb cutlet, and the delivery of two mains to the same table at the same time require distributed practices to converge through particular coordinative understandings (CA1) and work flows that converge in time (CA2); all the CEs also contribute to other shared ends around flair and reputation (CE3). Individual contributions to these are organised through station and function responsibilities (CE3), which co-produce particular components of meals.
Service work flow is 'bursty' and sporadic. It is initiated by the event of an order (usually activated by docket information from an order machine) which then generates an intense series of parallel activities from multiple practitioners that are adjusted as required by a sous-chef who is the kitchen operations manager. For example, the sous-chef yelling 'two minutes to the lamb' allows the chef preparing the vegetable accompaniment for that lamb dish to judge whether she must accelerate personal preparations so that the total order can be completed in 2 min. In this practice, the end results of quality, delivered and completed customer orders are intimately linked to their means (e.g., how long the lamb cutlet should be grilled to remain tender, juicy yet cooked, or how to retain the heat and seasonings of the accompanying sauce, until the time the customer first tastes it on the plate). Individual practitioner roles and activities can be differentiated – who produced the dessert, who dressed the salad. Yet it is the cumulative effects of many holistic outcomes that sustain the standards of excellence for the overall practice – for example, customer preferences for a particular cuisine, the explicit and implicit techniques that govern that particular culinary style and the ambience and efficiency in delivering	The workflow (CA2) depends on connective spoken (CE1) and embodied (CE2) responses to the orders: they are parallel but not independent or identical, having a distinctive social organisation (CE3). Time-calling (CE1) allows not only for responsive actions (CE2), but also contributes to others' and shared judgements – collective accomplishments of mutual understanding (CA1) and timed performance (CA2). The specific contributions adjust and attune not only to particular customer orders, but also to the specificities of other chefs' comments and actions, accomplishing a fluid differentiation in roles (CA3).

This small trial suggests that connective enactment and collective accomplishment can be understood in relation to the sayings, doings, and relatings of practices, even though Johnsson's (2012) description of this practice of culinary service was published nine years before Hopwood et al.'s conceptualisation appeared.

Conclusion

This essay began by canvassing how the phenomena of connective enactment and collective accomplishment trace the ways in which different kinds of work (orientation and reorientation; coordination of efforts) occurred in the particular case of a simulation of health professionals responding to shoulder dystocia in which the practitioners *re-oriented* themselves to address the transformed situation and began to *coordinate their efforts and actions differently* to collectively accomplish the safe delivery of the child, and the safety of the mother. Using the theory of practice architectures, and the way it construes the intersubjective spaces in which practices occur, we aimed to show how the phenomena of connective enactment and collective accomplishment may be generalised beyond the case studied by Hopwood et al.

Testing the viability of the notions of connective enactment and collective accomplishment in a different case of practice, Johnsson's (2012) study of culinary services, suggested that these phenomena could also be found in this case. It is likely that future research will reveal connective enactment and collective accomplishment occurring in distributed practices in many diverse contexts. For example, Lave and Wenger (1991) and Lave (2019) describe the processes of *situated learning* that take place when newcomers to a workplace learn how to become full participants in workplace practices by "legitimate peripheral participation" in which they try out the work practices of "old hands". Future researchers into workplace practices and education might investigate whether the notions of connective enactment and collective accomplishment help to flesh out how, empirically, legitimate peripheral participation happens as newcomers are initiated into different kinds of work practices, and whether they do so in the kinds of ways that the healthcare teams studied by Hopwood et al. achieved mutual orientation in the shoulder dystocia simulation, and coordinated their actions to accomplish the collective ends of successfully delivering a baby without harm to mother or child.

A key contribution of these ideas to understanding and researching professional practices lies in their connection to the notion of the collectividual (Stetsenko, 2019) and parallels in frameworks such as the theory of practice architectures. This is important if we are to recognise the collective nature of professional practices without losing all sight of and grip on individual contributions to those practices. While we may act together with others in practice, we must also always act ourselves, aware of and responsible for our own contributions. A key aspect of professionalism is not just to follow rules and enact theoretical knowledge, but to avoid harm and suffering, and to act for the good of each

person and the good for humankind. This is the form of action Aristotle described as *praxis* (MacIntyre, 1983). Taking a neo-Aristotelian view of praxis, Kemmis and Smith (2008, p. 4) described praxis as:

> […] action that is morally committed, and oriented and informed by the traditions of the field. […] Praxis is what people do when they take into account all the circumstances and exigencies that confront them in the particular moment and then, taking the broadest view they can of what is best to do, they act. (p. 4).

This neo-Aristotelian view of praxis is extended by a complementary Marxian view of praxis. As Mahon, Heikkinen, Huttunen, Boyle and Sjølie (2020, p. 27) wrote:

> […] in praxis, actors are aware of the historical situatedness of what they are doing. They are conscious of their actions in the present being shaped by history (e.g., past actions/events and consequences of past actions/events), and of how they are shaping unfolding action […] that is, how their actions are "making" history (Kemmis, 2008). This evokes the notion of educational praxis as "history-making educational action" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 22; see also Kemmis & Trede, 2010), which links to the […] Marxian notion of praxis.

Professional practice informed by such views is rightly described as *professional praxis*. It embodies a view of professionalism which recognises not only the collective goods of the profession but also acts for the collective good, as well as the individual good, of the people the profession serves. The notions of connective enactment and collective accomplishment in distributed professional practices point to ways in which professionals (and those they serve) enact mutual orientation as they work out what is to be done, and coordinated action directed towards accomplishing that end. These notions flesh out the idea of the collectividual by suggesting ways in which individual professional practitioners orient and act in the conduct of collective distributed practices.

The notions of connective enactment and collective accomplishment provide useful analytical foci not only for understanding how work is done, but also for understanding the learning that makes that work possible. The notions were originally recognised in a formal professional education setting and identified as conceptual labels for things that were being taught and learned in order to change practices. It turns out that they may be relevant for understanding how participants' actions are coordinated in many distributed practices to accomplish shared ends. No doubt further research will identify the forms that connective enactment and collective accomplishment take in a range of different work settings, with implications for the design of site-specific forms of pedagogy through which the mutual orientation and coordination of participants' actions in distributed practices can be taught and learned, thus enhancing both professionalism and professional practice.

Declaration

Both authors confirm that there are no interests to declare.

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The Research Literacy of Professionals: Reconciling Evidence-Based Practice and Practical Wisdom

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Abstract

There is widespread agreement that the art/science dichotomy is obsolete; professional practice must accommodate both experience-based judgment and evidence-based tools. However, there is little agreement on what this reconciliation entails, partly because we lack a conceptualization of the professional agency involved. What kind of intellectual ability is needed for the translation of research into practice? This article argues that we need a new conception of *research literacy*, where the distinct issues of application to practice are addressed. By first replacing the art/science dichotomy with a *craft model* of professional practice, the article explains how research literacy should be conceived as a virtue that preserves the integrity of the domain of expertise. This virtue is served by a set of sensitivities that enable professionals to embed evidence-based tools into practice in a collaborative and situationally attuned way. The craft-oriented conception of research literacy is explored with examples from medicine and teaching.

Keywords

Research literacy, evidence-based practice, intellectual virtue, professional judgment

Introduction

It is a sociological commonplace that professional practice aims to be both scientifically anchored yet flexibly to attuned individual situations (Brante, 2011; Freidson, 2001). However, this commonplace assumes that professionals can mediate responsibly between research-informed standards and the complex demands of practice. The assumption is standardly justified by appeal to the "practical wisdom" of professionals. But as Donald Schön famously said, the term "wisdom" and its cognates are "junk categories" typically used as placeholders for elusive types of reasoning (1987, p. 13). While Schön's influential account of "reflection-in-action" made some aspects of practical wisdom less elusive, the current demands on reflection are unclear. How can evidence-based tools, such as decision aids for patient interaction or school-wide behavioral programs, be translated to practice without sacrificing responsible professional judgment?

This is an issue where superficial agreement soon gives way to fundamental disagreement. On the one hand, few would claim that professionals can ignore knowledge gained from systematic meta-reviews, science-based recommendations provided in guidelines and validated models of decision-making. Outright rejection of the tools of evidence-based practice will often be reckless. On the other hand, the turn towards evidence-based practice continues to raise fears of "cookbook medicine" or "teachers as mere technicians." *Qua* professionals, role-holders are supposed to act on reasons that can be offered as substantial justifications as opposed to mere formalistic deference to procedures. Today, fears of formalistic deference may be warranted by persisting tendencies to connect evidence-based guidelines to mechanisms of accountability (for recent accounts, see Håland & Melby, 2021 on medicine; Mockler & Stacy, 2021 on teaching). Sticking strictly to procedures may in some cases be necessary to avoid liability.

However, a more fundamental reason for continued resistance to evidence-based practice is the lack of conceptual tools for seeing professional roles as both governed by evidence and practical wisdom. Despite an abundance of academic literature claiming the obsolescence of the "art/science dichotomy"[1] and persuasive accounts of the potential "synergy between *theoria*, *praxis* and *poiesis*" (Oancea, 2018, p. 1050), there is no framework for integrating the tools of evidence-based practice with ethically informed and experience-based judgment. In some regards, we are still dealing in Schön's "junk categories." That is, the

[1] "the hoary confusion regarding the extent to which medicine is an art or a science is a relic of murkier times and not a useful way to think about the management of uncertainty in clinical practice" (Goodman, 2003, p. xi), "the recent distinction between the 'art' and 'science' of medicine presumes a traditional logical positivist or logical empiricist philosophy of science" (Solomon, 2015, p. 7), "This is a cliché we should get rid of—if only because neither the concept of 'art' nor the notion of 'science,' as they figure in this phrase, have any empirical referent" (Berg, 1997, p. 1085).

standards of practical wisdom that enable responsible reconciliation have yet to be articulated.

This paper argues that we can make headway by reconsidering what *research literacy* means in the professional context. Using examples from the literature on medicine and education, the paper shows how calls for research literacy seldom reach beyond the expectation that professionals should understand the methods, concepts, and importance of research. This expectation may be reasonable in itself, but it can lead to unreasonable results if the role-specific contours of research literacy are neglected. That is, an understanding that is restricted to terms internal to the domain of research fails to do justice to the challenges of reconciliation.

The following argument for professional research literacy as a mediating virtue between research and practice proceeds in three steps. The first challenge is to derive some basic benchmarks for responsible practice. The call for overcoming the art/science dichotomy is essentially a call for a new model of professional reasoning with research. My suggestion is to frame responsible reasoning on a craft model of professional practice. This is a rejoinder to the current literature on professional reasoning that equates craftwork with intuitive artistry and therefore as antithetical to evidence-based practice. The craft model can be rehabilitated by briefly revisiting the Socratic dialogues, which contain a conception of craftwork that is suitable for current needs. The second step is to articulate a conception of research literacy that respects the constraints of the craft model. In line with the craft model, my argument is that research literacy should be conceived as an intellectual virtue that serves the integrity of a practical domain of expertise. The final step is to illustrate this conception of professional research literacy with a couple of examples drawn from medicine and teaching.

What is professional practice? A craft model

The question of whether and how professional practice can comprise both evidence-based tools and practical wisdom depends, most fundamentally, on how we understand the concept of professional practice. It is useful to take a lead from the famous neurosurgeon Henry Marsh in this regard. In recounting his interview for medical school, Marsh mentions how a senior pipe-smoking registrar noted “it was best to see medicine as a form of craft, neither art nor science—an opinion with which I came to agree in later years” (Marsh, 2014 p. 77). The point seems to be, roughly, that good practitioners are neither slaves of rigid methods nor improvising performers. Rather, they have a grasp of the time and place of procedures and standards. It is about intelligent application of rules, guided by an understanding of the core concerns of the practice. For example, urgency may call for relaxation of precautionary measures, risky matters may call for increased information for consent, and so on.

