Teacher professionalism in changing times

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This text discusses several understandings of the term professionalism, rooted in disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, and the study of professions. The general considerations are subsequently related specifically to teacher professionalism. This analysis is followed by a cultural-historical contextualization of this concept, based on the assumption that professionalism is a contextually dependent entity that cannot be understood in isolation from the cultural and historical context in which it appears, although it is assumed that teachers' professionalism will always entail both explicit and tacit knowledge. The historical overview over the teacher profession's development and its changing conditions is followed by an analysis of the current situation and some of the challenges the teacher profession faces today.

Keywords: Professionalism, professional knowledge, professional practice, epistemology, education, teachers

Background

The current text was originally delivered as a trial lecture at the faculty of the humanities at the University of Bergen as part of the author's defense for her PhD degree. For ethical reasons, the manuscript has been kept in its original form with a few minor adaptions that seemed necessary when the lecture was to be published as a written text.

The topic for a trial lecture is given by the assessment committee; the candidate is given a task to solve. According to the conventions of the faculty of the humanities, in the trial lecture the candidate is given the opportunity to give a lecture on a topic different from, yet related to the topic of her thesis, which is presented separately as an introduction to the actual defense of her thesis. The idea is that in the trial lecture, the candidate should demonstrate a broad orientation within the field in which she has been working.

Although Lea's thesis, *Intellectual Practicians,* was defended at the faculty of the humanities, it also draws on the social sciences. Consequently, to explore the topic assigned by the committee, "teacher professionalism in changing times", she has put together examples from both traditions to offer the audience an overview over the current situation as it appears at the interface of the two perspectives. This

approach to the topic may in fact be regarded to be in concord with a main finding in her doctoral thesis; the participants in her project, teachers of an academic subject in upper secondary school, constantly find themselves at the crossroads between two ways of operating; that of the academic tradition and logic of their education and the complex practice of their work life. The academic *logos* and values are rather insufficient to cope with this complexity, the teachers find, and so they need to balance the academic identity they brought into their job with the demands of real life teaching. In her thesis, Lea explores the forms of knowledge that the teachers' practice comprises as well as the agents' professional identity and their understanding of their work.

For the teachers, the concept of 'changing times', applies to their own lives at several levels; first, it relates to the transition from the academic logic and values to that of teaching, second, it relates to how schools and education change, and third, there are the changes in society at large and how these affect school life. This is discussed in the thesis. The focus in the current text mainly relates to the third level – teaching and views on teaching (and teachers) in a society that is constantly changing.

Presentation and outline

The assigned topic for this trial lecture is a quite open and very broad one: "Teacher professionalism in changing times". It has been necessary to be eclectic. I will try to account for my choices and my shifts of perspective along the road. As a first step, I will provide an outline of the text:

1. Delimitation and interpretation of the topic, including spatial and temporal contextual delimitation
2. The concepts 'teacher', 'professionalism' and 'teacher professionalism', including conceptual contextualization and discussion
3. Changing times
4. Teacher professionalism in changing times: Put the pieces together.

The lecture is taking place at the Faculty of the humanities, not at the Faculty of education – which might well have been the case, considering the topic. The fact that this is not the case has had impact on my choice of perspective in dealing with the assigned topic. My perspective, and so, what I actually see, is contingent on the point where I stand, which is *inter* disciplines. Therefore, while I definitely *do* look to studies within educational research, I also draw on disciplines more often associated with the humanities, such as history and philosophy of education. There will be detours to the social sciences as well.

Delimitation of the topic

A clarification of the topic is necessary because it is not possible to talk about such a topic in general terms, without regard to cultural, historical and temporal factors. As Hans Jørgen Staugård writes,

> what a profession is and what it means to be a professional is not just a question difficult to answer in precise terms. The question as well as the answer have different meanings in different times. Professions are historical and dynamic entities, and therefore also complex entities which constantly must be analyzed and evaluated as part of the social context of which they are parts. (Staugård 2011)

Geographical and cultural delimitation

I will primarily talk about teacher professionalism in Norway, but will also give examples from the other Nordic countries and some from other Western countries.

Temporal delimitation

I will take a retrospective glance on some "times of change" to contextualize the topic historically, but the main focus will be on the present and the recent past.

The concepts 'teacher', 'professionalism' and 'teacher professionalism'

Teacher

What is a teacher? According to Oxford English Dictionary, teacher simply means "one who teaches or instructs" (Dictionary, "'teacher"). Etymologically, it is related to *token*, and to the German verb *zeigen*; to show. Which makes sense.

