

## The Reflective Methodologists A Cultural Analysis of Danish Pedagogues’ Individualised Silence and Collective Articulations

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### Abstract

*This article takes its point of departure in a stance found among practitioners – including teachers, preschool teachers, kindergarten pedagogues and other welfare professionals – in which theory is considered abstract and thus irrelevant to or unhelpful in their daily work. In exploring the backgrounds of this stance, I address the issue at two levels: one that focuses on the professional identities, cultural logics and communicative norms of kindergarten staff groups in their actual, contemporary context; and another that focuses on aspects connected to the reception of Donald Schön’s concept of ‘the reflective practitioner’. The analytical and methodological perspectives in the article are informed by the anthropology of education; specifically, by focusing on meaning-making processes and their consequences.*

*In my approach to the concept of the reflective practitioner, I use a Bourdieu-inspired perspective; here, the social actor’s practical sense and tacit knowledge are related to questions of power and other actors’ strategies for positioning themselves within a social space. In doing so, they produce professional identities, ideals of communication, and colleague relationships. Here, the point of departure is that questions concerning ‘reflective practitioners’ and ‘tacit knowledge’ cannot rely solely on theoretical arguments but should be empirically informed by studies of practices as they unfold in pedagogical institutions. This article analyses the field by investigating these concepts and examining the cultural logics that make such interpretations possible and meaningful. Furthermore, I point to a problematic aspect of Schön’s work with regard to his empirical basis, which demands a particular focus on the historical effect of ‘the reflective practitioner’ concept as a symbolic marker of identity in the cultural logic of the pedagogical field. I also address how this logic considers practice to be the exponent of all that is good, meaningful and correct. From my analysis, I develop the concept of ‘the reflective methodologists’ to describe a professional identity and practice that relies on the critical examination of specific actions instead of ‘tacit knowledge’.*

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*As Kotzee states, the real problem regarding Schön's conceptualisation of tacit knowledge is understanding the social transmission of 'know-how' (Kotzee, 2010, p. 1). Kotzee further argues that, in order to understand practice, it is necessary to focus on "how social practices are constituted and how people are initiated into them" (Kotzee, 2012, p. 15). In this article, I highlight such practices, taking their characteristics seriously.*

## 1. Quality on the Agenda

Pedagogical work is often described as being always unique, as it focuses on individuals and their learning processes. Individuals and processes both have some innate, indescribable and distinctive characteristics that cannot be reduced or generalised. As a consequence of this uniqueness, it is argued that pedagogues must act in and deal with ever-new situations, relationships, problems and people. To do so, pedagogues have historically been trusted by society to make decisions and act on the basis of their professional judgement. This judgement is often referred to in both research and the world of practice as 'practical knowledge' or 'tacit knowledge', and its providers are referred to as 'reflective practitioners'. These terms tend to be semantically linked to positive qualities and are used to describe the practices of welfare professionals. In this context, knowledge is thus a normative concept, suggesting that it is better than what is perceived as 'not-knowledge' or ignorance (Kotzee, 2012, p. 15). The demand for quality measurement, quality development and standardisation over the last decades has put pressure on this trust in professional judgement. Quality is often discussed in abstract and ideologised ways, stating either that pedagogues know best because they know practice, or that they should know theories or programme procedures better than they do. Other forms of logic that are not pedagogical are becoming more influential, which has led to an increased demand for the use of evaluation tools that may not identify the significant aspects of practical activities (Dahler-Larsen, 2007, 2012). To discuss quality in a way that is not solely ideological, I find it necessary to study pedagogical practice. In the following, I explore certain aspects of such practices in order to highlight and problematise these generalised ideological stances. In doing so, my point of departure is that practice is: 1. *a fundamentally social phenomenon*; and 2. defined as "*any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity*" (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 187 in Kotzee, 2012, p. 6). Using empirical ethnographic studies of practices<sup>1</sup> in the Danish kindergarten sector, I examine how ideas of knowledge, reflection and quality are embedded in the production of the pedagogues' professional identity.

The field's emphasis on the reflective practitioners' so-called tacit knowledge legitimises a wall of silence regarding central aspects of the profession's practices (Schön, 2001; Wackerhausen & Wackerhausen, 1993; Nielsen, 2002; Polanyi, 1966; Kjær, 2009, 2010). The analysis that follows provides examples of how this silence is produced, and suggests that pedagogues enter into discussions about quality in order to qualify the discussion rather than rejecting it entirely or turning it into a question of personal or local tacit knowledge<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> These findings are related to several of my research projects; particularly, a three-year postdoctoral project that focused on identifying and describing the cultural characteristics of high-quality, inclusive pedagogy in Danish kindergartens (Kjær, 2013, 2009, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Please note that I am discussing not the ontological existence of the phenomenon of tacit knowledge or tacit knowledge as a theoretical concept, but the social life and reception of the

## 2. Pedagogical Identity and Symbolic Orders

The cultural order of the pedagogical field of practice and the creation of professional identities can be seen as an on-going process of strategic activity. I thereby regard the pedagogical field of practice as a symbolic landscape in which groups of employees position themselves and each other as part of a strategic process of legitimisation. My primary focus is on ‘pedagogues’ or kindergarten educators; i.e., practitioners (skilled staff) who have undergone a 3½-year training programme that consists of alternating practicum and school activities. In Denmark, such kindergarten educators primarily work in day-care institutions for children aged 1-5 years, and in after-school play arrangements for children aged 6-10 years. These institutions are staffed by a mix of kindergarten educators (fully trained pedagogues; approximately 60 per cent) and teacher/educator assistants (less-skilled/-trained; 40 per cent).