We can expand on this by drawing on the "least academic" theory of knowledge (Woodruff, 1990, p. 60), namely Plato's early Socratic dialogues devoted to the nature of *techne*—standardly translated as craft. Describing it as the "least academic" theory is meant honorifically, referring to it being unburdened by later reductions of knowledge to "justified true belief" and modern controversies over how to meet skeptical worries. The dialogues express a more practical concern with *expertise* understood as the knowledge that grounds trustworthy action in a specific domain. On the early Platonic conception, expertise involves the interweaving of different types of knowledge (skills, factual knowledge, understanding of principle, etc.). That is, unlike later theories of knowledge that focus on how individual propositions can be warranted in the face of skeptical worries, the Socratic epistemology aims at illuminating knowledge as embodied in ways of doing things. In pursuit of this aim, the craft model takes on three main features that will be useful in conceptualizing the reconciliation of research and judgment. In the following, I am referring to these features as extracted by Plato scholars. It bears emphasizing that these scholars are not merely pursuing an exegetical goal, they are trying to reconstruct a theory of expertise that is attractive in its own right and that deserves to be revived.

The first feature is that an activity that aspires to be a craft must possess *integrity* (Smith, 1998, pp. 135-136; Woodruff, 1990, p. 72). This concerns the scope of the activity; the craftsperson is neither specialized in an arbitrarily narrow domain nor engaging in some very generic competence that is used in the pursuit of all kinds of ends. The idea is that each craft has an end that naturally connects a set of skills. Diagnostics, for example, arguably requires skills in abductive reasoning, probability, and communication. These skills hang together because they jointly support the end of explaining symptoms. By contrast, communication is not a craft in and of itself, because it serves many types of ends.

The second feature is that craftwork is rational in the sense that the craftsperson *can give reasons*. In the Socratic dialogues, this feature is especially emphasized to distinguish between craftwork and the automated skill expressed in a mere "knack" or "routine" (Plato, 1997b, Gorgias 462b-463c). The expertise of craftwork involves an understanding of connections, enabling the craftsperson to explain why certain things are done. Note that this is not simply about straightforward causal reasons, but also about normative reasons. For example, Socrates claimed poets lack craft expertise because they cannot explain the value of their artistic decisions (Plato, 1997a, Apology 22b-c).

The third feature of craftwork is that it can deal flexibly and intelligently with a variety of situations. This follows from the previous two features (integrity and rationality). A craft is not so specialized that it can only deal with standardized and predictable situations. It can deal with dynamic and novel challenges. Naturally, flexibility features prominently in modern craft conceptions as well, for example in the already mentioned concept of "reflection-in-action" (Schön, 1983). In Richard Sennett's *The Craftsman*, craftwork is imbued with a spirit of curiosity rather than formalistic reasoning (2008, e.g., p. 224, p. 288).

The curiosity that drives craftwork comprises inquiry into *why* some action is right, and this helps explain how flexibility relates to rationality. The expertise involved in craftwork is not mere imitation of actions in similar situations, but a form of responsiveness to a complex of connections.

However, there is no claim here that all the knowledge that goes into expertise can and should be articulated. Rather, the rationality component calls for an articulation that can provide *evidence* of craft knowledge, but this does not imply that the practical understanding that guides craftwork can be reduced to the content of the propositional articulation (see Smith, 1998, p. 138 for the Socratic pedigree of this view). Abstract principles and rules may indicate a direction of action for the novice, but for the expert they lose some of their guidance function and take on a more explanatory and justificatory role. However, this remaining justificatory function is, at best, obscured in more recent theories of expertise (Benner et al., 2009; Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986).

I motivated this account of professional practice by way of explaining a surgeon's remark about medicine being a craft. My account reclaims the craft concept from the current tendency to associate the concept with the antithesis of research-informed reflection, a tendency that is especially prevalent in the literature on teaching (see Winch, 2017, ch. 6 for a good overview). On the one hand, this tendency is understandable given the way craftwork often involves tacit knowledge and automated skills. However, the advantage of revisiting the Socratic dialogues is to highlight the rational and justificatory component of craftwork. As Plato scholar Terence Irwin describes the view: "The expert in a particular craft offers authoritative guidance supported by a rational account" (1977, p. 71). This connection between craftwork and rational account-giving survives in some contemporary virtue-theoretical accounts of expertise. Julia Annas, for example, sees craftwork as the opposite of mindless routine (2011, p. 169), although she and many others note that the term "craft" carries impoverished associations today compared to the ancient Greek concept of *techne*.

How does the craft model help us reconcile evidence-based tools and practical wisdom? It gives a sense of how research literacy—as a mediating ability—should be conceived as an intellectual virtue that sustains the integrity of practice through flexible adaptation. How far removed is this conception from the current use of the term "research literacy" in connection with evidence-based practice? As we shall see in the next section, while the craft model is aligned with certain influential accounts of the principles of evidence-based practice, current ideas of research literacy fail to recognize the need for mediation between normative domains. In particular, research literacy is still being used in the way it was introduced in the "public understanding of science" tradition, while what is needed is an account that respects how the use of evidence-based tools creates distinct challenges for the integrity of practice.

Why research literacy? Beyond the public understanding conception

On my reading, evidence-based practice is fundamentally about translation between domains of knowledge. While it has become common to equate evidence-based practice with a set of statistically refined techniques—especially randomized controlled trials and meta-analyses of such trials—it is a striking fact that its *core* method has only been gestured at in vague terms. That is, the methodological and epistemological issues involved in the evidence hierarchies and the guidelines have drawn much attention, but if we take the most cited definition seriously, these issues are secondary. Instead, the most fundamental concern is the *integration* of research-based evidence and professional judgment.

The famous definition from medicine reads: "The practice of evidence-based practice means integrating individual clinical expertise with the best available external evidence from systematic research" (Sackett et al., 1996, p. 71). As the authors note, "expertise" involves moral notions such as "compassion" and "thoughtfulness" (Sackett et al., 1996, p. 71). In other words, the evidence of systematic research needs to be translated into a practical framework of reasoning, which includes value-based considerations. In a similar vein, evidence-based teaching has been described as "a set of principles and practices which can alter the way people think about education" (Davies, 1999, p. 118). But such programmatic statements have not been followed up with a theory of integration through professional reasoning. Hence, for the past two decades, a steady stream of analysts, including friends of the evidence movement, claim that "the question of how experience and judgment integrates with the rules remains oblique" (Kelly, 2018, p. 1160).[2]

This obliqueness is due, at least in part, to the fact that the notion of research literacy is seldom taken to present distinct challenges for professionals. This neglect is reflected in the way the concept is used to assess comprehension of research, but not the agency involved in its application. Literacy, in its original and extended senses, is a "two-sided competency" (Engstrom, 2011, pp. 22-23; Herman, 2007, p. 80), meaning that it involves both epistemic *access* and competent *action*. In discussions of evidence-based practice, however, the focus is almost exclusively on access rather than action. For example, the early evidence movement is sometimes described as a "research literacy movement," but here the term research literacy simply means instilling "the ability to independently and critically read the biomedical research literature" (Wyer & Silva, 2015, p. 2). This falls within the broader tradition of treating professional research literacy as conceptually uninteresting, seeing it instead as merely a subcategory of public understanding of science, which is equally focused on the access aspect of research literacy.

[2] See also Bluhm, 2017, pp. 1-2: Loughlin et al., 2016, p. 629.

In fact, the assimilation between research literacy as understood in public understanding of science literature and research literacy in the professional context is often quite systematic. The public understanding conception of research literacy has a tripartite structure. It requires (1) "an understanding of the norms of science," (2) "knowledge of major scientific constructs," (3) "awareness of the impact of science and technology on society and the policy choices that must inevitably emerge" (Miller, 1983, p. 31). This structure is easily recognized in discussions of research literacy in professional roles. The research literacy of medical professionals has been defined as (1) the ability to "access, interpret, and critically evaluate primary medical literature," (2) familiarity with a "multitude of available research databases and [ability] to structure their clinical questions in a way that optimizes searchability and literature retrieval," and (3) the capacity to "decide if the results of the study are clinically meaningful and relevant to their own work in the field" (Senders et al., 2014). As in the public understanding tradition, this structure maintains a focus on methodological soundness, up-to-date findings, and practical importance. Similarly, the research literacy of teachers is defined as (1) being "familiar with a range of research methods," (2) knowledge of "the latest research findings," (3) and understanding "the implications of this research for their day-to-day practice, and for education policy and practice more broadly" (BERA, 2014, p. 40).

This way of extending research literacy from the public understanding context to professional practice is useful insofar as it highlights the need for active and critical engagement. Nevertheless, this standard conception of professional research literacy raises questions concerning what it means for professionals to reason in ways that aim not only at comprehension but also at application of research in a way that respects role-specific responsibilities. How can research literacy serve a mediating function between the domain of "what works" and the domain of "what is appropriate"?

The assimilation between professional research literacy and public understanding of science is not total, however. To some extent, the need for a mediating and craft-oriented concept of research literacy has been acknowledged in other parts of the literature. Recently, Pete Boyd argued that educational theory should develop a conception of research literacy that recognizes "the interplay between research and practical wisdom" (Boyd, 2022, p. 19). Similarly, in medicine, it has been argued that research literacy consists in a set of "core competencies" including "professional values, attitudes, and ethics" (des Cruser et al., 2012, p. 167).

The references to "practical wisdom" and "professional values" draw attention to the fact that teachers and doctors face a distinct task of application. For research literacy to serve as a source of trustworthiness, it must be given a role-specific form that connects evidence to the goals and concerns of professional practice. I have already argued that professional practice can be understood on a craft model, but it remains to be shown how this model should govern our conception of research literacy. In the next section, I propose an account

of professional research literacy that has its own distinct tripartite structure (i.e., different from the public understanding conception). Importantly, this is not meant to diminish the need for research literacy in the public understanding sense (i.e., critical comprehension). The claim is rather that research literacy takes on further dimensions in the professional context. Hence, the three sensitivities presented in the next section delineate the core features that make professional research literacy distinctive, but they do not exclude the concerns of the public understanding of science conception.

Professional research literacy: Three sensitivities

The argument of this section is that the craft model of professional practice places certain demands on how we conceive professional research literacy. That is, the features of *integrity*, *reason-giving* and *flexibility* (as discussed above) shape the success conditions of responsible engagement with research-based tools. My suggestion is that professional research literacy, in its role-specific form, has its own tripartite structure comprising three sensitivities: *genre sensitivity*, *practice sensitivity*, and *situational sensitivity*. This section lays out the core meaning of these sensitivities, leaving the discussion of concrete examples to the next section.

Genre sensitivity: In order to maintain the integrity of the craft, professionals must deal with questions in a way that is neither too narrowly specialized nor lacking in dedicated focus. In the exercise of professional research literacy, this expresses itself as responsiveness to professional roles as distinct genres of reasoning. This involves awareness that the standards of research do not have the thematic breadth required for practical conclusions. They can only deliver a sub-theme to a broader narrative.

In the public understanding of science sense of research literacy, the success conditions are provided by the applicable standards of the relevant academic discipline (e.g., transparency, replicability, or statistical significance). These standards define a research-internal genre that delimits the range of sensible questions to ask with regard to validity and justification. For example, it usually makes little sense to ask whether a regression analysis is caring or to justify a sociological model by appeal to its political support. But in switching to the genre of professional reasoning, considerations of care, political support and a broad range of further social concerns can ground legitimate questions and justificatory reasons. Not in the sense that professionals can appeal to their personal preferences in morality and politics, but rather that they are supposed to be responsive to role-specific principles of ethics and law. It often makes sense to ask whether professional claims express care or enjoy adequate political support (e.g., in distributive questions). The genre-sensitive professional is responsive to this difference in justificatory reasons and knows that whether some intervention “works” according to the genre of research does not answer whether it works according to the genre of the professional role (cf. Oancea & Pring, 2008, pp. 21-22).

Practice sensitivity: Craftwork is not justified by tradition or mere authoritative fiat. Rather, it is justified by providing rational explanations that can ground trustworthiness. While genre sensitivity serves the integrity of the craft (i.e., responsiveness to the appropriate standards), practice sensitivity serves the intersubjective reason-giving aspect. Doctors and teachers justify their actions in the name of a shared normative framework and the contours of this framework are developed in conversation with other practitioners and the public that depends on responsible professional reasoning.