We have all been taught by somebody, more or less all our lives, and teaching is indeed an old activity. Yet the term itself is not that old. Moreover, teaching as a profession in the meaning 'an occupation for which one is specifically trained' is relatively new, at least in Scandinavia. Much younger than the traditional handicrafts, for example. Elsewhere in the world, this has been different.

Teachers may be of many sorts. They may for example be dedicated and interested, as Miss Honey in Roald Dahl's (1916-1990) story about Matilda, or definitely less so, as Miss Trunchbull in the same book (Dahl 2016 (1988)). There are many literary portraits of both kinds. The French writer Albert Camus (1930-1960) describes a teacher of the former sort: "In Germain's classes they for the first time felt that they really were alive and were held in high esteem. They were found worthy of discovering the world." (Camus 2003). A tribute to teacher Germain indeed.

Beside differences in personality and engagement, differences may concern education and institutional affiliation; there are teachers in kindergarten and at university, there are general teachers and subject teachers, such as music teachers, math teachers, hairdressing teachers, sports teachers and many other. Is there a point in distinguishing between them? I have thought there is, and that is one of the reasons

why I chose one specific group of subject teachers as my empirical case in the project *Intellctual Practicians* (Lea 2015). Nevertheless, I have chosen a broad notion of the term 'teacher' today. So when I today talk about teachers, I basically refer to the large group of teachers in compulsory education, but to some degree also to teachers in upper secondary school.

In addition to this, the term for 'a person who teaches' has changed historically. Examples of older terms may be *school masters* and *hearers* (Grydeland 2012) – terms which give an indication of how teachers and their task have been regarded by the contemporary society.

'Professionalism'

What does the term 'professionalism' really mean*?* In Norway, the terms *profesjonalitet* and *profesjonalisering* have over the last years emerged as alternatives to compounds with the traditional terms 'faglig' or 'yrkes-', i.e. 'occupational' or 'vocational', as their first part. To my ears, the new terms have a somewhat equivocal ring. They are generally presented as being all about 'securing and improving quality' in the education and practice of professionals, but if one takes a closer look on how such high quality is supposed to be achieved, the picture turns out to be somewhat ambiguous.

British educationalist, professor Ivor Goodson, presents reflections resembling these in a discussion of the English terms 'professionalism' or 'professionality' versus 'professionalization' (the correlate to the Norwegian *profesjonalisering*). Goodson writes: "I see the project of professionalization as concerned with promoting the material and ideal interests of an occupational group – in this case the teachers. Alongside this, professionalism is more concerned with the intricate definition and character of occupational action (– in this case the practice and profession of teaching)." (Goodson 2003, 126).

Whether there is a conceptual conflict between the terms 'professionalization' and 'professionalism' or not, they both relate to 'profession' – the noun from which they both are derived. Therefore, to get to the core of professionalism, it seems a good idea to look at the concept 'profession'.

Among the first to take a theoretical interest in professions was German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) who studied the emergence of the German state bureaucracy in the years previous to the turn of the 20th century (Weber 2003). Later on, the study of professions has become a separate academic field of study, with American sociologists Andrew Abbott, Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) and Eliot Freidson (1923-2005) as some of the discipline's most well-known theorists (cf. e.g. Abbott 1988, Freidson 2001, Parsons 1978).

In Parson's view, professions play an important part in keeping a modern society together (Parsons and Shils 2001). It was Abbott who introduced the distinction between the occupations he termed professions and other occupations (Abbott 1988). Characteristics for occupations which qualified for the term 'profession' in Abbott's terminology were, among other things, that they were knowledge based,

relatively autonomous, and that they dealt with what he called “human problems amenable to expert service” (Abbott 1988, 35). To this, Freidson added the performance of judgmental power as a characteristic for professions (Freidson 2001).

Based on earlier studies within the field, Norwegian scholars of professionalism Anders Molander and Lars Inge Terum propose the following definition: “Professions are a kind of occupation where services are performed on the basis of theoretical knowledge, achieved in specialized education” (Molander and Terum 2008, Introduction, my translation, cf. also Parsons 1978, 40).