Historically, the pedagogical field in Denmark has a long tradition of activism. In 1828, the Women’s Charitable Association (*Det Kvindelige Velgørehedsselskab*) opened the first institution (*asyl*) for the children of poor, working women. Hedevig Bagger introduced the first Danish Fröbel kindergarten in 1880, and she established the country’s first course for female kindergarten teachers in 1885. Up until 1948, developments in the field were mainly the result of such private initiatives. Afterwards, the field gradually became the object of state recognition and public funding. However, highly engaged individuals still continued to establish new kindergartens and teaching institutions for pedagogues (Larsen, 2001). Right up until 1995 when a law was passed regarding business plans, the pedagogical sector was dominated by a spirit of grassroots activism. Subsequently, changes started to occur quickly, and Danish society has increasingly taken an interest in the work done at day-care centres and kindergartens as well as the institutions that educate pedagogues.

As a result of this background, today’s pedagogues have had to establish and define a renewed identity for their profession. Such developments have not followed an easy, clear path; rather, changes have often been met with opposition and disputes. From an anthropological perspective, identity is not only embedded in the individual but is a fundamental social, relational and process-based phenomenon that revolves around an individual’s position and status in his/her different cultural contexts (Eriksen, 1995; Goffman, 1959). In order to have a meaningful interaction, two people who meet as social actors must define what kind of relationship they have to each other. The definition of each person’s role and status is, therefore, fundamental to the interaction. The roles are usually defined subconsciously; only in cases where problems or conflicts arise do the processes of identity creation become evident through the doubts or struggles that result. Nevertheless, people must continuously work to build, maintain, adjust and transform their identities (Eriksen, 1995, 2004, p. 58).

Both private and professional identities are established within social interactions, which are played out in landscapes that are not only concrete and organisational, but are also charged with symbolic meaning. The creation of identity involves orientating oneself in relation to the surrounding society with its innate logic, and where others’ processes of

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term within a particular profession. In doing so, I am informed by a Bourdieuan tradition, conceptualising perspectives similar to ‘tacit knowledge’ by the term *habitus*.

identity creation also take place. This can be regarded as a social space in which individuals are constantly acting to attain or maintain their positions (Wilken, 2011; Bourdieu, 1992). For example, we are able to identify ourselves using the world map with which we are familiar. According to the points of the compass, people from northern Europe can position themselves in the northern hemisphere and on the European continent, which is part of the western world. In doing so, they have located themselves geographically as well as in relation to a range of social and cultural markers. As a result of a postcolonial world view, the northern hemisphere is considered to be the wealthiest part of the world (Said, 2004; Bhabha, 1994) and, from this standpoint, the western part of the northern hemisphere is seen as a cultural arena with numerous shared characteristics that differentiate it from the east/Orient (Said, 2004). The cold north is associated with wealth, as opposed to the poor but warm(-hearted) south. Similarly, in this world view, the west is associated with democracy, innovative thought, dynamism and rationality, while the east is associated with mysticism, tradition, spirituality, hierarchy and meditative calm. However, this Eurocentric<sup>3</sup> world map is not only a symbolic representation of the physical reality of the world, it is also an expression of power. When we place ourselves on such a world map, we are not only positioning ourselves within the geographical landscape, but also creating an identity that is linked to our position. And we do this in a landscape that contains a plethora of symbolic meanings that we either reproduce or question. These symbolic meanings play a role with regard to which characteristics are used when individual and collective identities are established. In other words, these symbolic logics are pivotal to the meanings that make a real difference.

The creation of such meanings is related to power. The one who has the power also has the right to tell the story and thereby define the world. The world order sketched out in the symbolic world map tends to be viewed from the perspective of the west, and symbolic meanings are built upon centuries of ideas about ‘ourselves and others’ (Said, 2004; Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1996). Therefore, the world map is not a neutral representation of the world, but rather the expression of a particular way of seeing it. In addition, as part of one’s on-going identity work, it is necessary to respond more or less consciously to the logic and the meanings that are embedded in the symbolic landscape (Eriksen, 2004; Goffman, 1959).

This way of thinking can be used in the work of analysing what is at stake for pedagogues’ professional identity at a time of important changes. Positioning oneself within a symbolic landscape requires the ability to gain acceptance within a chosen position. In order to define and construct reality, one must have the power to make others see and understand the world in a particular way. In many cases, this power is manifested in subtle ways – i.e., *symbolic power* (Bourdieu, 1996). These forms of power (Wilken, 2011, p. 90-1; Bourdieu, 1996) can be exercised in a way that is so benign, implicit and all-pervasive that it is accepted as something natural. However, it is anything but organic. On the contrary, it expresses a social and cultural order that is the result of and also a part of individuals’ and groups’ exercise of power, choices and strategic prioritisations (Wilken, 2011, p. 90-1; Bourdieu, 1996).

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<sup>3</sup> Eurocentrism is the practice of viewing the world from a European-centred or western-centred perspective.

The Danish pedagogical sector – which includes the Danish kindergarten tradition and the identity of the Danish pedagogue – can be considered a social space or, in the language of Bourdieu, a ‘field’. This term indicates that we are dealing with a social landscape in which the parties involved fight or negotiate for the right to define and dominate it. The basis for this negotiation is, however, shared by everyone involved. Put simply, the struggle presupposes that the parties involved agree on what is worthy of dispute. In the Danish context, the discussion and conflict has traditionally focused on two basic sets of opposition: theory versus practice; and proximity versus distance (see Figure 1). The tensions of these dichotomies are metaphorically represented in different ‘lands’, connotating specific values and emphasising particular aspects of pedagogy.

