

The Professional as Prophet – The social magic of professional knowledge

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Abstract

Professions have become powerful forces for conceptualising both their own world and that of the general public, and for carrying out solutions for a wide range of human challenges. There is therefore good reason to examine the forms of social dominance that come with professionalisation. The inquiries in the current study are fundamentally preoccupied with the inherent contradiction between person and profession, and between the arbitrariness of subjectivity and the universalised concern of a profession. The presentation follows three steps: 1) The false neutrality of professions, 2) The contributions of Goffman and Bourdieu on contradictions between theory and moral practices within professions, 3) The symbolic order of prophecies. Evidence suggests that professions provide a surplus of meaning by virtue of some prophecies they carry with them. This symbolic resource creates an ambiguity between professional neutrality and determination of the personal morale of prophecies, with consequences for both knowledge of and knowledge about professions.

Keywords: Pierre Bourdieu, Erving Goffman, profession, symbolic power, teacher training

Scope

The aim of this article is to develop an inquiry into the conceptualisation of 'profession' and research of professions derived from the sociological assumption of some concealed symbolic dimensions for how the notion of 'profession' is used. The suspicion against the term applies to a hidden temptation to promote prophecies; in general, a prophecy reveals and embodies a higher transcendental predicational wisdom about the subjects to which it is devoted. It is thus knowledge that is at stake, not in itself, but in how it is socially organised (Collins, 1990, p. 18).

Due to the very comprehensive nature of the topic, several approaches linked to the research of professions have been omitted. The scope thus does not allow for a broader review of earlier critical inquiries into the notion of profession, professionalism and professionalisation than the defining works on profession of Larson (1977) and later contributions.

The article prepares for a conceptual and epistemological vigilance towards research on professions; 'education', 'teacher training' and 'educational research' serve as the primary referential cases. The points developed and made may be regarded as exemplary and it thus rely on the sociological imagination of the reader to continue the inquiry.

The symbolic power of profession

Most job advertisements resemble each other in that they describe the nature of the work, the location, the qualifications and education required, and the compensation. Some advertisements also include promises of career advancement for applicants. Beneath these primary and overt characteristics, secondary attributes are equally significant for both employers and employees. These involve not only public prestige, reputation or status associated with the job, but also lifestyle and the ability to behave appropriately on and off the job. Determinants such as age, gender, and social and ethnic background can all be of consequence for employers searching for the best-suited job candidate (Bourdieu, 2002, pp. 56-60; Brante, 2013, p. 3). Work-life, including the education sector, is characterised by these double standards, where an ideal façade is confronted with the realities of everyday life, creating conflicts and ambivalences. These conditions can impact all three parties involved and undermine the trust among them: 1) the authority figures of the institution (school leadership); 2) the frontline workers (teachers); and 3) the users served by the institution (school children and their parents).

'Profession' as a simultaneously mental and social category

It is exactly here a profession may serve as the compensatory force which can neutralise inherent tensions in the above-mentioned hierarchy of school leadership, teachers and pupils. The term 'profession', with all its inherent social will and power, can thus disburden all three parties of a potential loss of trust and authority, as 'profession' is based on the actual reality of groups of people that carry the same title, for example 'teachers'. A similar symbolic function might be attributed to the normative appeals of ethics. "As trained educators, we are professionals," or "he really does have a professional take" are statements that can quash any further discussion about the matter at hand. The fragility of the term reappears in appeals to professionalism as a strategy that according to Fournier (1999) is deployed to control the increasing margin of a general indeterminacy or flexibility in work.

In this way, 'profession' remains both the winner and the prize: the term unites a mental category and a social category simultaneously, displacing all economic and social differences and competitions within the professional group (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 243). The radical 'closure' that

Bourdieu and Wacquant point to here should be distinct from the common use of the Neo-Weberian term and the appropriate approach to profession and professionalisation (Saks & Adams, 2019).

In order to narrow the focus, Brante (2013, p. 4) delimit the professions according to their cognitive and social characteristics, as they are legitimised accordingly for the same reason. My approach adds to and emphasises the professions' symbolic properties. Brante promotes this definition: "Professions are carriers of abstract expert systems, enabling them to perform acts that are perceived as valuable (skilled, informative, helpful, profitable) and trustworthy by client" (Brante, 1992, p. 5). Brante has not found reason to integrate the symbolic dimension in his definition, nor has Saks (2012), in his assessment of the neo-Weberian approach in defining professions up against the more traditional taxonomy.