The notion of genre sensitivity developed above suggests that professional action can be understood as a form of narrative rationality. Narrative rationality does not simply grasp the order or causality of events but captures their significance and meaning in light of human values and emotions (cf. Velleman, 2009 ch. 7). The narrative structure of professional reasoning been persuasively explored in Kathryn Montgomery's *How Doctors Think* (2006). Her account of the social origins of the professional narrative is particularly relevant for current purposes. She describes narratives as "communal, intersubjective, implicitly or overtly collaborative, and therefore conventional and audience-dependent" (p. 48). In the terminology I will adopt here, this means that narratives are developed as a social practice.

Practice sensitivity, then, is about being attuned to intersubjective and audience-dependent nature of professional reason-giving. It serves the reason-giving requirement by steering justifications towards considerations that are broadly supported. The aim served by this sensitivity is to respect reasonable disagreement and the need for democratic engagement, but it does not involve pandering to unreasonable views just because they are in majority. As part of research literacy, this enables professionals to justify their application of research by appeal to reasons that find resonance in both the professional community and in the public that trusts this community. For example, there may be role-specific constraints on utilitarian reasoning. Research may indicate that an intervention will produce a beneficial outcome in the aggregate but on terms that ignore publicly recognized role commitments to ideas of equality, responsibility, or dignity. In other words, the intervention depends on reasons that do not have currency in the social practice and should therefore be resisted.

Summing up so far, what is the main difference between genre sensitivity and practice sensitivity? Genre sensitivity concerns addressing research with an interpretive attitude guided by the standards appropriate to the professional craft (i.e., fitting it to a broader narrative). By contrast, practice sensitivity concerns explaining and justifying decisions in a way that is attuned to the intersubjective basis of professional trustworthiness (i.e., creating the narrative as collaborative effort). These are of course two sides of the same coin, but they involve distinct legitimacy issues. However, with its flexibility feature, the craft approach reminds us that these sensitivities must be employed in idiosyncratic and complex situations. An adequate account of research literacy should therefore include recognition of the contextual nature of professional reasoning.

Situational sensitivity: Active engagement cannot consist in algorithmic application of a ready-made judgment to a concrete situation. Even when research is filtered through genre sensitivity and practice sensitivity, there is still a question of when and how to apply the knowledge. Is *this* the time for introducing a new classroom management intervention? Should *this* patient proceed with the treatment recommended in guidelines? Situational sensitivity enables professionals to go beyond generic framings of problems and recognize discrete contextual features that shape validity of research-based input. This goes beyond the traditional concerns of external validity, such as population validity and ecological validity (Bracht & Glass, 1968). External validity is a measure of the *generalizability* of effects, and responsiveness to the importance of this kind of validity is arguably part of the ordinary notion of research literacy (i.e., in the public understanding of science sense). In the context of professional research literacy, however, situational sensitivity also requires a judgment regarding the *appropriateness* of the effects in the specific context.

While the craft-oriented conception of research literacy promotes flexible attunement to the demands of the concrete situation, it does not promote it as a form of intuition that is independent of the integrity of the craft and its commitment to reason-giving. Situational sensitivity is constrained by the collaborative and communicative nature of professional practice. Clearly, however, not every decision regarding the use of research can be fully explained. Sometimes a decision just seems right and there is no time to think through why it is right. Yet as Christopher Winch recently put it, although the "evaluating-selecting-deciding nexus may no longer be *articulated* due to temporal constraints […] it should remain *articulable*" (Winch, 2022, p. 26, emphases in original). As noted above, however, the craft model delivers a necessary distinction concerning what needs to be articulated and what can remain silent: the point is giving enough evidence to warrant trustworthiness. When called to account, what matters is explaining how the action is licensed by commitments of the practice, as opposed to why it was the optimal choice among several legitimate alternatives. In other words, it may be hard to say why it was perceived as right, but it is necessary to at least explain why it was not wrong.

This generalizes to the other sensitivities as well. As a form of practical knowledge, they can be operative without being subject to focal awareness. When professional work is in appropriate flow, the sensitivities are background modes of approaching evidence and structuring judgment. Nevertheless, in line with Winch's point, they should be brought to the foreground when integration of evidence requires justification. When challenged about the legitimacy of an evidence-based intervention, a justificatory response needs to explain how evidence has been integrated in a way that respects these dimensions. The next section discusses these sensitivities in connection with some examples.

Professional research literacy in action

How does a craft-oriented conception of research literacy govern the use of evidence-based tools? This section further examines professional research literacy with the examples of school-wide behavioral management programs (*Case 1*) and the use of quantitative information in shared medical decision-making (*Case 2*). Naturally, the aim is to explain how the three sensitivities of research literacy can approach these programs and decision-aids, not to discuss the merits of the tools as such.

Case 1: School-wide behavioral management program

Consider first the case of a school that is implementing an evidence-based behavioral management program, which has been deemed successful in other schools (*School-Wide Positive Behavioral Support* is a prominent example of an evidence-based model that generates such programs). The program comprises a set of strategies for dealing with behavioral issues through routines for positive feedback. How should research literacy govern teacher engagement with the contents of the program?

One approach is for teachers (and school-leaders) to treat the program as a set of rules that dictate how to deal with behavioral issues. This attitude may be supported by the fact that a specific set of rules was deemed a success in other schools, so the teachers and school-leaders believe that there should be as little alteration of the program as possible. This is their understanding of "fidelity," a term that is central to implementation researchers (Ogden & Fixsen, 2014). On this approach, participant educators read the program as requiring school-wide conformity and consistency in classroom management strategies, with the aim of replicating the concrete strategies of other schools. For example, if other schools use symbolic rewards and sanctions in the form of behavioral scorecards, then that specific measure must be adopted in the same format.

The craft-oriented conception of research literacy emphasizes a set of critical questions to be raised in this regard and points towards an alternative approach. First, does the behavioral program mesh with the values that structure relations between teachers and pupils? Genre sensitivity counteracts any tendency to see the task as a matter of replication. The components of the program should not be adopted wholesale, but individually in a way that teachers can recognize as part of their professional narrative. For example, if the use of symbolic scorecards conflicts with established modes of communicating with pupils and parents, this may be discarded as part of the program. The program is thereby not interpreted as finished script, but as a set of principles that need operationalization in a way that integrates them with a broader set of concerns.

Second, can the program be implemented and justified through collaborative and democratic procedures? For example, can program coherence evolve through mutual exchange of experiences with classroom strategies? Interpreted as a form of practice

sensitivity, such mutual exchange is not simply about learning handy strategies, but about developing a shared evaluative outlook. The decision whether to use scorecards expresses the profession's values and thereby its claim to trustworthiness. This is not to deny a scope for individual variation. But legitimate variation must be justified as within the bounds set by commitments that are undertaken and developed as a joint professional project. When legitimate, the claim "That's how *I* do it" implies "This is how I interpret and realize *our* professional commitments."

Third, can the program be implemented in a way that respects the school's situation? For example, is a program that requires active involvement of parents suitable for this school? Situational sensitivity considers the fit between the program and school with an awareness of how contextual factors interact over time. Social dynamics relating to the school's traditions, demographic changes and economic priorities affect the symbolic meaning of tools like scorecards. For example, the symbolic meaning of scorecards can take problematic forms in an area where behavioral issues track demographic divides. And scorecards that have been adopted in a trusting environment through classroom deliberation and voting is different from scorecards that are imposed by fiat from above in the face of pupil opposition. In other words, one and the same tool may have similar effects along many standardized metrics (reported incidents, grades, etc.), but they structure the situations with different social grammars and communicate different moral messages.

The discussion above has been informed by actual debates on such school-wide behavioral support programs, but it naturally abstracts away many details. It should be noted, however, that a reading of some literature suggests that evidence-based behavioral models for schools are intended by their developers as sets of principles that should be interpreted more along the lines of a craft-oriented conception of research literacy than as rigid sets of rules (e.g., Stormont et al., 2012, p. 19; Sørlie & Ogden, 2015). Nevertheless, in actual practice, such programs are often approached as sets of authoritative rules by teachers and school-leaders (Haugen, 2018). There may be many reasons for this discrepancy between intentions and reception (accountability dynamics, workload, etc.). However, we need a craft-oriented conception of professional research literacy to diagnose what is wrong with the situation in the first place.

Case 2: Shared medical decision-making

Consider now a doctor who must decide on a cancer therapy in discussion with the patient. On what I'll call the quantitative approach, the doctor appeals to statistics to inform the patient. The doctor explains the relative chances of improvement according to the meta-analyses that inform the treatment guideline The aim is for science to speak for itself unburdened by evaluative interference from the doctor. After the information stage, the doctor uses a numerical mode of eliciting patient preferences. The patient is asked about the relative value of various outcomes using a quantitative rating scale, which is computed

to a treatment preference. This is supposed to enable the doctor to elicit preferences in a way that avoids paternalistic imposition of value judgments. Validated versions of such tools are considered part of evidence-based medicine (e.g., Straus et al, 2019. pp. 107-113). The overarching goal is to provide a systematic and transparent way of supporting shared decision-making.

In response, the craft-oriented conception of research literacy highlights a set of considerations that are silenced in the quantitative approach to shared decision-making. First, can the constraints on paternalistic imposition of values be respected by sticking to the numbers? Genre sensitivity highlights that the statistical knowledge gained from evidence-based guidelines and the utility functions gleaned from patients' ranking forms can only tell part of the story. Or rather, as there is no numerical neutrality, they implicitly tell a story of their own. For example, framing statistics in terms of chances of improvement rather than chances of failure makes it more likely that patients accept the treatment, and framing data in terms of absolute numbers rather than percentages may have the reverse effect (Groopman, 2007, pp. 242-243). The genre-sensitive doctor knows that numbers are part of a broader evaluative narrative, where the overarching plot of "doing no harm" involves a multifarious set of risks. Trade-offs are omnipresent: some of what is won through systematic procedures and statistical patterns comes at a cost to outliers, some of what is gained in anti-paternalistic transparency may be lost in terms of competent guidance, and so on. Genre sensitivity highlights that formalized procedures will point in different directions regarding such trade-offs and that they can only be integrated through evaluative judgment.

Second, practice sensitivity points to the intersubjective and collaborative standards for the evaluative judgment. This sensitivity can be seen as part the more general call for a "cultural framework in which health care professionals can fluently use (or reject) guidelines" (Hurwitz, 1998, p. 51; see also Timmermans, 2005, p. 495). That is, the "cultural framework" that guides use and rejection of evidence-based tools should not only comprise critical methodological scrutiny, but also a sense of how trade-offs are dealt with and how they mesh with the evaluative outlook of the profession. This requires that practitioners exchange their evaluations and also provide some structured feedback to tool designers. Current evidence-based aids for shared decision-making are in fact developed through extensive engagement with experiences from actual practice and they are increasingly sensitive to the ways patients actually think and feel (an instructive account is provided in Heen et al., 2021).

Third, situational sensitivity clarifies the contextual preconditions for the use of tools such as asking patients for quantitative rankings of preferences. One contextual condition can be severity. Doctors and patients dealing with conditions such as terminal cancer often avoid rankings of "utilities" because, if they are to be realistic, they require a very explicit representation of terminal scenarios (Marsh, 2014, p. 245). Another condition may be the

rationality of the patient's reasoning. Patients whose preferences reflect, for example, a biased emphasis on the well-defined side-effects of a drug, rather than the significant potential for improvement, may need help to make their preferences conform to their considered judgments (Groopman, 2007, pp. 246-247).

These are standards for critical reflection on the use of evidence-based tools, not reasons for rejecting them. The craft-oriented conception of research literacy does not ban tools like quantitative utility rankings in shared decision-making but promotes an evaluative attunement to the needs of the role and the situation. This mode of evaluation can feed back into the design of tools.

Conclusion

Research literacy has become considered a core component of professionalism. Yet the tendency to understand this in the traditional public understanding of science sense fails to respect the need to integrate research in compliance with a broader set of professional commitments. By seeing professional practice as a form of craftwork that requires rational and flexible judgment, this paper has attempted to delineate ways in which professional research literacy preserves the integrity of the practical domain. In unpacking this in terms of three sensitivities, the paper has suggested how research literacy is governed by a collaborative narrative without succumbing to mechanical rule-following.