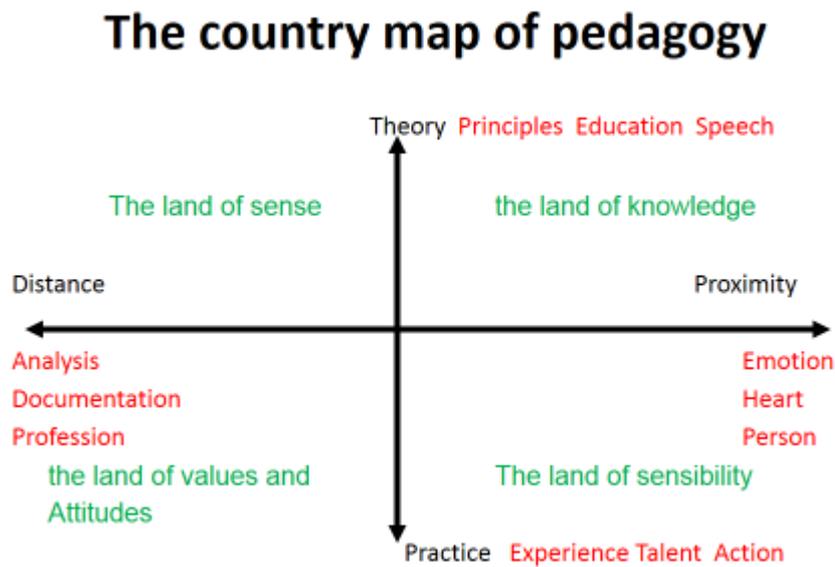


Figure 1. The meaning dimensions of the pedagogical field. Symbolic implications are shown in red.

A discussion about quality should be understood in the context of the field’s logic. The argument that pedagogy cannot be generalised or externally evaluated comes from the idea that pedagogical practice is always varied and unique, and therefore cannot be compared to practices elsewhere. Comparison is thought to be impossible because it requires proximity to a concrete situation or relationship in order to understand what it is about (cf. Bulterman-Bos, 2008). This argument (which can be found in research as well as in teaching professions) situates pedagogical work in a position in the field that is closer to practice than to theory, and closer to proximity than to distance (the south-eastern quarter of Figure 1).

This argument – which symbolically implies that proximity and practice are good while distance and theory are bad – can also be found among social actors who take up different

positions in the field (Wilken, 2011; Bourdieu, 1992; Bulterman-Bos, 2008)<sup>4</sup>. To position oneself is a strategic action that takes place continuously and relates to other actors in the field, so what looks like a static map is actually an on-going dynamic process in which identities are negotiated within the social space using both actions, symbols and narratives. Pedagogical teaching assistants<sup>5</sup> tend to position themselves in relation to emotional intimacy, making use of the compassionate and personal aspects of the individual and his/her relationships. The fact that these assistants are not fully qualified pedagogues means that they must position themselves closer to the area of practice in the symbolic landscape. Therefore, they also associate themselves with talents and activities related to the intimate, personal and emotional insights that come from experience (see Figure 1). Seen from the assistants' point of view, the pedagogues' position is closer to the theoretical and distanced (north-western) section of the diagram (Kjær, 2004).

However, many fully trained pedagogues also want to reside in the land of intimacy and practice, where the logic of emotional experiences and compassionate acts dominate – this is called the land of sensibility (see Figure 1). This means that the pedagogues try to position themselves in the same area as the assistants, especially in comparison to primary-school teachers, for example. This identity construction can also be seen in how pedagogues perform their roles on a daily basis – it entails striving towards establishing informal, personal behaviour and relationships within the institution and in interactions between colleagues, staff and children, as well as staff and parents (Kjær, 2005, 2007a, 2010). This identity is also constructed in the public arena during political activities, demonstrations, labour disputes, etc., in which pedagogues often act in ways that simulate a child's perspective; they sing protest songs set to the melodies of well-known nursery rhymes, and use visual communication that includes dolls, teddy-bears and other toys. Symbols like hands forming a heart (see Figure 2) are displayed to signify the value, warmth and kindness that represent the role of the pedagogue. The symbolic order of this world view suggests that practice is good, warm and right because it is practical; i.e., embedded in face-to-face interaction between human beings (proximity). This has been mediated metaphorically in arguments for 'warm hands' as opposed to the 'cold brains' or 'cold hands' of academics and administrators.

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4 This indicates that the field is constructed in accordance with the actions and understanding of those involved, and that the analysis is in accordance with the implicit doxa of the field (Wilken, 2011; Bourdieu, 1992).

5 Teaching assistants (representing 40 per cent of the staff) receive a lesser amount of formal training but work in the same kinds of institutions as pedagogues (representing 60 per cent of the staff).

## Socialpædagogernes internationale arbejde



Figure 2. Caring hands are among the main symbols used by the Danish pedagogical profession (source: [www.sl.dk](http://www.sl.dk)).

Pedagogues and assistants place the administrative logic of the welfare society – and the expectation that it is possible to gain insight into and an overview of day-care services – in an area of the symbolic landscape called the land of sense (see Figure 1). Here, the distanced, external gaze dominates, which enables analysis to take place. Theoretical approaches are manifested as abstract forms of communication and are put forward in documents that describe pedagogical principles and intentions as well as in evaluations, research reports, etc., that investigate and analyse the field of practice. Pedagogical staff are increasingly involved in such verbalised or articulated activities; e.g., in pedagogical learning plans, value statements, etc. The primary function of such texts is often to communicate the profession to the outside world, thereby legitimising it (Olesen, 2007; Kjær, 2007a; Palludan, 2007a); such efforts towards increased legitimacy can be seen as part of the profession's symbolic mastery (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1992; Bourdieu, 1990). However, there is often no connection between this symbolic mastery and the practical mastery of working with children (Palludan, 2007a; Kjær, 2010; Brøstøm, 1998, 2004; Kotzee, 2012).