'Profession' is a folk concept

Just like a too-good-to-be-true offer, the concept 'profession' attracts suspicion. An occupational group with broad and diverse properties, organised in competition for always limited resources, suddenly becomes a uniform collective force of the highest quality with the title 'profession'. All group members thus march in the same professionalised direction, even the lagging back row of potential opportunists.

Who and what should one trust? On the one hand, taking the term 'profession' at face value can be like "buying a pig in a poke" if it is considered an accurate characteristic of professional group members in social research. On the other hand, 'profession' is an established term, officially endorsed by the general public by itself and instituted by authorities that guarantee the quality of the education as it prepares for a professional career. Individuals can retrieve promising benefits and profits in solid public mainstream terms such as professional college, teaching profession, professional bachelor, professional ethics and professional research. It is even a positive term, as members of a profession are recognised without scrutiny, magically elevated humans, just missing blue blood in their veins to become aristocracy.

The fact that the official profane legitimate appearance of 'profession' is accompanied by its disguised twin in the shape of a hidden, misrecognised, and sacred symbolic force makes definition efforts dubious. According to Bourdieu (2019), one cannot define oneself out of the problem of definition because it is *classificatory*: How should a social researcher approach an object of profession, professionalisation and professionalism when it has already been classified, 'defined', so to speak? The concept of a profession has gained acceptance as a legitimate and unquestionable classification as the process of neutralisation slips imperceptibly into naturalisation; hence profession becomes the source of all its answers (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 241-242). In other words, the researcher appears as an uninvited guest at the rally party of defining a profession, while the host has already gone to bed; even the most reverent work of crafting a definition of a profession on premises-operational means is destined to fail (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 229). The efforts to distinguish a semi-profession from one of the fully-fledged 'classic' professions such as lawyers, doctors and engineers is precisely a fight over classifications; this is why the distinction between 'classic professions' and semi-professions can be of minor importance to precisely this approach. Bourdieu's notion of profession is concentrated in this quote:

"Profession" is a folk concept which has been uncritically smuggled into scientific language and which imports into it a whole social unconscious. It is the social product of a historical work of construction of a group and of a representation of groups that has surreptitiously slipped into the science of this group. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 242-243)

This could be the end of the story or at least a reason for thorough re-examination of how the social sciences can and should approach certain occupational groups that hold a special status due to education, control, power, etc. The gap between the common-sense-like naturalisation of 'profession' on the one hand and this apparent classificatory problem, on the other hand, calls for action. Endless efforts to define professions in one taxonomical model or other have a long history in the sociology of professions as a preferred attempt to bridge this gap (Brante, 1992, p. 2). These efforts thus already suffer from their own claim of doing what cannot be done without falling into an endless chain of accounts for the accounts.

Autonomy and the impact of professions: a carousel of mysteries

In his arguments against this taxonomical or 'attribute approach' Brante (2011) critically challenges the common notion of control and autonomy. According to one attribute, a profession is characterised by self-governance or autonomy, i.e. freedom from control by any outsiders, whether this be the state, clients, laypersons or others (Brante, 2011, p. 5). But such types of control via autonomy are always time-limited and conditioned by relations to external powers (Brante, 2011, p. 7). Moreover, professionals do not consider autonomy as particularly important, which compares to the opinion in the working population in general. Contrary, 'interesting work', 'varied work tasks' and 'good social support' are more crucial to the employees (Mastekaasa, 2011).