In conclusion, a couple of limitations of the article are worth mentioning as potential for further research. First, it has been beyond the scope of the article to discuss in any detail the extent to which professionals actually comply with the idea of research literacy. There are, however, relevant studies to which more systematic connections can be made. For example, a recent account describes how medical professionals cope "pragmatically" with evidence-based standards (Kuiper, 2018). Another describes how teachers engage in "thick" interpretation of evidence, which involves integrating it with experience and a future-oriented assessment of practice (Mausethagen et al., 2018). The current approach to research literacy may represent a normative framework for assessing such pragmatic coping and thick interpretation.

Second, the article has not discussed institutional ramifications. Nevertheless, it clearly has direct bearing on the status of administrative or legal instruments that make professionals liable to comply with guidelines and programs—the so-called shift from autonomy to accountability (Timmermans, 2005). As an account of responsible integration of evidence, the present notion of research literacy has implications for how we should understand "meaningful accountability" (Bovens & Schillemans, 2014) in the context of evidence-based practice. The task of professional research literacy is not merely to incorporate research, it is also to restrict the use evidence-based tools to their proper domain. In line with this, meaningful or legitimate instruments of accountability must track responsible judgment as

opposed to unthinking conformity to guidelines. In other words, the standards of research literacy must be understood and respected beyond the confines of the craft.

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What is the Public Interest in Professional Regulation? Canadian Regulatory Leaders' Views in a Context of Change

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Abstract

Professions are regulated in the public interest, but precisely what the term "public interest" means can vary across time and place. Research exploring changes to professional regulation in the West has begun to identify such shifts: for instance, highlighting the emphasis on consumer satisfaction and public protection over other potential meanings of the public interest. To understand these societal shifts and their implications for professional regulation, this article first reviews neo-Weberian theories of rationalization, and empirical literature. Subsequently, it presents findings from interviews with regulatory leaders across six Canadian provinces to determine if the trends in rationalization identified are reflected in leaders' accounts of professional regulation in the public interest. Interviews reveal that many leaders define the public interest in ways consistent with technical rationality, including a safety lens and consumer orientation; however, there is also evidence of broader meanings and values. The implications of these findings are discussed.

Keywords

Professions, public interest, professional regulation, Canada

Professions are regulated in the public interest. Indeed, upholding the public interest may be the sole purpose of regulating professions. Nevertheless, despite the importance of the concept for professions and professional regulation, the term "public interest" is rarely defined, and in concrete circumstances may be difficult to determine (Adams, 2016; ICAEW, 2018; Saks, 1995). Traditionally it has been seen to refer to policy and action that benefits "the public overall" rather than the segments of the population professionals come in contact with in practice (ICAEW, 2018, p. 2). What is meant by public benefit, however, is socially constructed, and tied to prevailing societal values, social concerns, and even the private interests of influential stakeholders shaping public perceptions (Adams, 2016; Saks, 1995). As such, definitions of the public interest are not only fluid and changeable, but subject to social contests and debate.

Research suggests understandings of the public interest have shifted in recent decades in some countries. For example, in the United Kingdom and Australia, emphasis has been placed on public protection or patient safety and managing risk—especially within health care—rather than broader public interest goals (Kuhlmann et al., 2009; Pacey & Short, 2018; PSA, 2015). This is a small but significant shift in public interest narratives: the emphasis is more on limiting harm to consumers of professional services, rather than benefitting the public, more broadly. A public safety / risk-mitigation lens is touted as one that is clearer (and more measurable) for regulators and professionals, than the more-vague "public interest" (Cayton, 2018; PSA, 2015). This lens is also more consumer-oriented, and hence blends with concomitant trends emphasizing consumer satisfaction with professionals' services, and enhancing consumers' voice in the regulation and assessment of professional work (Boswell, 2018; Dent, 2018; Kuhlmann et al., 2009). It is expected that consumers will represent the public interest, providing a check against professionals' self-interests (Advisory Committee on Self-regulation [ACSR], 2016; Boswell, 2018). The result is an apparent shift away from broader conceptualizations of the public interest towards a narrower focus on the satisfaction and protection of clients (Brown & Flores, 2018).

These shifts are consistent with broader trends within professions and society, specifically what several scholars describe as the expansion of instrumental and technical rationality, which emphasize the application of scientific knowledge and expertise as the best possible means to achieve calculable and pre-determined ends, defined narrowly in terms of efficiency (Marcuse, 1941; Ritzer, 1996; Schön, 1983). Technical rationality provides little space for attention to civic or social values, or for reflection on the broader implications of professional practice decisions (Schön, 1983; Sullivan, 2005). Institutional and private interests, and the drive for efficiency are, instead, predominant.

To explore how these trends shape conceptualizations of the public interest in professional regulation—and identify what goals and values appear to underlie regulatory decision-making—this article first draws on neo-Weberian and other scholars' accounts of rationality and its impact on professional work in contemporary Western societies. Subsequently, it

reviews the empirical literature on the public interest in professional regulation over time in the United Kingdom and Europe. Next, it explores the extent to which technical rationality has overtaken value rationality in defining the public interest in Canada, through an analysis of findings from interviews with regulatory leaders across six provinces about the public interest in professional regulation. Canada is embarking on a period of regulatory modernization, and this period of change provides an ideal moment to explore diverging and shifting conceptualizations of the public interest that underpin policy change. The paper concludes with some reflections on the theoretical and societal implications of the study findings.

Theorizing the public interest

What is the public interest? There is no clear definition—nor perhaps can there be. The public interest is tied to values and principles—beliefs about what is the "right thing to do"—and these can vary across time and place (Saks, 1995). Certain principles are more-or-less universal in Western democracies, such as fairness, safety, access, and protection of the public. Beyond these generalities, however, the public interest becomes murky. The fact is that "the public" is internally divided, and different segments may have different interests or priorities; fulfilling the interests of some can disadvantage others (ICAEW, 2018: Saks, 1995). Not only is the term socially constructed, it is also socially contested as stakeholders engage in political contests each claiming their position is the one that will uphold the public interest best (Bonnin, 2019).

Professional work and professional regulation have long been said to serve the public interest (Adams, 2016; Saks, 1995). Sociological theories have emphasized the fiduciary roles played by professionals and professional regulators. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century theorists like Emile Durkheim (1992) and Herbert Spencer (1896) noted professional bodies' potential contributions to social order, and Foucauldian scholars have documented professions' role in supporting state activity, and extending governmentality (Evetts & Dingwall, 2002). However, professions not only contribute to state governance, but they hold positions of public trust where they are expected to act to protect the well-being and interests of others (Sciulli, 2009), and support general values including truth, trust, science, objectivity, and justice (Parsons, 1939; Parsons & Platt, 1973). For Parsons (1939) and others writing in the mid-twentieth century, professionals are lynchpins contributing to societal functioning and social order through the application of their expertise (see also Kurtz, 2022; Parsons & Platt, 1973). In this sense, professions are not just groups of workers, but important social institutions that marry expertise with civic duty and ethical conduct—demonstrating what William Sullivan (2005) characterizes as *civic professionalism*. Professional workers adhere to an institutional logic distinct from that governing the market or organizations—one valuing expert knowledge, autonomy, and control over their own work, guided by ethical codes and contributing to public well-being (Freidson, 2001). However, professionalism and professional logics are being undermined as market and

managerial (organizational) logics gain predominance (Freidson, 2001; Ritzer & Walczak, 1988). These trends may erode professionals' public interest commitments—and professions' social relevance (Kurtz, 2022)—as they prioritize self-interests, and personal / organizational gain.

Weberian theories pertaining to rationality, rationalization, and social action shed light on these trends and their implications for conceptualizing professions and the public interest. In his writings on rational social action—action oriented toward others that is conscious and goal-oriented—Weber (1968) distinguishes two forms. Instrumentally rational action is pursued to achieve a specific outcome. In contrast, value-rational action is linked to values; the action may not achieve a specific goal, but it is perceived as being the "right thing to do" in the given circumstances (Kalberg, 1980; Weber, 1968). Rational action is guided by different forms of rationality. In his own writing, Weber focuses on formal rationality, which is guided by rules, laws, or regulations. Other scholars have elaborated the conceptualization of other forms of rationality, including substantive rationality (Geva, 2015; Kalberg, 1980), which orders action in accordance with societal values (duty, honour, justice, fairness, etc.) (Geva, 2015; Kalberg, 1980; Weber, 1968). Over time, Weber and others have asserted, formal rationality is expanding at the expense of substantive rationality (Ritzer & Walczak, 1988; Weber, 1968): that is, behaviour is increasingly guided by formal rules and means-ends calculations, especially those aimed at enhancing the efficiency with which tasks are accomplished to minimize costs and enhance profit. These processes have been well-elaborated by Ritzer (1996) who documents the drive for efficiency, predictability, calculability and control in his accounts of McDonaldization, an intensified form of rationalization.

These concepts of rationality and social action have been applied to the study of professions and professional work (Parsons, 1939; Ritzer & Walczak, 1988; Saks & Adams, 2019; Schön, 1983). The concept of technical rationality is key to these discussions (Marcuse, 1941; Parsons, 1939; Sullivan, 2005). From a neo-Weberian point of view, technical rationality is akin to formal rationality, but here the means-ends calculations that determine goal-oriented action entail the application of expert knowledge, science and technology to address social problems and provide efficient solutions (Marcuse, 1941; Parsons, 1939; Sullivan, 2005). Western scholars date the expansion of technical rationality to the 1930s and 1940s, highlighting this as a period of time where expertise was mobilized by governments, corporations, and other social institutions in a variety of capacities. In the decades following the Second World War, professional employment expanded, as did the uses to which it was put, with the goal of using science and technology to determine social action in a manner that enhances efficiency, expediency and convenience (Marcuse, 1941; Parsons, 1939; Schön, 1983).

Marcuse was among the first to identify, and critically reflect on the implications of the rise of technical rationality, which he initially called "technological rationality." While, for

Parsons (1939), this rationality spotlights the importance of professions and expertise to societal institutions, Marcuse (1941, p. 142) reveals that technical rationality alters social action, requiring that it conforms to the needs of rationalizing institutions. Here, "individuals' performance is motivated, guided and measured by standards external to" them, to such an extent that the only reasonable course of action is to select "the most adequate means for reaching a goal which [s]he did not set." Like formal rationality, technical rationality is codified, rule-driven, and prioritizes efficiency. Action entails the application of scientific principles to improve techniques and performance, leaving less room for action driven by social values and collective interests (Marcuse, 1941, p. 153). Parsons (1939) is optimistic that the institutions in which professions work allow them to engage in value-rational action to the benefit of society; however, Marcuse (1941) disagrees, arguing that attention to efficiency, expediency, and convenience is prevalent. As a result, he believes, self-interests are prioritized above collective interests.

Scholars writing from a variety of perspectives document the impacts of rationalization on professional workers. For example, Sullivan (2005) highlights technical rationality as key to the decline in civic professionalism. Schön (1983, p.42) laments technical rationality's impact on professional work, learning and knowledge, arguing that it directs attention to problems of "technical interest" that are "relatively unimportant to clients or to the larger society" instead of major social issues of concern to all. He advocates for reflective practice to facilitate professionals' ability to move beyond the limits of technical rationality, and cope with unanticipated cases and matters of potential importance beyond specific institutional settings. Ritzer and Walczak (1988) show how structural social changes fostering rationalization in professional workplaces are pushing professional practice away from its roots in substantive rationality—shaped by values like altruism, autonomy, and authority—towards formal rationality, and the drive for efficiency in a formalized, rule-driven way. They argue that the use of new work practices, technology, and managerial controls combine to reduce professional autonomy, authority, and control, bringing about deprofessionalization (see also Ritzer, 1996, p. 137-8).