In recent years, there has been an increased presence of critical, analytical and evaluative perspectives from outside observers. One might say that there has been a shift away from the previous situation wherein pedagogues were allowed a great deal of freedom. The current situation is influenced by the fact that society has particular expectations regarding day-care providers – not least of all, an expectation of gaining insight into what they do. Thus, historically speaking, the Danish pedagogue's identity has evolved from those highly engaged activists who took matters into their own hands to tackle social, familial and societal tasks and problems. Traces of this history are still evident in some of the standard terminology of the pedagogues' jargon (Elbro, 1995). For example, “over at the municipality” (*oppe på kommunen*) is used in everyday speech to refer to the municipal administration. This phrase makes sense because pedagogues have traditionally considered themselves and their institutions to be something ‘other’ than the municipality, simply because that used to be the case. Although day-care services in Denmark have undergone a reform process in the past few decades – i.e., they have become a fully integrated part of the municipal administration with assigned placements, funding and all that this entails – pedagogues' use of language and identity still displays characteristics rooted in the reality of times gone by (Kjær, 2010). Practitioners have perceived the new demands concerning documentation, etc., as ‘distanced’ and ‘theoretical’ (the north-

western quarter of Fig. 1), and semantically linked them to negative qualities such as ‘cold’ and ‘bad’, thereby seeing them as irrelevant.

Over the years, the administrative logic, expectations of comparability and quality that can be easily measured have clashed with the institutions’ and staff’s focus on processes, relationships and the lived experience. The pedagogical staff’s perception of life in the institution as positive, inclusive and well-functioning is not always recognised by other actors. (Some) children and parents may be overlooked, in need of help that they do not receive, or they may experience their interaction with the institution and its embedded logics as difficult, offensive or a source of conflict (Kjær, 2003). An overview of the statistics and a range of qualitative studies indicate that day-care services and schools contribute to the reproduction of social inequalities (see Kjær, 2010; Hestbæk & Christoffersen, 2002, for research reviews; see Kjær, 2003; Palludan, 2005, 2007b, for examples of qualitative studies). As such, when viewed from a social-analytical perspective, the practices that pedagogues consider to be ‘good’ may turn out to have hidden and undesirable effects, such as discrimination, stigmatisation, etc. (Palludan, 2007b; Kjær, 2007a). But how can this happen when both practitioners and pedagogue-educators have been calling for and trying to educate ‘reflective practitioners’ for decades?

### 3. Tacit Knowledge, Articulated Knowledge and Tacit Ignorance

From a Bourdieuan perspective, the issue of tacit knowledge and practice should be embedded in an understanding of how power is exercised within the social space as part of the actors’ strategic positioning of themselves and each other. The ability to be a part of the practice within an institution demonstrates that one has developed a habitus, which is necessary in order to become an integrated and inconspicuous part of the culture. If this habitus is explicitly legitimised via pedagogues’ claims of tacit and practical knowledge, then this reference to practical mastery becomes part of the profession’s symbolic mastery, legitimising it and protecting it from insight and external control. Building pedagogical work upon tacit knowledge is therefore a manoeuvre of power – a manoeuvre that conceals what is happening out of sight and beyond control, and a manoeuvre through which practices implicitly become self-evident and good *per se* within the community of the profession (Danielsen, 2009). As a result, practice is transformed into an element symbolic power (Wilken, 2011; Bourdieu, 1993) but also of internal social recognition within the teaching community. It also becomes difficult to assess whether pedagogues’ tacit knowledge fulfils the legal requirements in relation to vulnerable children, for example, or whether it unknowingly and unintentionally contributes to processes that reproduce social inequalities (Kjær, 2010, 2013; Bourdieu, 1992).

In Denmark, Donald Schön’s work *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983) has had a significant yet indirect influence on self-perceptions within the pedagogical profession (Kristensen, 1998). Since the 1980s, Schön’s concepts – such as the reflective practitioner, practical knowledge and reflection-in-action – have been important to the pedagogical sector and its strategies of legitimisation, primarily because university researchers and lecturers at teacher-training colleges and colleges for pedagogues have been inspired by his thoughts and conceptual universe. However, I am not aware of any discussion about whether it is appropriate to apply Schön’s theoretical points – which are based on his

observations of practitioners in academic professions – to professions that are not academic; I return to this later.

Schön is concerned with describing and conceptualising what Michael Polanyi calls ‘tacit knowing’ or ‘tacit knowledge’ (Polanyi, 1966); Schön himself mentions ‘knowing-in-practice’ (Schön, 1983, p. 52), and he attempts to describe that which is rarely articulated, but which is developed and practised in embodied and embedded actions, in sensed assessments and intuitive discretion. To use Bourdieu’s concept, this can be called habitus. Schön defines practical knowledge or competence by contrasting it with what he calls ‘technical-rationality’, which is characterised by a fixed and research-related knowledge base, clear regulations and instructions for how to act, as well as rigidity, standardisation and certain mandatory procedures (Schön, 2001, p. 36-51). He compares a practitioner’s competent actions to the ways in which sportsmen and artists train specific skills as well as train themselves to evaluate and judge their own actions in relation to new, unique situations<sup>6</sup> (Schön, 2001, p. 51 ff.). Expanding upon this, Hans Jørgen Kristensen (1998) writes that, in light of the sizeable challenges posed by a complex world, being a ‘flexible methodologist’ is no longer sufficient; if the pedagogue, the teacher and the teaching assistant are not to be used indiscriminately, then reflective practitioners with sound discretion are required. Kristensen calls for a professional common sense that is based on knowledge and developed in practice, and which functions intuitively in practical contexts. There are, however, problems with this approach.

First, it is doubtful whether the contrast that Schön draws between technical-rationality and knowing-in-practice makes sense. It is clear that, when comparing different professions, one finds various kinds of practice. The scientifically grounded physician traditionally consults research and test results, which indicate that certain treatment methods may be effective. The experience-guided pedagogue or teacher does not traditionally consult research results, but rather understands his/her work as something that must always adapt to the specific actors in each unique situation as well as their requirements and relationships. However, in both cases, the practitioners must use their discretion and make assessments, identify and define problems and, based on these, make decisions and take action.