Philosopher Donald Schön (1930-1997) has written several books on professions and professionalism. In his work, Schön has emphasized practical experience and reflexivity as important elements in professionals’ knowledge, and it was he who developed the concept of ‘reflective practice’, often referred to in discussions of professionalism. Schön finds professionalism to be proficiency achieved in practice. Experience is a crucial element in this, but the practitioner’s reflections on her experiences are the yeast in the dough, so to speak. Development, and so, achievement of professionalism, is dependent on these reflections. Therefore, Schön writes, “[w]hat I want to propose is this: The practitioner has built up a repertoire of examples, images, understandings, and actions” (Schön 1995, 138) – on which her professionalism rests.

Staugård sums up the characteristics of professions, such as these are expressed in classical studies within the field, in three points.

1. Professions are based on specific theoretical knowledge, achieved in formal, competence-giving education.
2. A high degree of independent professional and moral judgement is required of practitioners of professions.
3. Professions are practiced within central social areas and are usually subject to some degree of public administration. (Staugård 2011, 163)

As the final example of theories on professionalism I quote sociologist Staf Callewaert’s critical comment to the many attempts of standardizing professionalism in the article “Towards a general theory of professional knowledge and action” (1999). Callewaert finds these attempts nothing short of futile since practitioners’ practices in his view are guided by their practical sense, developed on the base of social and bodily experience, not by rules: “On the basis of empirical studies of professional practice as a process (…) it can be proved that the cognitive orientation is mainly tacit and fuzzy, strategic, and only vaguely associated with references to discourses and instructions” (Callewaert 1999, 218).

Therefore, when things happen, Callewaert explains, what is in play is this practical sense, or a practical reason, which he takes to be very different from theoretical reason. This practical reason, not education, is the backbone of professionalism in Callewaert’s view.

How should teacher professionalism be defined, on the basis of all of this?

Teacher professionalism

One possible reason why defining teacher professionalism is not a straightforward task may be that teacher professionalism has become some sort of a catchword. It pops up in the media ever so often. It occurs in policy documents, and politicians talk about quality in education, best practices and teacher professionalism in the same breath. Yet the term is hardly ever defined in such contexts. At the same time, teacher professionalism seems to be among those value laden terms which it is virtually impossible to discuss in a critical manner since they have a presumably incontrovertibly positive meaning. Who could possibly be against high quality, the best conceivable practice – or professionalism among people trained in a specific trade or profession, such as teachers are?

Teacher professionalism might be discussed in descriptive terms, as an exploration of what teachers actually do at work and how their occupational life may be described. The two aspects will partly be intertwined in the following. To encircle the concept, I will relate Frank McCourt's reflections on teacher professionalism after 30 years in the game. In addition to being a rich first-hand description of teaching, this is also an interpretation of teacher professionalism. So, although the quote is long, it would have taken me even more words to give an equally nuanced picture. McCourt writes:

> A young substitute teacher sat beside me in the teachers' cafeteria. She was to start her regular teaching career in September and could I offer her any advice?
>
> Find what you love and do it. That's what it boils down to. I admit I didn't always love teaching. I was out of my depth. You're on your own in the classroom, one man or woman facing five classes every day, five classes of teenagers. One unit of energy against one hundred and seventy-five units of energy, (…) and you have to find ways of saving your own life. They may like you, they may even love you, but they are young and it is the business of the young to push the old off the planet. I know I'm exaggerating but it's like a boxer going into the ring or a bullfighter into the arena. You can be knocked out or gored and that's the end of your teaching career. But if you hang on and you learn the tricks. It's hard but you have to make yourself comfortable in the classroom. You have to be selfish. The airlines tell you if oxygen fails you are to put on your mask first, even if your instinct is to save the child.
>
> The classroom is a place of high drama. You'll never know what you've done to, or for, the hundreds coming and going. You see them leaving the classroom: dreamy, flat, sneering, admiring, smiling, puzzled. After a few years you develop antennae. You can tell when you've reached them or alienated them. It's chemistry. It's psychology. It's animal instinct. You are with the kids and, as long as you want to be a teacher, there's no escape. Don't expect help from the people who've escaped the classroom, the higher ups. They're busy going

> to lunch and thinking higher thoughts. It's you and the kids. So, there's the bell. See you later. Find what you love and do it. ((McCourt 2005, 304-305)

Basically, McCourt's understanding of teacher professionalism is in understanding with that of the participants in my project *Intellectual Practicians*: It is very much regarded a matter of experience and developing a 'practical reason', to borrow Bourdieu's term (Bourdieu 1977, 1998). Many of those who have studied professions share this view, and we have seen an increasing promotion of what Goodson terms "practical professionalism" (Goodson 1996, 131) in teacher education. This development might be an ambiguous one. While it is an acknowledgement of a major element in teacher professionalism; its character as a practice, understood also as a reflexive practice, in Schön's terminology, practice does not in itself safeguard sustainable professionalism. We know, for instance, that in actual life, people's practical judgement is not always the best interpretation of the given situation or circumstances. While necessary for navigating in daily life, our interpretations may be insufficient and we may even be mistaken. Our understanding of others is limited, and so there may for example be reasons for students' sulkiness or reticence that the teacher does not take in. In addition, teachers, like other people, may simply be biased or downright prejudiced. Judgements on such grounds may very well be morally dubious.