The idea that technical rationality, and the dominance of market and managerial logics, are undermining professionalism aligns with similar arguments from scholars working under a new institutionalist theoretical perspective (Noordegraaf, 2007; Reay & Hinings, 2009; see also Freidson, 2001). These scholars, however, demonstrate that it is not simply the case that professional values wither away in the face of market logics. Rather, professional workers learn to navigate these conflicting logics (Reay & Hinings, 2009), and some become hybrid professionals adopting elements of both logics in their professional practice, or go further and establish a new logic that blends the two (Noordegraaf, 2007, 2015). These insights are significant as they underscore that values continue to shape professionals' activity (and identities), even when workers are confronted with other, dominant logics. Indeed, professional logics prioritizing values of service to others and ethical conduct are

institutionalized, and embedded within professional education and regulation, to an extent they have been perpetuated, despite institutional pressures counter to them. The persistence of professional logics alongside market logics suggests that conceptualizations of the public interest may continue to align with civic professionalism (Sullivan, 2005), even as other priorities (such as efficiency) hold sway.

The public interest in professional regulation: Recent literature

In an earlier review of public interest conceptualizations in Canada, Adams (2016) documents shifts over time. In the late nineteenth century, the public interest was most often discussed in terms of protecting the public by raising service quality through restricting entry to professional practice to the highly trained and ethical. Access to services was also a consideration. Here professionals' interests largely coincided with the public's interest in high-quality service provision. By the mid-to-late twentieth century, professions were regarded as too elitist, and there were concerns over access to services and high costs. Conceptualizations of the public interest shifted in the context of change: Although service quality and access continued to be highlighted as public interest considerations, so too were workforce flexibility and cost-effectiveness. By the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Adams (2016) finds, there was increased emphasis on efficiency, cost, and accountability. Since the 1960s, professional interests and public interests have been regarded as diametrical rather than overlapping. These trends, generally speaking, are consistent with rationalization processes, suggesting a shift towards efficiency; however, traditional meanings of the public interest, including access and service quality, have not disappeared.

Currently in Canada, policy documents and regulatory legislation affirm the centrality of the public interest to professional regulation (Advisory Committee on Self-regulation [ACSR], 2016; Professional Governance Act, 2018; RHPA, 1991). Although documents refrain from offering a clear definition, it is nonetheless evident that the public interest includes the interests of clients/patients as well as the general public (ACSR, 2016, p. 4). The lack of a definition is likely intentional, to avoid narrowing the scope of the concept, and to enhance adaptability.

Research from Europe also explores changing meanings attached to the public interest. Traditionally, in the United Kingdom, meanings attached to the public interest were broad, and tied to principles like justice, freedom and welfare. The public interest and professionals' interests often coincided (Saks, 1995; Whiting et al., 2020). Research on regulatory reform in the UK suggests a shift in the early twenty-first century (Chamberlain et al., 2018). One over-arching driver of reform has been a concern for public protection. Amid scandals surrounding malpractice and professional incompetence in healthcare, UK policymakers prioritize protecting service users by ensuring that practitioners practise

skillfully and safely, and that incompetence and malpractice are swiftly and effectively addressed (Chamberlain, 2012; Saks, 2015). In this context, policymakers and other stakeholders define the public interest as being different from, and even antithetical to, professional interests (Cayton, 2018; United Kingdom Department of Health, 2017).

Researchers link the emergence of a public safety focus to changes in governance, including the rise of neo-liberalism, consumerism, and new public management (Dent, 2018; Kuhlmann et al., 2009). Broader notions of the public interest appear more compatible with the welfare state, with its policy mandate to support the governed population. Under neo-liberalism, there is a greater emphasis on individualism and individuals' responsibility for their own successes and failures. The emphasis on public safety centres attention on individual practitioners and their interactions with individual patients/clients, as well as holding the former to account for the latter's satisfaction and well-being. An increased focus on individual practitioners and patients, and the efficiency and convenience of professional services, are consistent with technical rationality, as described above. One associated trend is the emergence of clinical governance and the scrutiny of professionals' competence and behaviour (Brown & Flores, 2018; Chamberlain, 2012). This coincides with technical rationality's focus on the application of science to solve pragmatic ends, and an emphasis on competence in work performance (Schön, 1983). It also reflects the application of science by one group of professionals to monitor the activity of others. The focus on performance can also be linked with the recent expansion of anti-expert sentiment within government and society more generally (Eyal, 2019). The backlash against expertise is a reaction against the privileged role of experts under technical rationality, and encourages closer scrutiny of performance and a questioning of expert knowledge and authority. Although, traditionally, public interest mandates focused on the potential for professionals to benefit society, the current public protection discourse emphasizes the harm professionals can cause (United Kingdom Department of Health, 2017).

Another linked trend is a rising emphasis on consumer satisfaction and the client experience (Brown & Flores, 2018; Kuhlmann et al., 2009). Consumers now play a larger role in regulating professionals through involvement on regulatory bodies and an enhanced voice in the healthcare system—although opportunities for meaningful inclusion remain limited (Boswell, 2018; Dent, 2018). Regulators urge professional service providers to put patients/clients first and ensure the latter are satisfied with the services they receive. This too is consistent with technical rationality's emphasis on individual interests. Traditionally, professionals served their clients not by responding to their demands, but by combining their expertise with broader professional values, to do what the professionals believed was best for their patients (even as they took clients' preferences into account) (Freidson, 2001, p. 127). The consumer rights movement has been a positive development, but the increased emphasis on consumer satisfaction in professional practice and regulation, combined with intensified scrutiny of professional conduct by consumers and managers, reduces

professional autonomy (Waring & Currie, 2009). At the same time, it leads to a shift away from more general conceptualizations of the public interest, towards a focus on individual client safety and satisfaction. These changes impact professionals in a variety of sectors.

Despite these trends, there is also evidence that broader public interest considerations persist in many locales (ICAEW, 2018; Veloso et al., 2015). Indeed some authorities have created practical guides to help regulators and policymakers determine what the public interest is in concrete situations (ICAEW, 2018; PSA, 2021). Moreover, while trends such as neo-liberalism and consumer rights movements have occurred in Canada as well (Whiteside, 2009), until recently they have not been associated with a decline in professional self-regulation (Adams, 2017). Traditional values have persisted due to profession-state collaborative relationships, and a form of self-regulation that does not draw heavily on state resources.

Combined, the literature and theory suggest that conceptualizations of the public interest may be shifting towards self-interests and a focus on technical competence. The emphasis on self-interests appears to be manifesting through attention to consumer satisfaction, institutional demands for efficiency, and a concern that professional self-interests can be harmful. The focus on technical competence has spotlighted concerns over safety and practitioner performance / misconduct. To the extent that market/ managerial logics and technical rationality dominate, then, definitions of the public interest should emphasize consumer interests and public protection, as mentioned in the literature. Nevertheless, professional logics and substantive rationality persist, in the Canadian context and elsewhere, suggesting that traditional values like fairness, equity, and access to services should also remain relevant. To determine the impact of these social changes on conceptualizations of the public interest, this study analyses data from interviews with Canadian professional regulatory leaders on their understanding of the term.

Specific research questions are as follows:

1. How do regulators understand the public interest in terms of their mandate?

2. To what extent do these understandings reflect technical rationality and market/organizational logics, and to what extent do they appear to reflect social values and professional logics?

Methodology

To uncover regulatory leaders' views of regulatory change generally, and the public interest in particular, I conducted 77 interviews with 83 participants, who held leadership positions in regulatory bodies (such as registrar or executive director) or who were involved in the field in other capacities (for example working in government or serving as consultants). To recruit participants, I visited regulator websites to identify individuals in leadership

positions, and contacted them directly. Sometimes people I contacted forwarded my contact information to others in their organization or related ones. Those interested in participating contacted me to schedule an interview, which was conducted online or over the phone in 2021. Participants were located in six provinces: 20 interviews were done with regulatory leaders in British Columbia (BC), 22 in Alberta, 21 in Ontario, and the remaining 14 with leaders in Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. Forty-five of the interviews were with people regulating healthcare professions, and 32 with people involved in the regulation of other professions, or in a role where they dealt with both. In Canada, professions are regulated on a provincial basis, and it is common for each profession to have its own regulatory body (although this is changing with regulator amalgamations). As a result, there are numerous regulated professions in each province.

In terms of background, about half of the regulatory leaders interviewed were trained in the professions they regulated. One fifth were members (or former members) of regulated professions, but were working for a body that regulated a different profession. The remaining thirty percent of leaders were not members of a regulated profession. Those in this latter group, as well as many in the other two categories, had some training in administration, law, or another field relevant to their work.

Interviews ranged in length from 35 to 70 minutes, with most taking an hour to complete. Only two participants declined to have their interviews recorded. University ethics approval was obtained prior to the study. Because all participants were promised confidentiality, I have not tied participant/interview numbers to specific provinces or professions when reporting findings.

The thematic analysis of interview transcripts was largely inductive. For this present paper, I focused on the interview question asking participants to discuss what the term “public interest” meant to them, in terms of their work as a regulator. Other mentions of “the public interest” during the interview were also analysed. I began with open coding, assigning key words and phrases to portions to text. Subsequently, I grouped these key words into broader categories, and then counted how many times each word, phrase or category was mentioned in interviews. Responses were compared across provinces and profession type (health or other).

Findings

When defining the public interest, participants provided a range of responses. A few gave a succinct definition, but most spoke at length about the challenges of defining the public interest, or identified a wide range of components contributing to it. Despite this variability, several elements were frequently mentioned, and these are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Meanings attached to the public interest by participants, number of mentions.

Key words	**Total**
Public protection/ safety	40
Consumer service/ lens	28
Practitioner competence	23
Broad, holistic focus	23
"Safe, ethical, competent" practice	15
Professional vs private interests	15
Discipline	14
Difficult to define (or should not be defined)	12
Practice guidance, standards	11
Cultural safety, equity, diversity & inclusion	10
Risk focus (right-touch regulation)	9
Access	9
Economic and Environmental well-being	9
Interviews by Region	**77**

As Table 1 shows, a slight majority (52% or 40/77) of participants defined the public interest in terms of public protection or safety. For some participants, there was little need to elaborate, as the terms public interest and public protection were viewed as synonymous:

> Protection of public safety. Like, to me, that's just the bottom line (#39).

> To me, public interest is all about practising in a way to keep the public safe (#20).

Nonetheless, many participants did elaborate, highlighting other elements of the public interest, especially—for one-third of participants—a consumer focus. For the latter, the public interest was all about meeting the needs of consumers, and being responsive to them. Participant #20, quoted above, highlighted this dimension as well:

> […] but I also think that we are amiss if we don't engage the public and ask them, what keeps them safe. And I know, we've engaged, we've had focus groups, and you would be surprised, you know, we focus on […] doing a procedure just right. However, that's not what keeps them safe. You know, it's communication, caring, taking the time to look in somebody's eyes, you know. So, as regulators, I think we're putting blinders on.

For this regulator, then, public protection needed to be combined with a consumer orientation: A responsible and informed regulator should talk to people and find out what they needed, and then ensure registrants were providing services in a manner that enhanced patient/consumer satisfaction.

Regulators with a consumer orientation also emphasized putting clients first, prioritizing their interests and those of their families, as well as taking steps to inform the public about professions and professional regulation and the complaints process. Many participants also stressed the need to be transparent in their activity, and to communicate clearly with clients and the general public. A linked consideration, for several participants (10 or 13%), was a concern for cultural safety, equity, diversity, and inclusion. To really meet consumers' needs, regulators and practitioners had to combat racism and unconscious bias to ensure that everyone had access to good, culturally safe services. Regulators explained they were attempting to "be more culturally appropriate and humble in our work" (#52).

Another aspect of the public interest that appeared in just under a third of interviews (23 or 30%) was a focus on practitioner competence. Participants explained that to serve the public interest, regulators had to make sure that registrants had the skills required to meet the demands of their jobs, and that they "remained competent through a continuing competence program" (#44).

Participant #64 elaborated on regulators' public interest responsibilities here:

> […] making sure that people who are in the profession have the qualifications and competencies to be allowed to call themselves a professional, so that's academic and experiential, and all those things. But it's also other skills like communications and things—like it's not just a science for us; it's other things. It's setting up and maintaining and auditing and reviewing programs that ensures that they maintain the skills required to be able to do their jobs, and that they are only doing those things that they have the qualifications for. […] So that there is ongoing professional development, and those things are audited. And they're audited to make sure they stay in their lane.