The argument can be extended even further, as teachers end up selling themselves out of the profession the moment they become professionals, due to at least the approximate monopoly on definitions that government authorities serve. With the detailed legal prescriptions determining primary school teachers' practices and teacher education, from the very first day the aspiring teacher is moulded into a veritable regime of truth. This may come under the disguise of attempts as research, curriculum models or psychologically generated prescriptions, which may pass without reflection and resistance. These regimes of knowledge will tend to pass unnoticed, as they present themselves with a superior self-confidence of obviousness. However, this regime does not have its roots in the history of teaching, teacher training or educational research, but rather in the virtual monopoly held by government institutions to determine what should be considered legitimate concepts and agendas in teaching work. Here, the aspiring teacher may be misled into believing that this state official version of the pedagogical world is the first and most important, and that this world is exactly as it appears: a foundation of trustworthy narratives cast by the natives in the field and the authorities. This point can be illustrated by the arguments revealed in this intellectual experiment:

It can be entirely uncontroversial to view the primary school as a sensible arrangement with a historical mission and also an indispensable enlightening and upbringing place for generation after generation until the now former pupils can provide for themselves. However, rationally, it is not: Why should all children of a generation start school almost simultaneously? Moreover, why should an age group define it? Do all the numerous annual school-holiday-school return mass migrations actually fit everyone? Does it really take a mammoth school system to produce a remarkably large group of powerless, functional illiterates? In addition, what do school students actually know and can do after ten years in the school system: Could they not have learned and achieved everything in half the time? Moreover, one standing conclusion of educational sociology tells that the school primarily teaches to affirm the knowledge that children from the dominant class in society already have, by rewarding them with higher grades than others receive; grade disparity is the concrete measure of the size of the school system's 'pedagogical mortality rate' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979, p. 8; Grendal, 2021).

This radical yet entirely sensible doubt can be brought into teacher education: does one truly become a teacher by repeating this timeframe determined mass migration from the first day of study right up to the other side of the bachelor's thesis, semester by semester? The connection between

education and the subsequent practice of the profession is a huge mystery because we know so little about the inner relationship between admission to, participation in a vocational education, and its significance for the candidate's conduct in the profession (Olsen, 2020, p. 213-222). Nevertheless, all agents, institutions, and authorities are united in a potentially unquestioned belief in the ultimate value and necessity of education for the proper performance of teaching, even though this collective belief remains entirely unverified. Thus, everyone is forced to believe that the duration, form, and content of professional education are precisely the rational, necessary, and sufficient guarantees for releasing the teacher on the school's pupils.

It is precarious, therefore, to give in to the autonomy of professions, because it is the public authorities that add a final and true legitimacy to the profession (Svensson & Åström, 2013). In this context, the ambition of the profession becomes downright perilous because it presents itself with false neutrality (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 242). It is a concept overheated with vested interests, just as part of the common-sense world's universe of meaning. It is thus to become a Trojan horse, with sinister forces inside, that may encounter the student teacher, the teacher and the researcher without them even realising it. The concept deceives itself, as it is the social product of a historical work of a group coming into being, along with the representation of it that surreptitiously has slipped into a science of this very group. One side-effect of this operation tacitly transforms the socio-ecological heterogeneity of a profession into a uniform homogeneity; the question of how the concept of profession comes in form of a Trojan horse in other professions is now open for inquiries.

In action, professions have a strong voice in making sense of the world and putting people in their place. Furthermore, they all use science as their fuel in one way or another, if nothing else, as a symbolic force. Therefore, the researcher can find a collegial friend in the professions, as they share a reference to knowledge through their respective connection to science; all of them are, after all, professionals of logic (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 123). They can also easily become allies if they occupy a position close to each other in the social space measured as volume and composition of cultural capital (Olsen, 2020, pp. 223-228).

Cracks in the knowledge of profession

Specialised knowledge usually rooted in scientific theory and research is regarded as a common feature of professions, and also their historical genesis and formation. The established knowledge resources not only serve recognition and general acknowledgement, but naturally also play a crucial role in the practice of a profession. With the authority of a profession one can imagine how knowledge proceeds, permeates and in general accompanies the practices in useful and flawless ways. Despite this idealisation, research on the professions have been preoccupied with the question of the professions' knowledge base. In the following chapter I will present three inquiries into the rationality and functionality of professional knowledge, which so far might not have been a peculiar object of attention: The failures of the 'theory-practice' reduction, the moral levelling of professional knowledge in action and the incommensurable logics of professional theory and of practice.