No matter which of these professions we focus on, it is necessary to develop a cultural skill-set in order to be part of it – that is, one must have the ability to be a part of the professional culture with its verbal and physical tendencies and norms. These tendencies are what Bourdieu calls habitus, and they are learned through actions that may take many different forms. Everyday life, working life and the educational system play a central role in the development of habitus (Wilken, 2011; Bourdieu, 1992). Here, it is worth noting that the pivotal difference between the two aforementioned professions is not that one is practically based while the other is theoretical, since both types of professional are also practitioners; Schön himself remarks on this (Schön, 1983). Rather, they are markedly differentiated by the types of knowledge to which they refer and which they use to legitimise themselves. Whereas the physician legitimises him/herself through technical-rationality using test results and the documented findings of double-blind studies, the pedagogue (and teacher) legitimises him/herself by claiming that pedagogical work is fundamentally different from the physician’s work.

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<sup>6</sup> Here, we see a symbolic order similar to that of the landscape presented in Figure 1.

Second, it would be wrong to claim that only technical-rationality is rational and based on an intellectually comprehensible logic. It would be more reasonable to regard the two approaches as different forms of rationality that are simply grounded in different logics, and which each refer to their own basis for legitimacy. The question here is whether or not the pedagogue's claim to reflective practice and tacit knowledge is true. And if it is true, does that mean that learning and quality development is the consequence of this (inner) reflection? It is undeniable that traditions are carried forward within the pedagogical sector in the form of habitually conveyed logics, but it is uncertain how this particular tradition relates to reflection in Schön's sense (Bourdieu, 1992).

In Schön's description of embodied, tacit knowledge – what he calls 'knowing-in-action' – he emphasises that the practitioner's sense or feel for the process is linked to his/her individual mastery of a variety of figures and models that guide seemingly spontaneous actions: Specifically, a model or 'schema' (Schön, 1983, p. 55), which is an implicit cultural script for how a particular situation or process should be carried out. Certain behavioural norms exist in relation to each script or model that is specific to particular situations and environments. For example, rules in the dining room are different from the rules in the kitchen, the bedroom and on the stairs, just as there are different rules for everyday and festive occasions, and during the day and at night. Likewise, there are different rules at home, on the street, in the day-care institution, on holiday, etc. (Kjær, 2010; Bondebjerg, 2008; Goffman, 2003). The use of the term 'model' does not mean that everything is decided in advance, but rather that certain logics, norms and rules apply to each event; thereby, this makes some actions more relevant than others in context. In the model of the Danish day-care institution, there are particular rules and norms as well as a notable lack of awareness regarding social inequality; the model sets an agenda based on everyone being equal, and the idea that children should be treated as children – nothing more, nothing less (Ehn, 2004).

The most important tool in the actors' attempts to act appropriately consists of different figures; i.e., specific techniques, themes, genres or processes that can be used and which can make the individual's participation less chaotic and more structured (Blaakilde, 2006, 2011; Tedlock & Mannheim, 1995; Kjær, 2005). Such figures could be greeting rituals, small-talk that fits into the linguistic and social tone, thus signalling that the speaker is a relevant conversational partner, or it could be following through on the single moments that are part of the model. Schön compares these competences to the feeling that guides jazz musicians during improvisation, for example. He mentions – but also downplays – the idea that improvisation is neither chaotic, individual nor mysterious, and thus is not entirely spontaneous in some ways. However, it is structured and qualified in part by: a) The individual musician's ability to play his/her instrument (a technical ability); b) his/her familiarity with the piece of music being improvised (a clearly defined theoretical or abstract knowledge); c) his/her knowledge of the rules of improvisation (familiarity with the social model for the activity of 'jazz improvisation'); and d) his/her knowledge of a variety of musical figures (concrete tools and techniques in the form of set phrases and elements) that are used and combined in ways that make sense when combined with the figures that the other musicians contribute (Schön, 1983, p. 55).

What Schön does not pay attention to, even though he touches on it, is the social context of this individual practitioner. In order to reflect upon and act creatively and innovatively, the reflective practitioner needs to do so within an existing practice (cf. Kotzee, 2012, p. 12). Schön does not give any clues regarding how social actors learn to participate in such

practices and thereby acquire conventional patterns of interaction (conduct) to reflect upon (Kotzee, 2012, p. 12). This acquisition should be understood not as an internalised act of individual practitioners but as a process of social interaction in which social control plays an important role. That which defines the reflective practitioner for Schön can, using a Bourdieu-inspired perspective, be problematised as an exercise of symbolic power, in which the person wielding the power views him/herself as, for example, a good and caring pedagogue without realising how his/her own codes and patterns of behaviour acknowledge some things and overrule others when dealing with children and other users of social services. This symbolic power may be produced, promoted and legitimised by patterns and logics in the existing practice (Palludan, 2007b).

### **The Reflective Practitioner as Identity**

One of the problems with the concept of ‘the reflective practitioner’ is that it tends to elevate the intuitive, the tacit and the improvised to something that cannot be explained, documented or articulated (Kristensen, 1998). With regard to tacit and practical knowing-in-action, the ideal and the claim that pedagogues are reflective practitioners have turned the practitioner’s reflection into something individual and emotional – “*a black box which makes practice mysterious and inaccessible*” (Nielsen, 2002, p. 15). If reflection is tacit and closely attached to action, then it must take place *within* individual practitioners. Consequently, an individual’s personal dispositions, tendencies, feelings and assessments will dominate what happens. This means that the reflection may consist of anything from theoretically-based critical analyses of one’s own and other’s actions to preconceived judgements and psychological defence mechanisms. On the other hand, the social character (constitution) of practice probably creates an innate inertia, a social control, as well as local definitions of how and what to do.