Quite a number of participants linked competence, ethical practice, and safety. Indeed so many used the expression "safe, ethical, and competent" care or service to describe the public interest that it earned its own category, and was the 5th most-mentioned meaning attached to the term, public interest.

Just under a third of respondents (23, 30%) explicitly rejected simplistic definitions of the public interest as public protection or consumer satisfaction. Instead, they argued that the public interest had to be considered broadly or in a holistic fashion, as encompassing many different dimensions.

> I think regulators need to look at the public interest quite broadly in terms of societal objectives, immigration, labour market imperatives, and, of course, public health and safety, and the need to create a registration system that's fair and timely. And to move folks through the system, make sure there's proper competence and resourcing so that people are not delayed unduly and, you know, it may well be that the government needs, at some point, to redefine what is meant by the public interest. If, you know, it comes to the conclusion that the regulators are not dealing with it in a holistic perspective (#33).

Participant #40 also insisted that regulators had to look at the big picture and weigh many different dimensions of the public interest, not simply focus on consumer concerns:

> So it's not about what's in the best interest of that patient in front of you. It's what is that public interest? So it's going to get into all the things from social determinants of health, public good return on investment, a population-based funding model. And, you know, we can't be everything to everybody every time. And that's where you start to look at a value system to make those decisions around that.

These participants and many others insisted that any definition of the public interest had to be broad, encompassing a number of factors and values—from cost and efficiency to societal factors. Two explicitly rejected the term "public protection" due to its insinuation that "there's all these professionals out there waiting to harm you, right? Not true" (#25).

These sentiments, and the importance of a broad approach to regulating in the public interest, are elaborated by participant #9:

> I think that when I started this job, I was a little bit offended by the way that we focus in on the job of the [regulator] to protect the public from [professionals]. Right, here's a bit of a pejorative construct. […] We make recommendations for […] therapy to improve the health of patients and citizens. So it's not that we're protecting—I don't want just to protect the public from [professionals]. I want [professionals] to be able to improve the health of people, because they can. And I would expect that if you know something that can make somebody better, you should tell them.

These regulators reject the anti-expertise sentiments and the narrow focus on practitioner malpractice, which underlie public protection framing, arguing in favour of a more holistic understanding of the public interest.

These four elements—protection, consumer lens, competence, and breadth—were the most mentioned, but many other components of the public interest were identified in interviews. For example, it was not uncommon for participants to discuss the public interest in contrast to professionals' interests; 15 (19%) did so. However, responses differed, with several participants defining the public interest as being the opposite of professionals' interests, while others asserted the two could overlap, and therefore were not as diametrical as is sometimes assumed.

Less often mentioned were disciplining practitioners who engaged in malpractice (14 participants), establishing practice guidance and standards to inform effective professional practice (11), and adopting a risk-based approach to regulation or right-touch regulation (9)—"identifying risks to the public, and mitigating those risks, if possible" (#17). A minority of participants—especially those regulating professions outside the health sphere—emphasized that the public interest included consideration of the health of the economy and the environment (9 participants).

Approximately a sixth of respondents (12) said the public interest was either difficult or impossible to define. Indeed some explained that the term *should not be* defined.

> […] so how are we going to define […] the public interest? I think that's a folly. You can't and you shouldn't. You need to broadly be able to use that as a tool. […] We have pieces in the act [i.e. regulatory legislation] to ensure that things are safe. And then we're developing structures and processes that ensure safety of the public, and also ensure the safety of our environment. And those are touchstones […] But the public interest is a very broad concept. And, you know, you can set out factors and things that you can consider. But it's something that is a wholesome exercise that needs to be approached that way. And so while I understand the desire to sort of put a formula together, I don't think that's the appropriate approach. (#73)

For this respondent and others, regulating in the public interest necessitated a practice wherein regulators considered the public interest implications of everything they did. The public interest could not be distilled down to a single phrase or focus, or a formula for regulators and practitioners to follow. Others concurred that the public interest was a "lens you use […] on everything you do" (#38)—something to be considered in every aspect of a regulators' work. Regulators should not concern themselves with "the public interest" generally, but focus on public interest considerations "connected to a particular context" and regulatory task (#51).

Another element that was emphasized by several participants (9) was access:

> We serve the public interest by ensuring that there is a sufficient quantity of minimally qualified individuals able to meet the public's needs. […] We're not here to set barriers or to keep people out if the public needs service. We need to make sure that the most competent qualified people available are doing the best they can under the circumstances. […] Going without a health service can in some cases be just as bad as receiving a bad health service. So we try to balance that when it comes to serving the public interest. (#12)

Other aspects of the public interest that were mentioned by participants, but less often, included building trust, efficiency and effectiveness, and adopting a metrics or outcomes-focused approach to regulation. One respondent somewhat cynically said the public interest was "what the government wants it to be" (#68).

There were some differences across provinces in which elements were most-mentioned (results not shown). For instance, Ontario regulators were more likely to mention a risk-based approach to regulation, while Albertan regulators placed particular emphasis on competence. Regulators in British Columbia and Alberta were more likely to discuss the challenges inherent in defining the public interest. BC and Ontario regulators emphasized broad definitions more than their counterparts elsewhere.

Variations in definitions were also evident between health and non-health regulators. For instance, the latter were more likely to mention economic and environmental interests, and the difficulty of defining public interest. Nonetheless, both sets of regulators similarly emphasized protection, consumers, competence, and breadth.

Discussion and conclusion

Professions in Canada, as in many other countries, are formally regulated to serve the public interest. However, what exactly is meant by the public interest is socially constructed and contested. Traditionally, the public interest was attached to societal values including the ethical provision of services, access, and the application of expertise in a manner that benefitted not just the direct service recipient, but others in society as well (Adams, 2016;

Saks, 1995; Sullivan, 2005). Professionalism was tied to social values as well as practitioner autonomy and control (Freidson, 2001). The spread of formal and especially technical rationality over the course of the mid-to-late twentieth centuries and beyond may have undermined such commitments, some theorists contend, narrowing the focus of professional activity to the application of expertise to solve technical problems, prioritizing efficiency and expediency. As a result, attention to collective interests and issues of broader significance is diminished. There is increased emphasis on self-interests, rather than public interests. Recent research on professional regulation suggests these changes manifest in enhanced attention to consumer interests (rather than the public more broadly defined), and greater attention to competence in the technical application of expertise, in the form of clinical governance and a consumer protection lens. The result is diminished professionalism, and a subordination of the professional logic to market / managerial logics (Freidson, 2001). These changes may also reduce professions' relevance to modern societies (Kurtz, 2022).

To determine whether and how these trends impact professional regulation—and especially regulatory leaders' conceptualization of the public interest in regulation, this study analysed data from interviews with Canadian regulators. Findings revealed that participants defined the public interest in a variety of ways, but the elements most emphasized include public protection, a consumer lens, and practitioner competence. These findings not only support the European literature on changing conceptualizations of the public interest, but they also appear consistent with technical rationality and a focus on individualism and expert performance. Nevertheless, there is also considerable evidence of breadth and depth in participants' public-interest conceptualizations. Indeed, several participants reject narrowed thinking about the public interest, advocating for a broad and holistic lens, and a few criticize the "public protection" focus. It is clear that Canadian regulatory leaders take numerous considerations into account when defining the public interest, from competence and ethics, through discipline and access, to equity, the economy, and the environment. Thus, despite evidence of technical rationality and market / managerial logics, there is evidence that professional logics, and associated values, persist. There is also evidence of ties to prevailing social concerns and values (as Saks, 1995 has argued), since current public concerns for equity, the environment, and access to services are reflected in participant responses. A broad understanding of the public interest, despite the expansion of rationalization and emergence of neo-liberalism, is still possible. This is consistent with new institutionalist approaches that have highlighted the existence of multiple logics governing professionals and their work.

There has been a push in professional regulation to move away from serving the "public interest" as an over-arching goal and towards goals like consumer satisfaction and practitioner performance that are more measurable (Cayton, 2018). As we have seen, this trend reflects rationalization processes that have been at work for some time. However,

there are real risks associated with this approach, as many theorists and commentators have highlighted, not only for practitioners, but for the public (Marcuse, 1941; Ritzer, 1996; Schön, 1983). Analytically, it is important to recognize the presence of technical and formal rationality shaping our social institutions, and their impact on professionalism and professional work, narrowing the scope of such work, and potentially minimizing professions' contributions to society. Socially it is important to continue to move beyond self-interests to consider collective, public interests. Consumer concerns should not be ignored, but it is imperative that regulators look beyond the service recipient, since professional practice has broader implications for society: the contexts in which services are provided is important, as are prevailing social inequalities, barriers to access, and implications for the environment. Without a broad conceptualization of the public interest, these important elements could be forgotten. Supports for professional practitioners (registrants), such as providing practice guidance, and fair disciplinary procedures are also important, and can mitigate future risks to others. It is worthwhile to heed the advice of those regulatory leaders who suggest that while the public interest may be impossible to define, it is important to adopt a holistic public interest lens, and apply that broad lens to everything they do. Too narrow a definition of the public interest could create unintended risks for the people regulation aims to protect.

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Methodological Insights on Teachers' Professional Agency in Narratives

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Abstract

This article presents post-structural narrative methodologies to examine teachers' agency. According to previous research, agency is important for the learning and well-being of teachers. However, post-structuralism has questioned the assumption of agency as being located in the individual and has claimed a more entwined and relational perspective. The article disturbs clear-cut categorisations of teachers' agency as strong or weak and argues for examining narrative practice because teachers use a variety of grammatical resources that are not inherently personal but are entwined with cultural narratives. This methodological approach reveals how teachers appear agentic and vulnerable at the same time. Thereby, it helps illustrate multifaceted views of the teaching profession.

Keywords

Professional agency, teaching profession, professional learning, narrative analysis, post-structuralism

Introduction

Professional work is characterised by the ability to execute agency within one's domain of expertise. At a very general level, professional agency refers to the power to act and choose one's actions at work (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Loutzenheiser & Heer, 2017). Teachers' professional agency has recently been examined by various theoretical and methodological approaches. It is a growing research field and is associated with both the teacher profession and their students' learning and well-being. In this article, I present post-structural narrative methodologies to examine teachers' professional agency.

Previous approaches to teachers' agency include various perspectives and epistemologies. While admittedly producing valuable knowledge on teachers' professional agency, the methodologies used in previous research seem mostly to rely on rather individualistic assumptions regarding humanity, centring human subjects as excessively autonomous beings. Proponents of the post-structural, post-modern and post-humanist positions in recent studies have contested that view, instead seeing agency as pluralistic and entwined in personal and impersonal relationships (e.g., Bennett, 2010; Burkitt, 2016; Loutzenheiser & Heer, 2017). In this process, the traditional methodologies that tend to categorise teachers' professional agency as either strong or weak seem increasingly inadequate for grasping the full spectrum of professional agency and discerning its nuances. Thus, I argue for methodologies that have the potential to reveal how agency is not only about autonomous individuals but also always incomplete and intertwined with linguistic and narrative systems and relationships within which teachers act.

In methodological literature, conventional humanist qualitative methodology (St. Pierre, 2021), including common-sense coding (Müller & Frandsen, 2020) or simply overlooking how empirical material is produced and communicated (Holstein & Gubrium, 2016), easily guides the researcher into thinking of humans as separate from each other and from the wholeness in which we all live. This article argues that focusing on narrative as practice can provide a means to explore the incomplete and intertwined essence of teachers' professional agency. This is because the narratives told by teachers are not located solely within them, but are constituted through reciprocal relationships embedded within the web of cultural narratives (Meretoja, 2017). In this article, I draw on both narrative theorisations and empirical studies to elaborate on the argument. However, at first, I argue for changing the perspective on teachers' professional agency. Throughout the article, "agency" refers to the same as "professional agency", as I concentrate on teachers' agency in their professional work while also using theorisations from traditions other than profession studies.