The social game of theory and practice

Abbott proposes a model for professional work with an uncertain 'inference' space between 'diagnoses' and 'treatment'. Inference designates varieties of practical reasoning when the passage from diagnosis to treatment seems more vulnerable than obvious, calling for tacit knowledge and working by strategies of exclusion or construction (Abbott, 1988, pp. 48-49). Abbott's partly pragmatic and partly functionalistic diagnoses-inference-treatment modelling somehow excludes

itself from understanding the inherent symbolic logics of professions in general, and the logics of prophecies in professional enterprises in particular.

Even Abbott openly recognises the unpredictable practical logics of professional practices. He nonetheless adheres to a rather common notion of 'theory and practice' in his *practico*-normative conception of professional knowledge, by the very coupling of diagnoses-treatment. The 'theory and practice' phrase is a philosophical abstraction allowing all sorts of notions and declarations on human action, without taking the overly complex and unpredictable logics of professional practices into consideration. There is more to this, as 'theory' might shadow for the wide range of other kinds of knowledge that an occupation accumulates during its history.

Here, Peters in his reflections on classical and contemporary French philosophy offers a notion about what is being hidden, namely that modern knowledge and education are typically indebted to an implicit vision of subjectivity that highlights mind over body, giving a more or less refined conscious will sole sovereignty in matters of educational practice (Peters, 2004, pp. 22-26). The 'theory-practice' relation is thus to be considered as a hierarchy, with a determining vector of theory pointing down to practice. This hierarchy of knowledge is socially parallel with a social hierarchy of dominant-dominated, with all which that might entail in terms of symbolic violence and misrecognitions; a social game of professions that Abbott might involuntarily have entered into and contributed to.

By contrast, Goffman has observed both the practical and logical deficiencies between 'diagnoses' and 'treatment' in Abbott's conception.

Crossing the doorstep: The unaffordable professional knowledge

In his book *Asylums* – which offers a general theory of institutions – Goffman (1961) portrays the potential untrustworthiness of professionals. The precariousness of the situation rests on the fact that the professional is constantly confronted with a double standard:

Although there is a psychiatric view of mental disorder and an environmental view of crime and counter-revolutionary activity, both freeing the offender of moral responsibility for his offense, total institutions can little afford this particular kind of determinism. Inmates must be caused to self-direct themselves in a manageable way, and, for this to be promoted, both desired and undesired conduct must be defined as springing from the personal will and character of the individual inmate himself, and defined as something he can himself do something about. In short, each institutional perspective contains a personal morality, and in each total institution we can see in miniature the development of something akin to a functionalist version of moral life (Goffman, 1961, pp. 86-87).

On the one hand, the teacher can undoubtedly align with and invoke the rational professional learning perspective prescribed by official pedagogy. Here, the child becomes a willing pupil who participates, takes and gives in the right spirit, as dictated by everyday school life. But when crossing the doorstep into the classroom from this outside, officially school-legitimate agenda, the pupil is also a human with passions, emotions and demands. The teacher can understand and sympathise with these in the teachers' lounge, as there can be good reasons for the pupil's behaviour. However, back in the – supposed rationally professional – classroom, the teacher cannot afford such showing off by exempting the individual child from moral responsibility for his or her behaviour. Here, the children have become the officially stated pupils, defined by the professional discourse. Goffman demonstrates that professional knowledge changes its fundamental character, and transforms into a pragmatic moral mode, as the teacher crosses the doorstep from outside the classroom and into it. The same goes for the medical doctor entering the clinic, or the lawyer joining a legal case.

Goffman's identification of 'professions' as a double game reveals the preliminary characterisation of the traits of the profession, I am about to circle in. The social logic of knowledge that Goffman makes known gives rise to a unique social magic which may allow members of a

profession to commit even serious mistakes without necessarily facing negative sanctions from within the professional group, the legal authorities or the public.

Lack of logic of the logician

Goffmann's observations and interpretations of the 'doorstep' dividing two different social logics of knowledge is paralleled by Bourdieu in his outline of the two different logics in action: the logic of practice and that of a scientifically informed professional discourse.