This would be an ethical objection to one-sided focus on practical knowledge. Goodson points out that one-sided promotion of practical knowledge may have impact also on the over-individual level; it may make teachers blind to their broader moral and social commitments, and then politicians may "restructure teachers' work and teacher education in ways that narrow such work to pedagogical skills and technical competencies, remove from teachers any moral responsibility of professional judgement concerning curricular matters, and cut teachers off from university knowledge" with the access it can give to for example independent inquiry and intellectual critique, he warns (Goodson 2003, 130). This is also a political matter and as such an example of what French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) would term 'struggles within the field' and which are closely related to social positions, to prestige, and to economic and political power (cf. e.g. Bourdieu 1984, 1996).

Changing times

The feeling that times are changing is not new. *Omnia mutantur, nihil intereit* - 'everything changes, nothing remains the same,' Ovid wrote, apparently quoting an even more ancient source, the Greek mathematician and philosopher Pythagoras (Evensberget and Gudersen 1983, 878). It seems appropriate, then, to approach the concept 'changing times' by the path of history.

Earlier times of change

We have the word “school” from Ancient Greek, where *schola* (Dictionary, 'school') actually meant “leisure” or “employment of leisure”; an activity for those who did not need to work. Education in the Scandinavian countries now presents adolescents with possibilities most young people in former days would never even dream about. Nevertheless, especially higher education is still unevenly distributed among the population. This may be analysed sociologically to relate to socio-cultural and economic factors. Pierre Bourdieu’s book *Reproduction in education, society and culture* (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990) is a famous example of a critical study of such factors. In Scandinavia, Donald Broady and his colleagues at Uppsala university (cf. e.g. Bertilsson, Börjesson, and Broady 2008, Börjesson et al. 2016) and Annick Prieur and colleagues (cf. e.g. Prieur, Rosenlund, and Skjott-Larsen 2008, Prieur 2010, Prieur and Savage 2011, Faber and Prieur 2012) are among those who have done similar work.

It is also true that this arena of possibilities is in some ways a demanding arena. Stress among teenagers is an increasing problem. Some do simply not cope. The dropout rates are relatively high in all Scandinavian countries, both from upper secondary school and from higher education. It nevertheless remains a fact that teachers and the public educational system have contributed to change conditions for children and young people in major ways. A prominent example of this is that child-ren no longer can be regarded to have a productive function; they do not any more contribute to upholding the household. Their function is in many ways much less clear nowadays than it used to be. This has culminated in the post war period, symbolically expressed in the emergence of a specific youth culture in the 1960s.

The first organized education was education for the selected few, also in Norway. The first onset of education for the many came with the implementation of mandatory confirmation in 1736; from then on, everyone was obliged to learn to read as part of the preparation for their confirmation. Yet, it was the local parson, not particular teachers, who performed this education.

The following century, the 19th century, was a time of considerable change in Norwegian history of education. A need for qualified teachers followed these changes, and it is only from then on it makes sense to talk about ‘teacher professionalism’ in this country.

Around the middle of the century, schools were built in the cities. These were termed ‘poor schools’ – a term which in itself is tell-tale for this period in Norwegian school history. Part of the background for modern mass education is the industrialization, which in Norway took place around this time. Not only did poor people’s children need to learn to read, or at least learn their catechism somehow in order to be confirmed; gradually, the authorities realized that it would be a good thing if these children had some place to be and someone to look after them at least part of the time when their parents were out working. Schools seemed to be the solution.

Another change at this time was that schools were transferred from the church to the municipalities. Roughly speaking, from this time on, also laypersons became teachers.

As a consequence of this, teacher education was largely improved in the 1860s with the result that teachers' status as an autonomous profession was considerably strengthened, Rune Slagstad writes (Slagstad 2006, 58).

Further strengthening of teacher education took place in the following decades. Historians and sociologists agree that in Norway, teachers' position has never been as strong as it was in the period from around 1890 up to the middle of the 20th century (Slagstad 2006, 73-74).