Over the years, the argument that pedagogical work cannot be evaluated or understood from the outside has been supported by the explanation that pedagogues are reflective practitioners who neither can/should be able to account for their tacit knowledge, nor can/should they employ the knowledge that is produced by others; for example, in research (Kristensen, 1998). This argument asserts that the reflective practitioner should strengthen and develop his/her practical sense by having his/her own experiences and reflecting upon them. Thus, the concept of reflection has become associated with a professional’s individual control over and assessment of his/her own pedagogical work, and his/her own flexible and creative adjustments of this work. Reflection has become a well-established objective in its own right, and ‘the reflective practitioner’ has become an ideal for those who work in the welfare sector – especially within pedagogy, where the concept has been used as a central identity marker. However, there are strong arguments against believing that an individual’s introspective reflection will lead to learning, improvement or even change (Kotzee, 2012; Nielsen, 2002). Rather, there is reason to expect reflection to be a part of how professionals’ produce, legitimise and consolidate their roles (Kotzee, 2012).

There is also a tendency to assume that all or most professionals possess the necessary competences to be reflective (Nielsen, 2002), even though Schön suggests that only the best practitioners have these skills. His concept of ‘the reflective practitioner’ describes an ideal to work towards; it does not describe something that already exists. Schön describes how teachers in a continuing-education project at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) gradually became reflective practitioners over the course of the project

(Schön, 1983, p. 67-9, 2001, p. 65-7). Thus, ‘the reflective practitioner’ is a normative concept that describes Schön’s idea of a good or even an excellent practitioner. But in the defence of ‘the reflective practitioner’ (compare with Kristensen, 1998), Schön’s basic premise has been more or less forgotten – i.e., that a professional’s intuitive sense is made up of specific competences. Like the jazz musician, the pedagogue must be familiar with a whole range of concrete techniques, skills and competences and then master them adequately; e.g., having the practical competences to carry out various creative and social activities, and using these activities so that they become part of different pedagogical methods and assume a variety of functions in relation to children with varying requirements and needs. The ability to use methods of analysis is what can qualify pedagogues’ work – for example, when they examine the consequences of their own previous actions, the dynamics of interaction and their consequences, etc. It is also the pedagogues’ ability to engage in ‘professional reflection’ so that their work is continuously adapted to the situations and requirements that arise.

When Schön describes tacit knowledge-in-action, it is a phenomenon that becomes more and more prominent, as the professional in question becomes more proficient and experienced due to a range of explicit areas of knowledge and competence. The practitioners who Schön studies are all academics (learning the practical aspects of being architects or psychotherapists), which means that they already have a considerable theoretical–analytical ballast at their disposal. This explicit theoretical knowledge examines and enhances action in practice; it becomes more implicit and tacit over time. What makes Schön’s ‘reflective practitioner’ into a knowing practitioner who does not merely continue an unreflective practice (as many others do; see Schön, 1983, p. 66, 2001, p. 67) is that, in his/her meeting with practice, he/she transforms considerable theoretical knowledge into an analytically qualified experimentation (Schön, 1983, p. 65-9, 2001, chapter 5). From this, we learn that extensive academic education and theoretical knowledge are necessary requirements for becoming a proficient practitioner – but on its own, such knowledge is not sufficient. One must also possess practical skills, creativity and flexibility. Conversely, both Schön’s and Bourdieu’s work show us that habitually embedded patterns of action, borne by tradition, also cannot stand alone. If they do, we must assume that the practitioner is not only unreflective, but also, due to his/her lack of reflection, exercises symbolic power and is thereby an active participant in societal processes of hierarchy and marginalisation that create inequality and segregation (see Palludan, 2005, 2007b; Bartholdsson, 2009, 2012). Even if a practitioner is reflective, we do not know whether this reflection has an impact on practice, let alone the nature of this impact.

Does individual reflection on one own’s actions lead to learning and improved practice? Kotzee points to how practitioners’ reflection often becomes an act of “reassurance or self-congratulations”, regardless of the character and quality of the practice (Kotzee, 2012, p. 15). This might give us a hint that conventionalised practices and codes of conduct tend to have an intrinsic inertness. In Denmark, professional self-criticism has disappeared from Schön’s legacy and has been replaced by an emphasis on ‘the proficient practitioner’ who is able to do everything required; e.g., to learn from his/her actions and adjust them accordingly. At the same time, there are societal demands for transparency within pedagogical work in order to make it accessible to people who are not directly involved – these demands have made it clear that tacit knowledge and embodied habituses are not sufficient for the future of the legitimisation process. However, the societal expectations

for documentation and justification of the pedagogues' chosen methods are far-reaching and could potentially lead to irrelevant extra work – especially if they are not attached to practice, thus becoming actual functions within the profession.

In the next section, I go further into the inner logics of the practices and institutional life in some Danish kindergartens, focusing on the production of professional identity. I present some of the ways in which proficient practitioners become proficient and compare them to some of the ways other practitioners become unproficient. Both are connected to the production of professional identity, communicative norms and ideals concerning colleague relationships.

## 4. The Reflective Methodologists

In *The Reflective Practitioner*, Schön describes two cases: One is based on the architectural profession, and the other one on psychotherapy. In both cases, the material in his examples is comprised of collaborations and dialogues between two professionals – one who has more experience than the other (Schön, 2001, chapters 3 and 4). Although he describes and analyses social processes that involve more than one professional, all of his conclusions are about individuals in the singular. This means that the examples are not analysed and interpreted for what they are: Social processes with multiple professionals. Instead, these interactions are interpreted as an expression of individual professional actors' processes in dialogue with solving a task (Schön, 1983, p. 76, ff. 2001, p. 117)<sup>7</sup>. This manoeuvre adds to the mystification and individualisation of the reflective work that is being carried out. Therefore, I suggest that the pedagogical profession should be interested not in the ideal of the individual reflective practitioner, but in a socially anchored ideal of 'the reflective methodologists' (Kjær, 2010). Like Schön's concept, mine is based on empirical studies of proficient professionals; in my case, pedagogues.

