

ESF Exploratory Workshop on  
**PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION AND LEARNING IN  
KNOWLEDGE-INTENSIVE SOCIETIES:**

Oslo (Norway), 4.-6. May 2011

Convened by:  
**Karen Jensen, Tara Fenwick  
and Monika Nerland**

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**SCIENTIFIC REPORT**

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The workshop *Professional Education and Learning in Knowledge-Intensive Societies: National Contexts and Transnational Knowledge Cultures* took place in Oslo, Norway on 4-6 May 2011 at the campus of the University of Oslo. The workshop gathered, in addition to the ESF representative, 16 researchers interested in cutting-edge research on professional education and learning in knowledge-intensive societies. The participants came from eight countries (Norway, Scotland, England, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, The Netherlands and Italy) and brought in their respective expertise in organisation studies, the study of professions, and education and learning research. All invited participants were able to attend the workshop.

### Background and aims

The educational implications of the transition towards knowledge-intensive societies has been explored and discussed, in many respects. However, the field could profit from being opened up to new theoretical and methodological inputs. A particular challenge relates to understanding the implications of *increasingly complex circuits of knowledge, transnational knowledge cultures, new texts and new epistemic modes of practice*. The sociology of professions provides important insights into the norms and moral foundation of practice and aspects of trust, as well as into professionalism as a means for occupational closure and control. Research within this line of theory development has, however, failed to account for the dynamics of knowledge and professional expertise – the epistemic dimension. Learning theorists also struggle to grasp the implications of ‘new circuits of knowledge’ and, in particular, to understand how professionals become enrolled in wider knowledge frameworks and manage to ‘stay connected’ to developments within their respective knowledge fields over time. In social science more generally, a range of theoretical and methodological resources have been developed in the last decades that can expand our understandings of professional knowledge and, through this, inform educational arrangements that can support professional learning.

Against this background, the workshop had a two-fold goal:

- To lay the ground for collaborative research efforts which would examine challenges and conditions for professional education and learning in contemporary Europe.
- To identify, during this workshop, research questions, partners and ideas to develop a strong proposal for an ESF collaborative research project.

### Agenda and structure of the meeting

From the outset, the workshop set about to increase communications among the invited participants. Well before the start-up of the workshop a website was constructed to which all participants submitted an article or a position paper on the topic of the conference. Furthermore, participants were encouraged to share their PowerPoint and other presentations beforehand, to enhance the likelihood of more efficient discussions.

During the workshop, all participants gave short presentations of their research of relevance to the theme of the workshop, highlighting their choice of research approaches to address different questions and also pointing to future research needs. They also gave some background information about professional education and learning in their countries’ contexts. This took place during the first one-and-a-half days and was organised in sessions of 2-3 presentations followed by time for discussions. Between the different sessions, main topics and issues for further exploration were identified and summarised.

In the afternoon of the second day, as well as on the morning of the third, participants worked in groups to identify core questions for collaborative research efforts, as well as for possible ways to take these issues forward.

### **Overall conclusions and outcomes**

The workshop generated productive discussions and a rich body of themes and initiatives to take forward. The conclusions and agreement on follow-up activities can be summarised as follows:

- The group and plenary discussions resulted in the identification of three strands of research questions and activities to be taken forward in collaborative efforts. The strands and their guiding questions are: 1) *How are professional practices developed and sustained in changing environments?* 2) *How is professional responsibility enacted through sociomaterial practices?* 3) *What implications for higher education are posed by these changes in professional practice and knowledge?* Each strand was allocated to one group to develop further, and will be carried forward by that group and supplemented by other workshop participants where appropriate. There was strong interest among workshop participants in moving towards a large collaborative research project. Until ESF funding possibilities for such a project becomes available, the participants are continuing their work to develop these three strands towards smaller research efforts and dissemination activities.
- A secure interactive website will be created through the ProPEL network at the University of Stirling for the workshop participants to continue their discussions and develop activity plans for the three strands, and to communicate their developments with one another for feedback. All ESF workshop papers will be posted on the site.
- As a structure for developing the ideas in the respective strands and developing joint activities, the themes identified during the workshop will be taken forward in joint conference symposia and meetings in autumn 2011 and spring 2012.
- A half-day meeting for all workshop participants will be convened at the upcoming ProPEL conference (University of Stirling, May 2012), possibly with preparations made beforehand, e.g., through Skype meetings in small groups, to report on the developments in each of the three strands and to further develop them.
- We are exploring the possibility of convening methodology workshops open to all participants in the workshop to compare approaches to data analysis in research on professional practice and knowing.
- A special issue of *Journal of Education and Work* is being created to publish research papers from many of the ESF workshop participants.