The need to think differently about teachers' professional agency

Updating how teachers' professional agency is understood is urgently needed. Due to individualisation, people are excessively seen as responsible and accountable for their

actions, both in professional work and in general. Established accounts on teaching tend to rely on an assumption that the world and the learner are apart (Mulcahy, 2014). This pressures not only the students but also the teachers in their work. Accountability policies, which emphasise measurable performance-based and instrumentalist notions of teaching, can be internalised by teachers (Buchanan, 2015). Learning and teaching are increasingly subjected to measuring and control, whereas the complexity of those phenomena is neglected (Strom & Viesca, 2021). This individualistic tendency has also been reflected in research. Researchers often unconsciously carry and reiterate the assumption that speaking and telling are transparent acts of agency (Chadwick, 2021) that imply personal capacities and abilities rather than larger phenomena.

Teachers' professional agency has been linked to supporting their professional learning (Cong-Lem, 2021) and professional identities (Buchanan, 2015). Although differences between the traditional approaches and epistemologies exist, they mostly concentrate on individuals or collectives acting within social contexts or structures that are analytically separated from the person. Researchers have only recently begun to question the focus on subjects as entirely autonomous beings, fully capable of making choices. According to this linguistic and post-structural approach, agency has been understood as mediated, relational encounters and material affordances that delimit the social participation of actors (Green & Pappa, 2021) or polyphony of multiple voices, implying diverse qualities of action (Heikkilä, 2022). These conceptualisations resonate with Bakhtin's (1986) dialogical perspective that argues against monological perspectives (Dufva & Aro, 2014), thereby elucidating internal tensions in teachers' agency. In addition, they have features common with those of Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) theoretical work, in which social actors can assume different simultaneous agentic orientations and in which agency is conceptualised as an internally complex temporal dynamic. Along with narrative analysis, systemic functional linguistics has recently been used to study teachers' agency (Shultz et al., 2019). The struggles to overcome the individual/structure dilemma clearly appear to require new methodological approaches (De Fina, 2014).

Post-structuralism, although a heterogeneous field, escapes assumptions of clearly defined subjects and centring of human subjects as conscious, rational and autonomous beings (Andreotti, 2014). These conceptions of the individual radically affect the way agency can be considered. Recent post-structural theories related to teachers' agency hold that agency does not merely signify the individual teacher's will to act (Loutzenheiser & Heer, 2017). This tendency is also visible in other fields. Some theorists claim that human agency does not rest on an abstract structure but on multiple, personal and impersonal relationships (Burkitt, 2016; Dépelteau, 2018), whereas some understand agency as assemblages consisting of not only human agency but also agency implied by material elements (Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2010). However, all these theorisations show how agency is always incomplete, intertwined with and produced through the linguistic and narrative systems and

relationships within which people act (Loutzenheiser & Heer, 2017). This article argues that these systems and relationships can be illuminated by focusing on narrative practice.

Why narrative practice matters for teachers' professional agency

From the intertwined understanding of agency, teachers' agency cannot be categorised as "strong or weak", which is an approach that has been used explicitly or implicitly in previous methodologies examining teachers' professional agency, especially quantitative ones. In their place, new methodologies that delve deeply into the situations and relationships from which teachers' agency emerges are needed. Those methodologies also have to pay attention to the interactions in those situations, whether verbal or embodied and whether with other humans or inhuman matter. Rather than seeing agency as a steady state or a finished product, its fluidity in time and space should be considered (Dufva & Aro, 2014).

By concentrating on verbal interaction, narrative understandings that examine the practice of narrative hold that people position themselves in various ways, sometimes as victims and sometimes as agentic beings who assume control over events and actions, and that they shift constantly between these positions (Riessman, 2011). This means that certain kinds of narratives are not inherently personal and that people will use a variety of grammatical resources. In narrative practice, the process of telling or writing one's account to someone else or for oneself (Meretoja, 2017) is the target of the research.

For example, in my research work, one day I may be telling my colleague, in a certain situation, very broadly about how the article I am writing is going very well and how I am enjoying the work. If I had to answer a questionnaire or a very short interview on how I sense *my* agency, then the answer would probably refer to an agentic stance. On another day, I confront problems in my writing, my mood is different and I meet another colleague in a different situation that makes me nervous, and I may, at first, estimate *my* agency as weak. This highlights the context-specific and dialogic nature of agency, whereby more nuanced methodologies are needed. Moreover, in these two situations, the grammatical resources available to me to express agency are very different. In the same way, interview situations inherently shape the content and form of what is said. Narratives and agency do not simply flow unilaterally but are shaped collaboratively (Holstein & Gubrium, 2016).

This example tries to show that instead of examining *my* professional agency, focusing on the relationships and situations that produce certain kinds of narratives is more appropriate. By narrating, people also pave the way for further agency, because their possibilities for action are founded in the narrative choices they explicitly or implicitly make in their narration. This is because people are not separate narrators using separate grammatical resources, but are embedded in a web of cultural narratives and meaning-making (Meretoja, 2017). In this way, narratives essentially shape peoples' possibilities for action

(Meretoja, 2017). They work to both represent and constitute reality (Bamberg, 2004) so that the text not only mirrors the world, but also creates the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

However, not all narrative research shares the idea of agency as pluralistic and entwined. The reality is actually the opposite, and narrative inquiry's frequent smoothing over of polyvocality in favour of univocal coherence has recently been criticised as one-eyed and undemocratic (Cirell & Sweet, 2020). Indeed, narrative research in general is a multilevel, interdisciplinary field with a wide range of approaches and theoretical understandings (Squire et al., 2017).

In the field of teaching and teacher education, narrative *inquiry* (Clandinin & Huber, 2010) has been dominant over linguistically minded methodologies. Traditionally, narrative inquiry has served to emancipate teachers' voices and tell their autobiographic stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). The use of narrative is hoped to work as a deconstruction that empowers individuals by allowing them to tell their own stories (Hodgson & Standish, 2009). However, giving voice to diverse groups can result in constituting multiple versions of the same voice (Hodgson & Standish, 2009). On the contrary, story criticality (Mäkelä et al., 2021) is needed in today's world, where affective stories of personal experiences are utilised to persuade people in various fields. In addition, the previous research has overwhelmingly focused on active elicitation or construction of narratives, whereby narratives embedded in research participants' naturally occurring interactions can remain hidden (Pulvermacher & Lefstein, 2016; Watson, 2007). Linguistically minded research that concentrates on narrative practice and the narratives told by ordinary people in diverse environments (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015) is compatible with the post-structural understanding of agency. Before the release of *The Handbook of Narrative Analysis* (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015), this tradition, often called "narrative analysis", used to be subsumed within broader linguistic fields, such as sociolinguistics, pragmatics and discourse analysis. Therefore, naming research narrative research, or even more specifically, narrative analysis, tells little about its ontological and epistemological assumptions regarding agency or subjectivity and therefore requires clarification, which will be provided next.

In qualitative research, agency is often traced through people's talk about their experiences. However, any methods do not allow us to enter into our respondents' worlds and understand their "experiences" and "perspectives" (Silverman, 2017). This is because when people tell their experiences, they do not objectively report what happened but interpret those experiences—both at the time of experiencing them and at the time of narrating them (Meretoja, 2017). The narration can sometimes seem neutral; however, a certain perspective from which people interpret their experiences always exists. Hence, agency cannot be deduced from the talk, as such, but requires attention to the narration within certain contexts—*how* and by which grammatical means the things are told.

The origins of these grammatical means are deep-rooted. Narrative, as an interpretative activity, is mediated by cultural models of narrative sense-making, often described as cultural narratives (Meretoja, 2017). These cultural narratives, as interpretative models, affect how people experience things. Narratives take shape in relation to other cultural narratives, which they implicitly or explicitly draw and comment on, modify and challenge (Meretoja, 2017). In doing this, people negotiate between their "own" and the prevailing cultural and social expectations (Hyvärinen, 2008).

Even in an inner dialogue, narrating takes place within a social web of meaning because people are inseparable from their surroundings and refer to various relationships in their narration (Hyvärinen, 2008). Hence, a lot of interaction exists in interviews without constant turn-taking, even when the interviewer stays still for a long time and lets the interviewee speak. For this reason, trying to "fade out" the role of the interviewer is pointless, but one must accept that interviews are always interactive (Holstein & Gubrium, 2016). Narratives are always, to some extent, jointly produced because people are never entirely separate tellers and listeners (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008).

Finally, narrative is relevant for understanding human possibilities. Actions and experiences expressed in a narrative imply a certain understanding of what is possible in a particular context (Meretoja, 2017). Narratives provide different subject positions, as people seize certain possibilities that are open to them and dismiss others (Meretoja, 2017). In narration, people consciously or—maybe more often—unconsciously choose how to orient themselves. A traditional understanding of narratives assumes that narration depicts past experiences. However, in contemporary research, narration is increasingly viewed as shaping prospective action (Andersen et al., 2020). Hence, narratives not only describe experiences related to agency but also play a part in the experience itself. If this profound role of narrative practice is not acknowledged, the understanding of how agency comes about will remain incomplete.

Analysing the narrative practice of teachers' professional agency

As said, narratives do not only refer merely to texts or talk but also to practice, interaction and action. The practice-based narrative analysis combines a focus on local interaction as a starting point for the analysis with an understanding of the embedding of narratives within their discursive and sociocultural context (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008). The narrative practice approach departs from the structural definition of narrative as organised with a beginning, a middle and an end, as established by Labov and Waletzky (1967). That definition resulted in a tendency to recognise narratives as only well-organised and largely monological texts with a beginning and an end (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015). Therefore, storytelling activity in the local context is neglected, and various materials that can be used for narrative research purposes are overlooked. Under the new approach, small

or incomplete narratives, or narrative accounts in which nothing much happens, become worth analysing and are no longer seen as mere analytic nuisances (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Lueg et al., 2020).

Similarly, understanding teachers' professional agency as a phenomenon of interaction means that they do not simply have agency; they negotiate agency in the narratives they tell and through the narratives told by others (Heikkilä, 2022). Various linguistically minded methodologies and approaches can be utilised in analysing the narrative practice of agency from a post-structuralist perspective. These methodologies are not clean or linear tools, resulting in predictability (Koro-Ljungberg, 2016). However, they share an interest in and an emphasis on how certain language usage or linguistic acts are selected in speech or text and the various qualities of agency they imply.

In research on teachers' professional agency, narrative practice can be analysed in a variety of ways. Kayi-Aydar (2019) studied the intersection of elements, such as the race, ethnicity and language background of one language teacher's agency, in the development of their multiple professional identities. In the linguistic analysis of the interviews, Kayi-Aydar (2019) concentrated on discourse markers (e.g. "oh", "well", "you know", "I mean") that indicated hesitation, certainty or doubt. She also identified indirect (reported) speeches that are related to agency, in which putting words into characters' mouths can actually voice the teller's own opinions but without taking responsibility (Kayi-Aydar, 2019). In the second phase of the analysis, Kayi-Aydar (2019) looked at how the teacher positioned herself in relation to her environment, including the researcher, to identify the identity positions she had constructed for herself.

Lefstein et al. (2018) applied linguistic ethnography in a case study on the agency exercised by a teacher team coordinator in shaping the scaffolding she received from her coach while jointly leading teacher team meetings. The analysis focused on how the teacher team coordinator positioned and identified herself, the changes in those positions, the authority she claimed for herself and others and how she ratified or contested assertions of her "own" and other's agency (Lefstein et al., 2018). The study illuminated how playing multiple roles created opportunities and obligations for the coordinator to be agentive (Lefstein et al., 2018).

Anwaruddin (2016) examined publications that emerged from a teachers' professional development programme in Bangladesh. In the analysis, Anwaruddin (2016) introduced a new materialist approach to critical discourse analysis, building a coding scheme based on these thorough theoretical and philosophical notions. He found that the publications overlook material factors that significantly influence teachers' professional learning and growth and that the discourses on technology-enabled success portray a one-dimensional and misleading view of teachers' agency (Anwaruddin, 2016).