How is our time a time of change?

It may almost seems that, in Charles Dickens' words, "change begets change" (Dickens, Ch. XVIII); as though things change faster and faster. Is there still something that may be regarded characteristic for the present?

Slagstad (2006, 204) mentions the introduction of New Public Management (NPM) as a governing principle in public administrations as a change of considerable consequence across the public sector. In Norway, NPM was implemented a couple of decades ago. Social and educational scientists find this to have had large impact on the educational system, and so on views on teacher professionalism.

Anthony Giddens argues that globalization, made possible by technology and a high degree of specialization, is what makes late modernity different from earlier historical periods (Giddens 2002). There are political and cultural as well as economic aspects to globalization, Giddens claims. He finds globalization to have impact on all levels, from micro to macro, and to have certain disparate effects: Along with globalization goes enforced nationalism and focus on the local. Along with cosmopolitism goes fundamentalism. Along with self-determination goes dependence. Along with weaker traditions goes a stronger need for self-realization. In fact, individualization and the need for self-realization have sometimes been emphasized as a main characteristic of our time. (Nyeng 2000, 21, Smith 2002, Taylor 2004).

The reflexive project of the self consists in maintaining a coherent self-understanding, Giddens claims (Giddens 1991, 14). This is a challenging task, for our self-narratives must constantly be revised because they are set in a context of manifold choices. In culture theorist and sociologist Thomas Ziehe's view, the task may be particularly demanding to young people (Ziehe 2004). The individualized post-traditional society is rich in opportunities and most of us are brought up to believe that we may freely shape our own lives. But the situation is ambivalent. The other side of the coin is that when we so to speak constantly create and shape ourselves, we are also prone to critical self-observation and to making unreasonably strict demands to ourselves. We may easily become perfectionists and never be quite satisfied.

In addition to this, there is so little to support us. Frameworks and traditions are looser than they once were. Consequently, we have to carry all responsibility for our choices and for ourselves by ourselves. This may be a heavy burden. Heavier still for young people than for others because they need to make so many important choices; education, occupation, partner, and so on.

As a result of this, there is among young people a general want for predictability, clarity, structure, and stable relations. A want for the possibility to *re*-construct a reality which may seem *de*-constructed. While it is not always easy to find this possibility elsewhere, schools can offer it, Ziehe writes. Teachers can offer it (Ziehe and Stubenrauch 2008).

Teacher professionalism in changing times: present challenges

Staugård claims that the teacher profession presently be under pressure from several quarters. He holds the frequent reforms of teacher education and the educational system at large over the last decades to be an indicator of this. His main explanation of the current situation is the introduction and implementation of New Public Management, NPM. The pressure from the authorities and the bureaucracy on the one hand, and the logic of the market, inherent to NPM, on the other, are regarded the core of the problem.

Politicians and bureaucrats make attempts of detailed regulation of teachers' education and daily work. This is incongruent with some of the characteristics of the relational professions, the professions where human relations are a main concern. Such characteristics are for example the required high degree of independent professional and moral judgement, and the constant making of decisions which take place in teachers' professional practice (Staugård 2011, 172-173). Observation studies have shown that teachers at average have to make two decisions per minute. It is also incongruent with the relative autonomy the professions traditionally have pled for themselves.

From the market come demands of efficiency and productivity. This is also problematic and partly incongruent with professional practices that characteristically deal with human relations. In human relationships all sorts of things can happen – many of which do not meet demands of efficiency, if measured in simple ways. We all know much about this from our private lives. It is not much different in relational professionals' practices.

So while NPM may be a suitable tool with regard to 'dead systems', such as administrative routines, it has become more and more clear that it is a far less adequate tool when it comes to more complex tasks and to tasks which cannot easily be measured quantitatively. In Staugård's view, this becomes particularly problematic in the relational professions. Professionals in such professions constantly find themselves in squeeze between their own personal and professional ideals and the claims about efficiency and rule obedience, especially in situations 'outside the scheme', the many unpredictable and disorderly situations that occur in their practice.

The implementation of NPM has also had some unintended and indeed paradoxical consequences with direct impact on teachers' practice. For example, while a main intension initially was to simplify public bureaucracy, there has, according to Per Arneberg and Bjørn Overland, been a rising degree of bureaucratization in basic education and consequently, they claim, teacher professionalism is "rapidly developed in a direction which makes it resemble that of a functionary in a target-oriented knowledge undertaking". They see an increasing degree of external control and test orientation, and an undermining of teachers' judgements and agency as democratization and Bildung agents as signs of this (Arneberg and Overland 2013, 19, my translation).