Reflective methodologists can be distinguished from Schön's and the field of practice's assumed reflective practitioners in that the methodologists possess a range of characteristics related to processes in the social and cultural space of the institution itself (Kjær, 2010). This means that the main difference is that reflective methodologists are seen as an actor who participates in social processes within the institution, and thus always exists in the plural. Furthermore, it brings into play Schön's observation regarding how the intuitive practical sense is based on mastering a range of patterns, routines, models and figures. This means that reflective methodologists are anchored in the social context<sup>8</sup>; their reflection can be seen as an explicit methodical process that follows a system and a

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<sup>7</sup> Kotzee (2012) criticises Schön's concepts for overlooking the social dimension. He does so with reference to Wittgenstein's concept of language as a social game and of practice as irredeemably social (Kotzee, 2012, p. 8). Thus, if change, improvement and development are to be the consequences of practice, then reflection must be social and not individual.

<sup>8</sup> As are reflective practitioners, it may be argued. I have found this to be true, but the reflective practitioners' embeddedness in the social context also defines and handles reflection in specific, problematic ways.

structure, and they constantly strive to develop their pedagogical practice in specific ways<sup>9</sup> (Kjær, 2010; Bie, 2009).

If habitual patterns make their presence felt to a great extent, this is due to the aforementioned separation of theory and practice – of symbolic mastery and practical mastery. This separation places central elements of pedagogues' work and professional roles into an individualised darkness. In order to examine these two areas of mastery, their mutual relation and their practical-pedagogical consequences, my work has focused on the following points of attention (Kjær, 2010):

1. **The culture of communication.** What are we able to talk about, and how are we able to talk about it? How can we move from abstract discussions about our intentions to concrete analyses of our actions?
2. **The culture of colleagues.** How do we define being a good colleague? How can we ensure that relationships with colleagues do not prevent us from seeing both appropriate and inappropriate actions – our own and others'?
3. **Adults' (professionals') role in processes of stigmatisation.** How do we react to research that suggests that pedagogical staff generally contribute to segregation and stigmatisation? How can we study the ways in which they do this? What can we do to counteract this?
4. **Children's role in processes of stigmatisation.** How do we deal with the hierarchies and exclusion that children establish? How can we study and understand what is happening? How can we counteract this?

In the following section, I examine the first two points of attention in more detail. The main questions are: What are the consequences for the communication that occurs between the pedagogical staff in day-care institutions when symbolic mastery and practical mastery are categorically separated; and is it possible to create a functional terminology, as others have highlighted (see, e.g., Ploug, 2003, p. 89; Kjær, 2010, p. 93–7)? Similarly, the issue of pedagogues' professional identity and colleague relationships should be taken into account when considering these questions (Kjær, 2010, p. 113–5). Indeed, the culture of communication and the colleague relationships related to professional identity are the basis and precondition for what takes place in the practice of pedagogical organisations.

### **The Culture of Communication**

In the Danish tradition inspired by Schön, reflective practitioners collectively construct a consensus in which they are not dependent on their colleagues, but instead base their reflections on individual experiences, feelings, assessments and knowledge – often with reference to 'tacit knowledge'. This means that individually embedded habituses are not examined. Reflection has traditionally been defined as something that takes place within an individual practitioner in relation to his/her embodied experiences. A consequence of this way of understanding reflection is that, for many years, the field of practice has relied on the idea that such processes are not visible or audible to those outside the field (Kjær,

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<sup>9</sup> These specific ways centre around critical empirical scrutiny of what takes place in social interaction. With a reference to Sartre (1960), I use the term methodologists to emphasise this aspect.

2007a). The intrinsic logic of pedagogical culture is based on this assumption of implicit reflective processes (for critiques of this assumption, see Kotzee, 2012; Nielsen, 2002). Parallel to the assertion of tacit knowledge, the pedagogical profession has made itself visible using documents that have increasingly been a legal requirement since the late 1990s. This has created a culture of communication in which symbolic mastery involves abstract explanations and declarations of intent in the form of various written genres, such as value statements, business plans, pedagogical teaching plans and so on (Kjær, 2010, p. 98-100; Kjær, 2013). In contrast, practical mastery is articulated through different forms of real-life and personal narratives, particularly stories conveyed orally (Kjær, 2010, p. 100-3). The communicative strategies related to the two kinds of mastery, in this order, lead separate lives. One problem with this culture of communication is that it both preserves and expands the separation of symbolic mastery and practical mastery. But an even greater drawback is that, put together, this separation and the culture of communication constitute an extremely effective barrier that prevents the pedagogical staff from observing, examining, analysing, considering and reflecting on their own and their colleagues' practices.

These processes of separation between practical mastery and symbolic mastery are bound with the dominant norms of the culture of communication. The term 'de-coupling' is used in neo-institutional theory to describe this phenomenon (see Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The communicative genres of symbolic mastery are all fundamental and abstract, and therefore ill-defined. They are also the subject of intense discussion within staff groups, who often lose sight of how this discussion relates to the practical level. As such, discussions regarding symbolic mastery tend to have a life of their own, in which opinions and values can be discussed and aired among colleagues (Kjær, 2009, p. 101; Kjær, 2013). Conversations regarding practical mastery also have a life of their own, and in these conversations, actions and experiences are shared among colleagues in order to support and reaffirm each other (Kjær, 2009, p. 101; Kjær, 2013). The genres of practical mastery are all concrete, personal and emotional. However, they are not open for discussion since feelings and experiences are always linked to the individual, and thus must be respected. The professional identity of reflective practitioners is produced and consolidated in the process of continually de-coupling symbolic and practical mastery, and by maintaining the norm that the abstract idea or intention – but not the specific action – can or should be discussed.