## 2. SCIENTIFIC CONTENT OF THE EVENT

The meeting commenced with a presentation given by the ESF representative and an introduction to the themes, objectives, core questions and agenda given by the convenors. The last part of Day 1, as well as the first part of Day 2, was then devoted to presentations by the respective participants, followed by discussions. The first section of presentations gave rise to discussions about different ways of understanding professionalism, about what different levels of analysis give and take (e.g., focusing on the work organisation or the profession as a context for practice), and the different roles of the user – in different professions and contexts of work. At the end of the first day, participants were set into small groups to articulate their interests in joint research efforts.

The presentations on the second day revealed that a greater variety in research approaches was represented by the participants. Moreover, the presentations revealed differences between the countries involved in how professional education is organised (e.g., regarded as higher or vocational education) as well as in how practitioners' competencies are monitored and secured (e.g., whether participation in continuing professional development programmes is mandatory, and whether professionals need to be certified for work). At the same time, the presentations also revealed shared challenges and interests. Themes that emerged for further exploration included a) the way we understand knowledge and its relation to knowing, b) ways of understanding and conceptualising boundaries between areas of practice and expertise, c) the implications of economic factors and accountability regimes for professionals in different (country) contexts, and d) the need for explicating methodological issues.

The last part of Day 2 was devoted to group work, to allow for more extensive participation from all participants and for further development of the issues raised during discussions. The discussions were explorative in manner, and served as a step towards identifying themes and questions for joint research efforts. Six themes were highlighted:

- *What characterises professionals today – in relation to other occupations and types of work – and what is now the hallmark of professionalism?* A suggestion was brought forward that, instead of focusing on traditional sociological definitions, it is productive to look at professions as patterns of intersections between responsibility and knowledge.
- The *professional-client relationship* needs more attention, in respect to changing societal expectations, the reconstruction of expertise and trust that arises through the availability of ICTs and more transparent practices, and accountability regimes. Of specific interest for professional knowledge and learning is also the role of users as co-producers of knowledge and practice.
- *The relationship between professions and work organisations* is an issue for further research, for instance, as to how ways of organising work and knowledge provide opportunities for and produce constraints against learning.
- *The role of new technologies in transforming professional work:* Research questions are related to the role of technologies in constituting work, sustaining knowledge, generating new competencies and reconfiguring professional-client relationships.
- *Relationships between professional education and work* are getting more complex – and give rise to a number of questions ranging from what kind of practice education should and can prepare for, to the mechanisms through which students become enrolled in expert cultures and the role of education in this respect, to questions about the regulation of educational programmes and the relationships between the professions, the state and the market in this respect.

Day 3 was devoted to synthesising themes, deciding on research questions to be followed-up in joint efforts, and agreeing on concrete actions to take these further. Before the

participants met to do so, the convenors had worked through all flip charts and notes from the previous sessions and prepared a list of seven thematic questions which summarised the main issues brought forward in the different discussions:

- *What are the different enactments of responsibility and their intersections with knowledge?*
- *How is professionals' knowing-in-practice sustained over time?*
- *What is the relationship of new digital technologies to professional knowledge and knowing?*
- *What methodologies are appropriate to studying the phenomena?*
- *Given all the changes we have identified and discussed, what new ways of educating are needed?*
- *How do material arrangements change professional practices?*
- *What are the relationships between Higher Education, professions and professionals?*

These questions were put on flip charts at the beginning of Day 3 and discussed first in plenary. Then the participants were asked which themes they would like to focus on and develop further towards concrete actions. Three groups were organised through this process. The morning session resulted in the identification of three strands of specific research questions and suggested activities, which were agreed upon in the final plenary discussion. The groups will also take responsibility for carrying the strand's future development forward, supplemented by other workshop participants where appropriate. The thematic strands and activities look as follows:

### **Strand one: How are professional practices developed and sustained in changing environments?**

(Group: Sanna Akkermann, Arthur Bakker, David Guile, Åsa Makitalo, Monika Nerland)

#### Research questions

- How does the implementation of new digital technologies transform existing professional practices and generate new models of knowing-in-work?
- How do professionals co-produce knowledge and practice with clients/ users/ other professionals?
- How are new epistemic practices emerging as part of professional work?
- Based on the above, what kind of new learning arrangements are needed? How do newcomers become legitimate knowers in their professional communities?