If this is so, and if this development continues, it is likely that teachers will feel increasingly powerless, both as a group and as individual professionals. If so, one may wonder how they in the long run can and may perform their daily work as practitioners of a relational profession. What will happen to their judgemental power? What will happen to their professional dedication and creativity, both vital qualities in relational professions? And, even more important, what sort of students will teacher education recruit? Studies have shown that among students' motives for choosing teacher education, creativity and autonomy ranges high. There is not much room for those qualities in a minutely regulated classroom.

Arneberg & Overland distinguish between what they term 'technical professionalism' and 'critical professionalism'. They claim 'critical professionalism' to be conditional on interplay between knowledge and action and on continual reflection on both elements. Against this stands the 'technical professionalism' that is dominated by technical rationality; rule based and conducted by routine. Provided the development they outline, we may end up with a profession largely dominated by 'technical professionalism'. A recent newspaper article about how teachers at a specific school are obliged to follow 172 locally developed rules in addition to the profession's general regulations may indicate that we actually are moving in this direction. (Haugerud skole 2014). It seems opportune to ask if this is what we want teacher professionalism to be; whether such teachers are what we want for the rising generation.

The educational system has been reformed relatively frequently over the last decades in the Scandinavian countries. According to Bourdieu's theory of practice, changes, such as reforms, may have a disturbing influence on agents within the field in question. One could say that education reforms as well as changes in society at large require that teachers time and again develop new forms of professionalism. Part of the ongoing discussions about professionalism in teaching and other professions may relate to this: Society is changing, in some areas rapidly. As part of these changes, public fields such as education are reformed. New laws are passed, new standards of qualification are set, the demands and expectations from the general public are changed and so on. One may assume that this evokes certain self-consciousness within the professions, and that questioning and debating professionalism is part of this enforced self-consciousness (cf. Callewaert 1999, 219).

At the outset, I quoted Goodson's comparison of professionalization to professionalism. At the time when he first made this comparison, Goodson registered what he called a "considerable antipathy to teacher professionalization" (Goodson 2003). In certain respects, it would be incorrect to make such a statement about the current situation in Scandinavia. Authorities constantly emphasize the importance of professionalization and take action to promote it for example by extending teacher education to a five-year master study. What authorities *have* done in Scandinavia, however, is to link 'professionalization' tightly to 'standardization', a philosophy which implies that quality is a fixed entity to be measured and quantified, but which is antagonistic to a view on education as a complex relational activity, the largest Norwegian teacher trade union, states (Utdanningsforbundet 2014). Judging from the public discourse the teacher profession seems to be enforced, but on scrutiny, it is easy enough to see that teachers' scope and autonomy are at the same time reduced, step by step.

Let me approach this double-sided face of educational change by looking at the distinction between standards and standardization. There is presently an amazing eagerness to standardize the education system. Teacher professionalism is driven by ever more government guidelines and central edicts on issues ranging from assessment to accountability to curriculum definition. It seems as though teaching is currently being technicized rather than professionalized. In fact, such standardization may come to dissolve existing patterns of professionalism and replace them with notions of the teacher as the technical deliverer of guidelines and schemes devised elsewhere (Goodson 2003, 127). To see standardization as the path to high standards, or to even equate 'standardization' with 'standard', is at best a simplism. At worst, such a way of thinking could result in an understanding of teacher professionalism that leaves teachers as little else than instruments in the hands of policy makers and the powers that be.

What could teacher professionalism be in our time of change? What should it be?
Different theoretical traditions come up with different answers to what should be emphasized in teacher professionalism. Some enhance the importance of theoretical knowledge of the subject the teacher teaches, other emphasize practical didactic and pedagogical skills. Some emphasize personal professional experience, others convictions and ideals (Rasch-Christensen 2011, 346-347).

Studies of teacher education and professionalism have shown that teachers can hardly be said to become teachers during their education (Lortie 1975). What matters the most, is their own school experiences, as students and as teachers (Darling-Hammond et al. 2006, Rasch-Christensen 2010), and so, lay theories about teaching are of consequence. However, there are also those who think that teacher education *has* impact on teachers to-be. For example, a relatively recent Danish study shows that teacher education *does* have impact on teacher students, but what matters is what teacher educators *do,* not what they say. Students imitate the teacher educators' style and way of acting, not what they say (Rasch-Christensen 2011).