Programmatically formulated, practice has a logic which is not that of the logician (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 86). As scientific structures cannot grasp the principles of practical logic without changing its genuine nature, one is presented with a collision across the doorstep. The observer's position outside the classroom with a scientific agenda promotes a vision of time which is not that of the practitioner and their practice inside the classroom. This decontextualised analytical view then may tempt both the professional and the researcher to ask for more logic from practice than it can give. The teachers as professional participants thus seek to reflect on their practice in the classroom, in search of the principles guiding their own actions; this is probably general in nature for all professions. Guided by their practical sense, the teachers achieve practical mastery of the situation without having to rely on, or being dependent on the symbolic mastery (Bourdieu, 1997, pp. 102-104). As the practitioner seeks to realise some reconstructed conception of his doing

There is every reason to think that as soon as he reflects on his practice, adopting a quasi-theoretical posture, the agent loses any chance of expressing the truth of his practice, and especially the truth of the practical relation to the practice. Academic interrogation inclines him to take up a point of view on his own practice that is no longer that of action, without being that of science, encouraging him to shape his explanations in terms of a theory of practice that meshes with the juridical, ethical or grammatical legalism to which the observer is inclined by his own situation. Simply because he is questioned, and questions himself, about the reasons and the *raison d'être* of his practice, he cannot communicate the essential point, which is that the very nature of practice is that it excludes this question. His remarks convey this primary truth of primary experience only by omission, through the silences and ellipses of self-evidence (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 91).

The analysts' error or mistake will consist in making their own relation to time identical to the practitioner's situated relation to time (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 81). The professional view's conception of time thus tends to destroy practice. By substituting the practical scheme with the theoretical either before or after the event has taken place, scientific practice tends to radically exclude even the idea of what it excludes (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 81). A closer investigation of students' experiences of internship and professional training in general might be useful to shed light on the contradictions between the theoretically informed observation post and the practitioner's bodily and contextual practices. As the professionals of *logos*, researchers are prone to reduce all practice to discursive formulas. This approach excludes the obvious possibility that the professional practitioner's efforts rely on pre-conceptual bodily necessities.

In *Pascalian Meditations* from 1997, Bourdieu offers an extended outline of the social effects of and impact on knowledge of 'the scholastic position', *scholé* (Bourdieu, 2000). This position, materialised on the university campus, is a relatively free privileged position of contemplation that carries along its own interferences or errors. One is labelled the scholastic epistemocentrism and engenders an unrealistic and even idealistic anthropology by imputing to its object what in fact belongs to the way of looking at it (Bourdieu, 2000, pp. 50-51). More radically, the professional in the scholastic position is tempted to force upon practice an unexamined social relation by projecting their theoretical thinking into the heads of acting agents; the researcher so to speak considers the professional agent of practice as being preoccupied with reading, thinking and publishing, and having

the same contemplative approach to time as the researcher. This privilege of social dominance reoccurs when it comes to making claims for universal values such as 'liberty', 'humanism', 'community', 'equality', 'inclusion' etc. Such acts of universalisation imply that all citizens have equal common access to express themselves and strive for 'human dignity', for example. If social differences in access to the universal are not taken into consideration, the prescripts remain fictitious declarations to serve the privilege and protection of the scholastic condition itself (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 65). To be good in will and words and advance the moral judgements and arguments depend, according to Bourdieu, directly on the distribution of educational capital among the agents. The goodwill confessions of the do-gooders go hand-in-hand with a moral-majority self-declared right to be deprived people's safeguarding spokespersons, without asking for their permission. This is a pretentious and supremely elitist cult with faith in the value of personal opinions. The emotional and political drive to make other people share the same opinions as themselves may imply an intellectual sacrifice where they might not be able to tell the difference between an observation and a wish, or a constative proposition and a performative judgement, defining all other contributions to the matter as solely being conservative assaults (Bourdieu, 2000, pp. 67-68).

Although Goffman falls short in a developed insights into the scenarios of institutional power of knowledge that Bourdieu serves, they both recognise the persistent contradiction between person and profession when it comes to the practical performance of the professional at work. The overloading of expectations in pursuit of explicit theoretical knowledge can cause one to demand more of a professional practice than the theory can deliver and account for; practice might obey principles quite different from those of a theoretically enlightened rule or a prescript. The latent crisis of a professionalized knowledge just doubles as one observes a shift from autonomy based professional expertise to the hardship of accountability feedback (Axford, 2002). One may even claim that the contradiction of person versus profession is paradigmatic, in order to understand the historical origin of a profession and the obstacles that research of professions encounter – or possibly misrecognise. This is a contradiction with the potential to destroy the effective strength of professional knowledge and interfere with real-time successful work performance.