#### Activities

A symposium addressing digital technologies and their impact on professional practices will be convened at the upcoming ISCAR conference (Rome 2011).

A symposium addressing co-production of knowledge and practice with clients/ users/ other professionals will be convened at the ProPEL conference (University of Stirling, 2011).

An additional symposium further developing issues of co-production in professional practice will be explored at a 2012 conference.

## **Strand two: How is professional responsibility enacted through sociomaterial practices?**

(Group: Bente Elkjaer, Tara Fenwick, Silvia Gherardi, Karen Jensen)

A specific topic is to explore accountability practices enacted through professional signatures.

### Research focus and question

When a professional is asked to sign, how is a signature done; or if the professional does not sign, what are the implications?

This constitutes a material entry point, and from there it becomes possible to see, e.g., how a document travels from one place to another. Through this we can elaborate approaches to study accountability across professions, but also the passage from the written – as the technology of the bureaucracy, including how it is changing through digital technology and how practices of accountability are inscribed in software.

Practices of accountability can be read as activities that the organisation sets up for the professional: the meaning of the strategies employed by the professional in order to sign or not to sign, when to sign, and what the signature does – whether it produces social professional responsibility or not.

### Activities

Scheduling a follow-up meeting in the autumn of 2011, potentially in Paris with French colleagues, to share specific samples of data to be analysed with a focus on these accountability practices towards further developing this overall idea into a collaborative research project.

## **Strand three: What implications for higher education are posed by current changes in professional practice and knowledge?**

(Group: Madeleine Abrandt-Dahlgren, John Field, Henning Saling Olesen, Torill Strand)

### Research questions

- What are the changing meanings of 'professionalism' and 'professional knowledge' in the context of their linkages with higher education?
- What changes are implied for higher education (as provider of pre-service and continuing professional education, as producer of a disciplinary knowledge/research base for professional knowledge, and as participant in warranting 'quality' in professional knowledge) by all of the changes in the demands of professional practice, responsibilities and work arrangements?

### Activities

Plans are underway to convene a workshop meeting at the upcoming ECER conference (Berlin, September 2011) to further develop these issues in specific terms and to link them with the other groups' projects.

### 3. ASSESSMENT OF THE RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

Through the participants' prepared presentations we learned that there are differences between countries in how education for professional work is organised and how the competencies of professionals are regulated and verified. Despite of these changes, however, several themes and questions productive for researching new relationships between knowledge and professional practice were recognised across the group. The three strands described above reflect these issues.

There is strong interest among the workshop participants in moving towards a large collaborative research project. Until ESF funding possibilities for such a project becomes available, the participants are continuing their work to develop these three strands towards smaller research projects and dissemination activities.

#### **Concrete actions to be taken forward**

1. A secure interactive website will be created through the ProPEL network at the University of Stirling for the workshop participants to continue their discussions and activity plans for the three strands, and to communicate their developments with one another for feedback. All ESF workshop papers will be posted on the site.
2. Two and possibly three conference symposia will be planned and presented, as described in strand one above.
3. A research development meeting will be convened in autumn 2011 to move forward the accountability practices project, as described in strand two above.
4. Strand three will endeavour to convene a workshop meeting in September 2011 to move forward discussions about ways to research implications for higher education posed by the six thematic issues.
5. A half-day meeting for all workshop participants will be convened at the upcoming ProPEL conference (University of Stirling, May 2012), possibly with preparations made beforehand, e.g., through Skype meetings in small groups, to report on the developments in each of the three strands and to further develop them.
6. We are exploring the possibility of convening methodology workshops open to all participants in the workshop to compare approaches to data analysis in research on professional practice and knowing.
7. A special issue of *Journal of Education and Work* is being created to publish many of the ESF workshop papers.