Biesta et al. (2017) examined the role of teachers' talk in their achievement of agency against the backdrop of educational policy by referring to teachers' talk, discourses and vocabularies, but not explicitly to narratives. The study is an ethnographic research in three schools and utilised observation, semi-structured individual and group interviews of teachers and managers (Biesta et al., 2017). The point of departure for the analysis was that teachers' vocabularies are the outcome of the complex interaction between personal sense-making and wider discourses emanating from different sources, such as policy, research and public opinion (Biesta et al., 2017). The analysis explored how and to what extent the teachers' talk helped or hindered them in exerting control over and giving directions to their everyday practices (Biesta et al., 2017).

These studies indicate that narratives should not be seen as ready and stable accounts of agency that are detached from their context. Researchers must pay close attention to the local level of interaction and simultaneously go beyond the local level to explore how narratives are shaped by ideologies, social relations and social agendas in different communities, times and spaces (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015). Narratives are shaped by contexts; however, they also create new contexts and alter power relations, thereby constituting new practices (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015). This means that by looking closely at narration, researchers can understand both the representation and the constitution of social reality. They can, for example, ask what kind of power relations the narratives represent, sustain and resist. In addition, researchers should be sensitive to the fact that not all experiences of agency are possible for all and at any time, which derives from inequality and intersectional differences.

Professional agency in narrative practice: An empirical example of student teachers' voices

The empirical possibilities for analysing narrative practice are diverse, and there are no inherently right or wrong ways of doing it. However, thinking about professional agency as entwined in a less individualistic way guides the analysis of narrative practice. In the study in question, my colleagues and I were interested in the kind of professional agency Finnish student teachers express after having learned the research skills in a master's level teacher training programme in university and then used them during a teaching practice period (Heikkilä et al., 2020). In this study, we were not interested in the individuals' agentic orientations because we acknowledged that these are changing and situated and therefore only scarcely contributed to an understanding of the student teachers' agency and to the development of the study programme itself.

We used the student teachers' reflexive reports, which we considered to reveal agency in a more natural setting than would be achieved by interviewing them. Of course, writing a report is also a narrative practice, and the student teachers may not have considered writing a report very natural in comparison to, for example, their mutual talk. Hence, we

acknowledged that the topics the student teachers were given for their writing, as well as the whole context of the writing as a guided reflection, would have affected their writing. However, the idea behind the design was that agency was not elicited but was interpreted from the student teachers' narration in written documents that teacher educators conventionally request to prompt student teachers to reflect on their learning.

The study applied a linguistically oriented approach to reveal nuances in the texts that could have remained unnoticed. We applied Hyvärinen's (2008) focus on expectations and used, as a general guideline, the "evidence of expectation", which is a list of linguistic markers summarised by Tannen (1993): repetitions, hedges, negatives, contrastives, evaluative language and evaluative verbs. We also utilised Bakhtin's (1986) metaphor of voice, which implies that the expressions that people use have formerly been others' expressions and that the expressions are transferred through a dialectic process. In this way, we were able to illustrate wider speech genres, manifesting different qualities of agency rather than focusing on the individual student teachers' accounts. We discerned four voices, which implied enacted, limited, rejecting and open agency. This was beneficial because researchers too often assume that the authentic and singular voice of a participant can be unproblematically represented (Chadwick, 2021). Extracting the authentic "voices" of individual people to represent their point of view has been criticised within post-structuralism, with the argument that no voices are completely individual (Rautio, 2021).

Although single examples can hardly represent the whole entwinement of professional agency, to illustrate the use of linguistically minded narrative practice, I discuss an example from one student teacher in the study mentioned, where the instruction was to reflect on the use of research skills in teachers' work. The evidence of expectation is marked in bold font.

> **Anyway**, teachers' work in itself is some kind of research. The teacher **must all the time** conduct research on the pupils of the class, the level of knowledge, the atmosphere and so on. **Of course**, it is **not official** research but **important**, **nevertheless**. **However**, I think there are **plenty** of **different** things that **go before** conducting research. **Anyhow**, the **most important** thing is to be in the classroom **for** the pupils, **not for** research. It is **important** to conduct **real** and **vaster** research concerning teachers' work. It **supports** and **helps** the teacher to **support** and **understand** pupils by **new means**. **In my opinion**, **however**, they **should** be conducted by researchers who can **concentrate full-time** on research.

In what ways does this example manifest or not manifest professional agency? The quotation includes a rich variety of evidence of expectation (marked in bold), for example, "however", "nevertheless", "all the time", "real", "vaster", "newer", "important" and "should", suggesting that the student teacher is trying to hold two incompatible pieces together. This illustrates how the student teacher is balancing between two different

agentic stances towards research: first, is an idea according to which research and research skills build agency in teachers' work, and second, is an opposing idea according to which conducting research in the classroom steals the teachers' attention away from the children. In this narrative, the student teacher seems to be constructing a picture of research skills in relation to the pupils as something that is not beneficial for them but is contrary to their needs.

The text is also very personal: the student teacher uses the phrases "I find" and "in my opinion", which reveal that the student teacher is negotiating between the possible narratives in this particular situation. On the one hand, teacher educators have taught them research skills. On the other hand, competing narratives contest their usefulness in teachers' work. This also illustrates the relational nature of agency, which is not owned by the student teacher but manifests relationally between empowering and rejecting narratives regarding research skills. Materiality is also visible in this example, as the student teacher discusses the importance of the physical presence of the teacher in the classroom for the pupils.

Looking at the expectations expressed in the example also reveals that the student teacher, when using a critical voice, is feeling a strong pressure that, in their daily work, teachers are supposed to conduct educational research, which was actually not the purpose of these studies. In this way, the student teacher rejects the idea that research skills can serve as a means for improvement and can help in teachers' work and professional development. Here, the analysis reveals a misunderstanding and confusion around the purpose of learning research skills at the university. The study contributed to challenges in integrating different knowledge domains into teachers' professional work (Hermansen, 2020) and the need to recognise knowledge sharing and epistemic engagement as important to teachers' competencies in educating teachers (Jensen et al., 2022). For its part, it contributed to the challenge addressed in shifting attention from individual autonomy to the performance of a collective teacher community and their epistemic agency, as well as the recognition of a research-oriented teacher role (Jensen et al., 2022). Notably, forcing this example into strict categories of "strong or weak" agency or as "agentic or passive" would simply not work. The example has several actors, as well as comparison and repetition, as the student tries to put the different pieces together. In this example, the agency is rather polyphonic.

Given that stances can shift, this approach to research can reveal restricting structures and scripts that can profitably be developed, rather than focusing on differences between individuals. It can show that students do not operate from fixed positions but that these positions are constantly changing, depending on the narratives available and as elicited by instruction, teaching, peers and learning environments.

Discussion

This article has argued that new methodologies are needed to enable a different way of thinking about teachers' professional agency that is less individualistic and more entwined because conventional methodologies focus on agency as an individual capacity, whether separate or collective. Scholars (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Feely, 2020) have called for new methodologies compatible with post-structuralism. The exemplary articles introduced above on the linguistically oriented narrative practice of teachers' professional agency (e.g. Kayi-Aydar, 2019; Lefstein et al., 2018) do not call themselves post-structuralist. However, they began to escape the strict categorisations of conventional narrative agency research and paved the way for more nuanced understandings of agency.

Hence, this article invokes the suspicion that not all kinds of narrative research may be compatible with recent understandings of human agency in educational settings. Clear guidelines on how to perform narrative research do not exist (Squire et al., 2017), and this article does not intend to define such guidelines. However, concentrating on the practice of narrative will help challenge any stable assumptions around subjectivity and agency, allowing researchers to identify and acknowledge more nuances in teachers' professional agency.

Analysing agency in narrative practice is not a simple answer to the need to analyse agency from a post-structural approach, as it comes with its own limitations. Narrative methodologies focus on language, which may hide agentic processes that are not tied to language, such as bodily sensations, positions and gestures. Looking simultaneously at language and at emotionality or embodiment within the narratives (e.g., the tone of voice, pauses, eye movements, facial expressions, body posture and gestures) is a growing area of interest in research (Lueg et al., 2020; Squire et al. 2017). In addition, new materialist approaches (Heikkilä & Mankki, 2021; Strom & Viesca, 2021), which also acknowledge other-than-human or more-than-human agencies, introduce alternative perspectives to the research on teachers' agency by shifting the view from the human to the material that affects the humans. They contribute to the research on the teacher profession by supplementing traditional human-centred perspectives and challenging the established individualised perspective, where professional learning is primarily seen in terms of the intrinsic capabilities or potentialities of people (Mulcahy, 2014). However, using these approaches often includes some kind of attention to language, since material encounters appear, at least sometimes, in human talk or text. Materiality can also be intentionally traced in narratives (Feely, 2020).

However, the status of language is paradoxical in contemporary narrative research. Narrative is always primarily defined as a kind of language, but the research tends to focus on meanings or the social positioning they produce or reflect and bypass the language of the narratives (Squire et al., 2017). Hence, more careful and versatile ways of analysing the

language in narrative research on agency are needed in the future. In addition, linguistically minded research does not need to overlook the materiality of the world.

Considering agency, Squire et al. (2017) divided research according to whether it sees narratives as symbolising internal individual states or external social circumstances. In their classification, personally minded researchers mostly agree that narrative makes sense of and enables action within lives, whereas socially minded researchers are more sceptical of whether agency is possible and are interested, rather, in the social effects or "agency" of personal stories (Squire et al., 2017). However, post-structural research goes beyond these boundaries by neither focusing on separate agents nor circumstances but on the relations and positions in which agency is manifested in the narrative practice. Here, agency is not taken for granted; however, its manifestations, possibilities and implications are problematised.

Finally, how can the quality of research that aims to analyse professional agency in narrative practice be evaluated when considering the arguments raised within the post-structural paradigm? Mismatches can indeed occur between what people say and what they do. However, a narrative is not meant to be read as an exact record of what happened or happens (Riessman, 1993) because no external world is against which a narrative should be evaluated (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Hence, how the truth is understood affects the way the quality of narrative research can be evaluated. Data or methodologies should not be assumed, but creativity should be embraced (Koro, 2021), considering that validity is just one label and may hinder us from generating more provocative questions (Koro-Ljungberg, 2016). Hence, the value of analysing agency in narrative practice lies not in its ability to reproduce the outside world but in its capacity to evoke new ways of thinking and seeing (Huttunen & Kakkori, 2020) and to re-orientate thought towards experiment and the creation of new forms of thought and life (St. Pierre, 2021).

In the same vein, the quality of the researcher's interpretations cannot be checked by the participants, as narratives are not static and the meanings of the experiences told in the narratives will shift even as the researchers interpret the narratives (Riessman, 2011). Of course, the interpretations drawn from the narratives have to be reasonable and convincing, also involving profound ethical considerations concerning how we code, reduce and categorise our "data"—initially the participants' voices (Chadwick 2021). However, the same events can be narrated in radically different ways (Riessman, 1993). This is a key insight of post-structuralism: the need to move beyond structuralist ontologies of the social world in which core social, cultural or psychological structures are considered to strongly constrain the possibilities of human action (Fox, 2014).

Although for post-structuralists, no universal truths exist (Hodgson & Standish, 2009), and textual processes matter in achieving and sustaining relations of power (Fox, 2014). Therefore, not finding universal patterns of narratives is not a weakness but a strength of

narrative research because a critical and careful analysis of narratives embedded in a web of cultural narratives can reveal several options by which narratives can be told or untold. Perspectives aiming at more holistic views of not only human interactivity and agency have been claimed (Dufva & Aro, 2014). They reveal that agency is often tensioned and that people appear agentic and vulnerable at the same time. From this perspective, narrative practice always implies different and heterogeneous qualities of professional agency.

Finally, according to a widely acknowledged notion, teachers in their work are not merely policy actors but are active agents in adapting and resisting policies (Cong-Lem, 2021). As social practices and professional discourse usually breed conformity rather than autonomy (Campbell, 2019), teachers' professional agency becomes a delicate issue that requires true attention, which also relates to other professions. If professional agency is conceived as an ongoing performance accomplished locally in and through everyday interactions, then the narratives that emerge in this context become the focus of interest (Watson, 2007). Therefore, analysing narrative practice can help elucidate the incomplete and tensioned nature of teachers' professional agency.

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