The chronic threat to a profession's legitimacy and to research of professions from the paradigmatic contradiction of person versus profession now seems to have been, if not averted, then at least countered from an unexpected source.

There is a prophet inside the professional

Research of professions since Max Weber has been interested in the outward strength of a profession, intending to examine the legitimacy of the position of power. Bourdieu has drawn attention to a body of knowledge within professions and its social use: inside the professional, the prophet resides.

Friedrich Fröbel, like other pioneers of pedagogy, was keen to draw on both religious sources and natural philosophy to advance their agenda. In the advance of kindergarten pedagogy, both sources serve the wisdom and capabilities associated with a prophet. Prophets believe they can reveal, proclaim and – crucially – embody the comprehensive wisdom about, in this case, both the child's nature and upbringing. In this context, the 'wise person' is recognized by deeds and stories, and the knowledge and values, approved by both peers and laypeople. Therefore, prophets and their wisdom are not worth much more than the admiration and devotion bestowed upon them by their faithful followers.

Could teacher training, the teaching profession, and professions in general nonetheless possess a hidden prophetic witchcraft-like wisdom? Yes, because the early prophet of an occupation follows

into the profession and continues to operate his prophetic wisdom there. It is for research to show what characterizes these prophecies, their transformation and in particular their persistence over time in each profession.

According to Bourdieu, all professions embody this duality of prophesy and rationality (Bourdieu, 2002, pp. 365-371):

- A. Professionals strive to be recognised as committed persons who act objectively, soberly, and neutrally without ever succumbing to personal feelings or compromising their power of judgment. A professional's assessment of a particular case does not begin with this case itself. Rather, it rests on general principles, all of which refer to the specialized knowledge professional education and scientific rigor guarantee. This is the self-image the convinced professional seeks to promote, eventually promoted in a self-assuring, self-assumed high dignity narrative.
- B. These ideals are typically upheld within the institutions – education, research, and professional journals – that may have found their mission in the promotion of ‘exemplary prophecies’ (Bourdieu, 2002, pp. 369-370). These prophecies convey the wisdom and predictions the field members have inherited from their predecessors and now uphold. In this way, the professionals offer their ideals of life for sale to be good examples for others; consequently, the enterprise of a profession then turns into projection. Thus, the professionals can, freely and more or less unconsciously, impose their life values on those they address, and willingly accept it if the system of dispositions they are provided with resembles those of the professionals.

Where, when, and how does this double standard manifest itself? It happens when the professional steps forward, face-to-face with the client, patient, child or pupil, both in the shape of being professional and as the prophet. Well, when we ask ourselves and inquire whether the doctor and nutrition expert ‘lives healthily’, whether the lawyer is righteous, whether the teacher is reasonable and sensible in dealing with the children, and whether the priest believes in God, we are probing this duality of the professional and the prophet.

Here, we believe that any professional who wishes to be seen as such knows the prophet within himself. Fellow professionals fight a daily bookkeeping battle, where (A) the formal professional ideal must constantly align with (B) the wisdom that the prophet will embody and reveal before the client. The professionals (A) thus do not exist as such on their own, although the profession-prophet does (A + B). This prophet can assume many forms. Those who believe in the crucial importance of ‘education’, in *Bildung*, can be such a type of prophet (Olsen, 2020, pp. 121-129). With the ambition of promoting ‘professional judgment’, one might think that (A) and (B) come together. However, this ends in a complete breakdown because the notion of ‘professional judgment’ overlooks the fundamental contradictions between professionalism (A) and the prophet (B).