Overall, the workshop was regarded as productive and inspiring by the participants. As convenors, we gratefully acknowledge the support we have received from the European Science Foundation to organise this event. We look forward to further cooperation with the ESF, either in the form of applying for a collaborative research project or through other initiatives.

## 4. FINAL PROGRAMME

### Wednesday 4 May 2011

12.00 Registration and welcome lunch

13.30-13.45 **Presentation of the European Science Foundation (ESF)**

**Lise Kjølsvrød**/ Standing Committee for Social Sciences (SCSS)

13.45-15.00 **Welcome by Convenors**

**Tara Fenwick, Monika Nerland and Karen Jensen** (University of Stirling and University of Oslo)

Overview of ESF workshop aims and anticipated outcomes

Introduction of participants and their research

Outline and discussion of key analytic constructs

Meanings of professional learning; transnational knowledge cultures; professionals' epistemic strategies; changing conditions of professional knowledge practices (e.g. new texts, new regulatory frames, new epistemic practices)

Introduction to the day

15.00-15.20 *Break*

*Presentations (with questions for clarification)*

15.20-15.45 **Presentation 1: Norway**

**Monika Nerland** (University of Oslo)

15.45-16.05 **Presentation 2: Sweden**

**Åsa Makitalo** (University of Gothenburg)

16.10-16.30: **Presentation 3: Sweden**

**Madeleine Abrandt Dahlgren** (Linköping University)

16.30-16.50 *Break*

16.50-18.30 **Plenary discussion of all three presentations**

Common themes and key distinctions with respect to workshop constructs. Identify and discuss distinctions among theoretical/ methodological approaches, and their advantages.

20.00 *Dinner in downtown Oslo*

### Thursday 5 May 2011

09.00-09.20 **Presentation 4: Denmark**

**Bente Elkjaer** (Aarhus University)

09.20-09.40 **Presentation 5: Denmark**

**Henning Saling Olesen** (Roskilde University)

09.50-10.10 **Presentation 6: Italy**

**Silvia Gherardi** (University of Trento)

10.10-10.30 **Presentation 7: Italy**

**Paolo Landri** (National Research Council)

10.30-10.50 *Break*

10.50-11.10 **Presentation 8: England**

**Anne Edwards** (University of Oxford)

11.10-11.30 **Presentation 9: England**

**David Guile** (University of London)

11.30 *Lunch*



12.45-13.05 **Presentation 10: Scotland**

**John Field** (University of Stirling)

13.05-13.25 **Presentation 10: Scotland**

**Tara Fenwick** (University of Stirling)

13.30-13.50 **Plenary discussion of presentations**

Common themes and key distinctions with respect to workshop constructs. Identify and discuss distinctions among theoretical/ methodological approaches, and their advantages.

13.50-14.20 **Presentation 11: Germany**

**Christian Harteis** (University of Paderborn)

14.20-14.50 **Presentation 12: the Netherlands**

**Sanne Akkerman and Arthus Bakker** (Utrecht University)

14.50-15.10 *Break*

15.10-15.40 **Plenary discussion of presentations**

15.40-16.40 **Small group discussion**

Common themes and key distinctions with respect to workshop constructs. Identify and discuss distinctions among theoretical/ methodological approaches, and their advantages.

16.40 – 17.00 **Plenary** – groups to present key points from their discussions

20.00 *Dinner*

## Friday 6 May 2011

09.00-10.00 **Plenary discussion**

Develop further key research questions that can address the professional education and learning issues identified as most critical for investigation today. Explore interests and opportunities for addressing these research questions in collaborative research efforts.

10.00-10.15 *Break*

10.15-11.30 **Small group discussion**

11.30-13.30 **Plenary discussion (Chair: Tara)**

Report back and consolidation. Together identify opportunities and interests for research collaboration and determine actions to take this further.

13.30-14.30 *Lunch and farewell*

## 5. FINAL LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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## 6. STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON PARTICIPANTS

**Number of participants:** 16

### **Country of Origin:**

Norway:	3
Scotland:	2
Denmark:	2
Sweden:	2
England:	2
Germany:	1
Netherland:	2
Italy:	2

### **Gender:**

Female:	10
Male:	6