



Special issue: professional practice, education and learning: a sociomaterial perspective

Madeleine Abrandt Dahlgren, Maria Gustavsson & Andreas Fejes

To cite this article: Madeleine Abrandt Dahlgren, Maria Gustavsson & Andreas Fejes (2018) Special issue: professional practice, education and learning: a sociomaterial perspective, *Studies in Continuing Education*, 40:3, 239-241, DOI: [10.1080/0158037X.2018.1508174](https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2018.1508174)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2018.1508174>



Published online: 21 Aug 2018.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Special issue: professional practice, education and learning: a sociomaterial perspective

This Special Issue of *Studies in Continuing Education* presents a collection of research papers, particularly focusing on issues related to work practices, knowing, organising, professions and the relations between professional education and work in meeting contemporary challenges in professional practices. The special issue was prompted by the 3rd International ProPEL conference in Linköping, 14–16th of June 2017, where early versions of the papers were presented.

The relation between professional education and work to meet contemporary challenges in professional practices is addressed in Monika Nerland's paper on *Knowledge Practices and Relations in Professional Education*. Professional education is conceptualised as being embedded in profession-specific 'machineries of knowledge construction', i.e. the dynamic interplay between people, practices, knowledge resources and educational arrangements. Such a perspective straddles the boundaries between education and work and provides a fresh gaze on professional learning. Through the empirical study of three different educational programmes; teacher education, legal education and soft-ware engineering, she shows how students engage in different epistemic practices and objects, and how these practices are linked to the educational activities and to the wider epistemic machineries in the professions. Cecilie Enquist-Jensen's paper *Navigating fluid epistemic spaces: Emerging challenges for student knowing and learning in public international law* provides a sociomaterial perspective on how students engage in epistemic practices in international law, how professional resources are assembled in the students' work, and how such assemblages serve to order practice and justify their decisions.

Jennifer Scholes's contribution *Researching 'messy objects': How can boundary objects strengthen the analytical pursuit of an Actor-Network Theory study?* focuses on how the concept of boundary object fits theoretically with an actor-network theory (ANT) when researching 'messy objects'. She defines messy objects as 'artefacts whose relational effects are inherently slippery and complex'. Based on an ethnographic study of professional engineers' work in an emerging renewable energy organisation this contribution provides insight how a messy object - a signature (timeline and pre-signed contract) - served as a boundary object that made visible asymmetrical power relations and knowledge practices. Scholes concludes that the point she wants to make in the paper is that it is impossible to follow all the actors involved in the act of signing the contract due to its inherent messiness and complexity. Therefore, she argues, it may be more beneficial to use plural theoretical approaches for studying emerging knowledge practices.

Katherine Taylor's paper *Temporalities of Learning: Lessons from a Socio-material Study of Allotment Gardening Practice* deals with professional knowing, learning and the significance of things in the work of allotment gardening. In the framework of actor-network theory (ANT) she explores the large overlooked organising actor 'time', that is, how different temporalities orchestrate knowing and learning in the gardeners' everyday practice. She concludes that there are lessons to learn from the case of professional learning in allotment gardening. The findings indicate that the 'time' is an important materiality that affects learning. The time

element might be helpful for understanding the changing nature of learning in an unstable and irregular practice such as allotment gardening.

In their paper, *The Changing nature of expertise*, Davide Nicolini and colleagues approach the question of expertise. Drawing on an understanding of expertise as social, material and interactional, the authors analyse a medical procedure within the field of cardiology, transcatheter aortic valve implantation (TAVI). In their study, they illustrate that expertise is at the same time translocal, influenced by factors outside of, and in connection to, the specific context. In order to become an expert, there is need to manoeuvre across different practices in which expertise evolves. Thus, experts are not the owners of expertise, but rather ‘carriers or conduits of broader circuits of knowledge’, where expertise is an effect of the entire rhizome. The authors end their paper by calling for ‘a more nuanced approach that differentiates expertise on the basis of the nature of the practice at hand’.

The paper ‘*Our surgeons want this to be short and simple: practices of in-hospital medication review as coordinated sociomaterial actions*’ from Ursula Reichenpfader and her colleagues are centred around implementation and integration of medication review in two surgical wards. By adopting a practice theory lens based on Schatzki’s notion of practice-arrangement as bundled, they offer an insight into the complexity of establishing and sustaining a medication review as a coordinated practice into routine hospital work. The authors argue that coordination of medication review practice rests on the hanging together of actions in the practice, such as the continuous documentation of changes in the patient’s medication. It is also argued by the authors that even more important for the coordination of medication review is how actions between overlapping practices hang together and how interconnected material arrangement are changed over time to understand the enactment of medical review in everyday work.


In their paper, *Learning from patients*, Paula Rowland and colleagues, focus on the enactment of patient engagement programmes. Drawing on the work of Foucault, they analyse international, national and organisational texts and interviews with patient participants and hospital staff members. The focus is on how subjectivities of patient advisers are constructed and how this intersects with a politics of knowledge. Such analysis is needed, the authors argue, as these programmes bring with them normative assumptions. Three subject positions are identified in the analysis: The patient adviser as process informant, as vessel of meaning and as a critical friend. What is at play here, is not so much that administrators and clinicians are learning from patients per se. But rather that they construct opportunities to learn from patient advisers. Such constructions bring with them specific understandings of what can be learned, by whom and to what purpose.

Oscar Rantatalo and Ola Lindberg, turn their attention to the question of liminality, in their paper, *Liminal practice and reflection in professional education*. More specifically, their interest is directed towards the question of how liminality might support student reflection. Liminality is here understood as ‘identities, sites and positions that exhibits “in-betweenness”, bordering, or passages that draw together different institutional conditions’. Drawing on a practice-based perspective on learning, in which learning is seen as relational, situated and embodied, they analyse observational data and interviews from two research projects, one on police education and one on a medical programme. The focus of the analysis was on how liminality is constructed by embodied subjects, where and how liminality takes place. Although there are several similarities between liminality and reflection (both processes can be seen as ‘transformative, connecting past experiences with future possibilities’, and as ‘characterized by unpredictability’), liminality adds to our understanding of reflection. The authors argue that in order to facilitate reflection, there is a need for an element of undeterminedness, something that liminality affords.

In her post-script to this issue, *Pondering Purposes, Propelling Forward*, Tara Fenwick describes the history and development of the ProPEL research network. The focus is on identifying approaches to research that are most helpful in revealing fresh insights about professional work, education and learning that respond to contemporary practice problems, while drawing on recent practice oriented, sociomaterial theories and innovative research methodologies developments in scholarly work. Tara Fenwick summarises her main impressions of the contemporary research in this field and provides a critical outlook on the future field of research on professional practice education and learning.

Madeleine Abrandt Dahlgren

Linköping University, Sweden

 madeleine.abrandt.dahlgren@liu.se

Maria Gustavsson

Linköping University, Sweden

Andreas Fejes

Linköping University, Sweden