The temptations to prophecies

So, anyone who takes ‘profession’ in vain doubles themselves as the profession-prophet. This fact presents an extraordinary challenge, a risk, as it were, to students and educators in teacher education, and to researchers: They are all susceptible to prophetic temptations. These temptations can come from state authorities, who compile catalogues of what are currently considered the most urgent problems, eagerly anticipating solutions. Temptations can also come from the circle of recipients to whom the researchers address their work. If a compliant audience is perceived, the researcher may fraternise with them, releasing promising problem-solving solutions and plausible future scenarios (Bourdieu, Chamboredon & Passeron, 1991, pp. 25-26). Prophetic researchers can also be tempted by simple explanations, where a specific effect is derived from a single cause. This

direct link between an ‘independent’ cause variable and a corresponding ‘dependent’ effect variable has sometimes been referred to as ‘variable sociology’ (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 100). Finally, the history of school pedagogy may be retold as the history of the profession-prophet, where edifying life ideals emerge, wrapped in more neutral and legitimate forms of knowledge; it does not seem that the research into the history of professions, teaching and teacher training included is aware of this double standard of the profession-prophet. So, anyone who does not know the prophecies in their field and who has not sought the prophet within themselves may risk ending up in the same predicament as the chemist who allows himself to be persuaded by the alchemist.

On the paradoxes of knowledge, power and legitimacy

This article points to some fundamental and interrelated problems of making the concept of a profession a determining classification in education and social science research. The first concern is that of social dominance hidden and working in the shadow of the concept of professions. This sociological understanding of knowledge and power also raises a second volume of problems that circulate within a frame of knowledge, power and legitimacy of a profession. This constellation is well-known within research of education and professions and therefore not controversial at all. One can, however, call into question whether the knowledge-power-legitimacy has been developed to that extent when it comes to theories of and research on the practice of professions. The inquiry into Abbott’s modelled and instrumental notion of diagnoses-inference-treatment is argued to rely on a rather common quasi-philosophical abstraction of ‘theory and practice’, which is a highly reductionist conception as one enters into the complexities of everyday professional practices. Each in their own way, Goffman and Bourdieu offer insights into the fundamental disparities between the logic of theory and reflections on the one hand, and the bodily, moral and practical logics of practice on the other; one may ask to what extent these principal understandings have gained traction within research of professions and education in general.

The first concern of social dominance and the second of knowledge-power-legitimacy are now united in the last approach searching for the symbolic order of professions through the surplus meaning stemming from the prophecies. On the one hand, it belongs to the vital characteristics of a profession, that matter – the professional case – and person and personal values are strictly separated. But the prophet’s prophetic wisdom dissolves this matter-person duality, silently transforming the apparently incompatible into a united symbolic force, according to the ‘profession-prophet’ formula. Thus, every profession entails a compromise concerning its reputation in the workplace and job. The discourse of the ‘profession-prophet’ is performative, contrary to that of ‘profession’, as it describes both the imperative of professional action and the action itself.

From here on, it is up to theoretical and empirical research designs to investigate how this ‘prophet-within-the-professional’ formula might appear in the actions of professions at work and the accompanying discourses. Within education, the determining use of *Bildung* and loose, dubious performatives such as ‘transition’ – from kindergarten to school, for instance – and ‘care’ could be such professional efforts genuinely ruled by the prophet, but hardly recognised by anyone. The prophet also intervenes with the professional in the regular confusion in use of the terms ‘expert’ and ‘specialist’. The ‘specialist’ rules the specialised professional knowledge of the profession, whereas the expert might unconsciously draw on the magic of prophecies. The social magic of the joined prophet-professional lets the naturalistic fallacy of Moore (1903) go smoothly and unnoticed.

Overall, anyone who takes ‘profession’ in vain and at face value risks being sucked into a whirlpool of unrecognised and therefore uncontrollable preconceptions. Those who are not vigilant in the face of the deceptive nature of everything that the use of ‘profession’ brings with it become

part of the power struggle, without knowing this game of power and its effects on themselves or on those who lack the means to either grasp the dominance or defend themselves against it. Consequently, the profession is not one of the cornerstones of the classical and modern Enlightenment project, which includes characteristics such as scientific rigour, transparency and critique of power. On the contrary, professional ambitions are on a collision course with the Enlightenment project itself. It is, therefore, extraordinarily noteworthy that the sources and guarantors of the Enlightenment project are on a collision course with themselves due to the misrecognised inner logic of prophecies.

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