In my opinion, what should be emphasized in teacher professionalism is the complexity in the profession's knowledge base. I base this view on the interpretation of my own empirical material in the study *Intellectual racticians*, where I find that the study's participants draw on many sources of knowledge. The participants are subject teachers in upper secondary school and have thorough knowledge of the subject they teach. They take a strong interest in didactics. Their knowledge of this field may be termed practical more than theoretical. Yet it is also explorative; the teachers have a reflective attitude to their practical teaching and constantly strive to develop their skills. In addition, the teachers take on the role as public educators, and such make use of their ethical knowledge and moral standards. They also emphasize the importance of social and psychological skills.

The teachers relate their understanding of their professionalism to their responsibility as public educators and so regard socio-political consciousness part of their professionalism. In their daily practice, they meet students who do not quite fit in and students who struggle. There are personal, social and economic reasons for this. These students are not served well if their teacher insists on a rigid body of rules, the teachers assert. It is often difficult, they admit, to balance between consistency and individual consideration. Yet this is what they constantly try to do. For to treat students equally is not necessarily to treat them justly (Kierkegaard 1991).

It appears, then, that these teachers might have made Goodson's words their own. He writes that "[p]ractical wisdom, developed in suitable contexts, for worthwhile purposes, in appropriately reflective ways, can and should form an important part of what it means to be professional as a teacher" (Goodson 2003).

It seems that in Goodson's opinion, judgement and discretion should be part of teacher professionalism. In my view, this is so first and foremost because the teacher is a human being among other human beings. Every day she stands in front of other persons whom she is set to guide and instruct. She cannot avoid being a role model, and this is a fact of which she must be aware. "Everything a teacher does or does not, says or says not in his classroom has impact," Inge Eidsvåg writes (Eidsvåg 2000, my translation). This is an old truth. Yet, if we listen to Ziehe, it is even more important in the post-traditional society than it was in previous times. To meet the needs of today's students, the educational system must dare to represent something different from the flickering information society outside the schools. Therefore, Ziehe thinks, the capacity to be responsive of students' moral and personal needs must be part of teachers' professionalism. But he must also know the subject matter and be able to present it to students in unbiased, yet engaging and extraordinary ways, Ziehe finds (Ziehe and Stubenrauch 2008, 269-270). I wonder if this is not what the American writer Siri Hustvedt describes when she writes:

> I was twelve when I first heard of Joan of Arc, that legitimate intruder branded as a witch. The man who told it to me was my seventh-grade history teacher at a Rudolf Steiner School in Bergen, Norway. Arne Krohn Nilsen, a tall rangy man with long whiskery eyebrows that made him look as if he were permanently

> surprised. He was an intense teacher, and he told Joan d'Arc's tale of glory and woe with a fervour I have never forgotten. He told it to the whole class, but listening to it, I felt like the receiver of a secret gift. I could not have said that the girl warrior appealed to me because, for a while anyway, she was allowed to play a role normally prohibited to women, but I am certain that I felt it. As my teacher spoke, as his voice rose and fell, and his sweeping gestures emphasized the drama, I was Joan of Arc. In a blank book, he drew me a picture of the historical heroine with a sword on a white steed. I still have it. (Hustvedt 2012, 80-81)

When writing about practical wisdom, Goodson refers to Schön and his concept of 'reflective practitioners'. Schön explains how professionals meet the challenges of their work with a kind of improvisation that is developed and improved through practice and reflection both 'in-action' and 'on-action' (Schön 1995). Goodson finds Schön's work to provide a useful basis for moral professional practices. Various aspects of teachers professionalism and practice have been explored in the light of Schön's insights, yet "what matters throughout this literature are the emphases that all teachers reflect in some way: that they can articulate and share their reflections more explicitly; that reflection is at the heart of what it means to be professional" (Goodson 2003, 129).

What Goodson here claims, may be regarded to relate to the concept of self-identity, which both Anthony Giddens and Charles Taylor have written about, the former in a sociological, the latter in a philosophical perspective. Giddens holds that self-identity in late modernity entails what he calls a 'life policy', which in turn requires an 'ethic for the personal' (Giddens 1997). In Giddens' understanding, 'the personal' is closely tied to 'agency', in which reflexivity is a necessary component (Giddens 1984, 1986, 1991). Indeed, "[r]eflexive awareness (…) is characteristic of all human action," according to Giddens (1991, 35). Albeit much of what teachers do when acting within their own professional field is guided by what Giddens terms a 'practical consciousness', and which resembles Schön's 'tacit knowledge', they also possess a 'discursive consciousness' which allows them to reflect on and verbally express their knowledge and considerations. The 'discursive consciousness' is informed by the 'practical consciousness', he explains (Giddens 1984). Thus, agents, and thereby teachers *qua* acting agents, "are normally able (…) to provide discursive interpretations of the nature of, and reasons for, the behaviour in which they engage" (Giddens 1991, 36).[1]

Similarly, Taylor emphasizes that certain dimensions are inherent to mankind (Abbey 2000, 56). For example, we are social beings, and we have a natural need to attribute meaning to our lives and therefore to understand what is taking place around us. Yet, while the need to understand is regarded universal, our understanding of who and what we are as human beings changes culturally and over time. Characteristics of our understanding of ourselves as human beings in the Western world in late modernity include belief in each person's uniqueness and right to be

treated respectfully, as well as a right and wish to strive for authenticity and for practical benevolence (Taylor 1989). In Taylor's view, these dimensions are constantly in play in our daily life, also in our professional practices. If so, this will be particularly evident in relational professions such as teaching (Taylor 1989, Taylor 2004).

If teaching then is something teachers *live* qua *persons*, in Taylor's terminology, this may at least partly account for why "practice cannot be invented on the basis of theory, not even on the basis of a theory of practice", as Callewaert claims to be the case (1999, 221). It may moreover partly account for Callewaert's view that "It is simply not true that the scientist can tell people how to solve problems. He does not know, even if he (…) maintains that he is the person who has the final word, even in practical matters." (Callewaert 1999, 222). As I mentioned earlier, Callewaert holds practice to be conducted by a practical sense. He explains this sense as an action-generating, incorporated cognitive and voluntary and sensible-affective orientation and traces it back to Aristotle (Callewaert 1999, 212).

It may still be a good idea to talk about professional practice, among peers and in other contexts. Yet, those who *particularly* need to be aware of these circumstances are theoreticians, scholars, policy makers and teacher educators. Those who write steering documents. Those who prepare reforms. Those in charge of the organizational development of teacher education. And theoreticians who develop theories of and for teacher professionalism. If those people do not take into account the aspects of human agency, for example as described by Taylor, they draw a false and inadequate picture of teacher professionalism. In fact, they may even come up with descriptions and prescriptions that violate teacher professionalism by obscuring elements that are both inherent and vital to such professionalism. For example, eager attempts of assuring the quality and standards of teaching and teacher professionalism by help of meticulous sets of rules and regulations might have such an effect. This might lead to 'technical professionalism', and thus bring us in a situation Hans Skjervheim warned against forty years ago; that we confuse practical actions with technical ones. Technical action is teleological, according to Skjervheim. This is required when we produce something – a car or a cake – but it is totally inappropriate for action in human relations. Humans should never be treated as something we could use as material for producing something, Skjervheim warns. Among people, we should act practically, he states, and implies that practical actions should be universalizable (Skjervheim 1996).

In one of McCourt's classes, his students are worried. At least the serious-minded ones. Since he does not give his students the common tests – no multiple choice, no fill-in-the-blank-space, no true or false, how does he then evaluate them? There is a discussion on this. The discussion ends up with the teacher asking the Big Question:

> What is education, anyway? What are we doing in this school? You can say you're going to graduate so that you can go to college and prepare for a career.

> But, fellow students, it's more than that. I've had to ask myself what the hell I'm doing in the classroom. I've worked out an equation for myself. On the left side of the blackboard I print a capital F, on the right side another capital F. I draw an arrow from left to right, from FEAR to FREEDOM.
>
> I don't think anyone achieves complete freedom, but what I am trying to do with you is drive fear into a corner. (McCourt 2005, 299-300)

Does a teacher's professionalism consist of those qualities in her that promote human freedom, then? Well, this may not be the only answer to what teacher professionalism is all about. But I do not think it is a bad one.

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Notes

[1] It would have been interesting to scrutinize the relationship between the practical and the discursive consciousness closer; it is not at all clear from the brief sketch I have drawn above how the tacit practical consciousness (or knowledge) may be transformed into expressible knowledge. However, there is not time for pursuing this topic in this context. Suffices it to observe that both Goodson's and Giddens' deliberations on reflexivity seem to be in agreement with Schön's considerations on the same topic (cf. Schön 1995).

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