Reflective methodologists work from the understanding that this separation of symbolic mastery and practical mastery poses a problem, as it renders pedagogical staff home-blind. The process of using professional reflection to challenge one's home-blindness is simply so difficult and complicated that it is not possible for it to be done as an individual, tacit and intangible activity while carrying out other actions (according to Schön's concept of knowing-in-action). Reflection<sup>10</sup> cannot arise from individual experience alone, but requires input to create critical and analytical distance. Even if reflection arises from individual experience, it does not necessarily have any impact on practice, because practice is a social phenomenon that is maintained by practice itself. Therefore, it is very common for pedagogues to experience that – even though it is easy and inspiring to share new insights and ideas with colleagues in ways that relate to symbolic mastery – it is often

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<sup>10</sup> Understood as something more than self-comforting processes.

extremely difficult for individuals to share with colleagues in ways that change practice. Too often, only symbolic mastery is affected, leaving practical mastery unchanged. Similarly, reflection cannot be created by individuals alone, but is dependent on external views and perspectives – from the conceptualisation of theories, from empirical research, and from the input and evaluation of both supervisors and colleagues. By combining the scrutiny, analyses and criticism from the communicative genres related to symbolic mastery with the concreteness and specificity of narratives related to practical mastery, some pedagogues manage to combine the two. The result is quality work that changes and improves practice.

When the staff group has a form of professional communication that connects symbolic mastery and practical mastery – i.e., when they are reflective methodologists – one can say that the communicative order is characterised by coupling (Kjær, 2010, p. 104; Kjær, 2013; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). In such staff groups, the articulation of practical mastery is not a matter of validating each other as individuals, but is aimed instead towards examining, analysing and discussing one's own and their colleagues' actions on a professional basis in relation to children and parents. This is a difficult exercise for many pedagogues – the most challenging aspect of which is using their own real-life experiences. However, some examples from my empirical material have been informative (Kjær, 2009, 2010). Here, a pedagogue describes what this form of professionally-based communication involves, and what its effect is:

What makes me happy and gives me energy in my work is not being praised to the high heavens (although it's nice) – it's when my colleague tells me that she's noticed something or puts something in a slightly different way so that it takes on a new perspective. That gives me energy and makes me feel like I'm being acknowledged – both professionally and as a person. In fact, extravagant praise has almost the opposite effect – it drains my energy because it's a constant reminder that we're attempting to do 'mission impossible'. (Kjær, 2010, p. 124)

Thus, the culture of communication among reflective methodologists is based on insights into the importance of the different actors' competences when it comes to understanding, evaluating, analysing and suggesting courses of action in actual pedagogical situations. The pedagogical work of the staff group as a whole is qualified by the sum total of the professional individuals' and staff group's theoretical-analytical understanding, practical experience and personal skills that are implemented in a given situation. This functions in specific situations, but it is also a working model that is often employed in long-term pedagogical planning and development tasks. For example, if all employees describe the same child, new aspects of the child as well as the work related to him/her may be illuminated. In this kind of task, the written word has an important role to play. Such new perspectives and insights rarely emerge in oral interactions because they imperceptibly tend to establish a common view.

One of the greatest challenges in establishing a coupling between symbolic mastery and practical mastery is that practical mastery can all too easily give the impression of being self-supporting and not requiring any supplementation; those involved may sometimes regard it as self-evident. To remove the illusion that it is self-evident, symbolic mastery's theoretical, critical and analytical perspectives must be related to practice. If this is successful, then both forms of mastery are challenged, which results in reflection and development. To ensure this, the most important element is that it is based not on individual inner reflection, but on collective scrutiny, evaluation and criticism.

### Culture of Colleagues

In order for pedagogical staff to function as reflective methodologists who can couple symbolic mastery and practical mastery, these processes must be supported by the culture of colleagues. Thus, it is important to consider which logic dominates the local definition of being a ‘good colleague’. When symbolic mastery and practical mastery are decoupled, the articulation of practical mastery becomes, as already described, emotional and personal. This means that a norm is created in which everyday language is dominant (Kjær, 2010, p. 51-2), and the individual members of the staff group define themselves and pedagogy in the same manoeuvre, so to speak, so that the definition of ‘professionalism’ is more or less identical to ‘personality’ (Kjær, 2010, p. 100-1; Kjær 2007a). As a consequence, ‘colleague relations’ are defined using a logic that recognises different personalities, while the task at hand and an analysis of what is happening in the pedagogical practice move to the background. Relationships between colleagues are thereby based on a rationale similar to that found in private relationships between friends, in which emotions – including sympathies and antipathies – are considered to be legitimate reasons for decision-making and acting.

Conversely, relationships between reflective methodologists are based on the profession and have pedagogical professionalism at their core (Kjær, 2010, p. 115ff.). Colleague relationships focus on the dissemination of pedagogical principles, their theoretical foundation and reflections related to them. As a result of the culture of communication, this dissemination is concrete in nature. The profession is not only discussed in general or comprehensive terms; rather, the dialogue is closely linked to the work that is done within the institution. Furthermore, the colleague relationship is factual in nature, which means that it focuses on the case or task that is its goal. This pragmatism is also evident in a sober and professional attitude towards the experiences and feelings of each staff member. The intense involvement with children and parents, which is an integral aspect of pedagogical work, affects the staff both emotionally and psychologically. As reflective methodologists, pedagogues do not collectively allow their feelings to guide them uncritically, either when working with children and parents or in their relationships with colleagues (Kjær, 2010, p. 119). These experiences and feelings are not negated, but are dealt with in a way that attempts to prevent them from obstructing the successful completion of pedagogical tasks (Kjær, 2010, p. 199 ff.). This takes place via processes that are always based on *the facts* of specific issues (Kjær, 2010, p. 115).

Thus, colleague relationships create an internal justice – a social control based on everyone participating in learning processes that are anchored in the professional, have a professional tone and are concrete in nature. Reflective methodologists systematise this in different ways; e.g., some form partnerships in which they observe and guide each other’s work and help each other stay focused on their objectives, while also providing a more distanced external perspective on actions and relationships. The head of the kindergarten or an external supervisor can also play an important role in establishing and supporting colleague relationships that focus on tasks, the case at hand and problem-solving, and which place elements of the personal into a professional framework. Reflective methodologists themselves describe how this in particular differs from the norm in their profession. This approach is often challenging for new colleagues, but with help and guidance, it is possible for them to learn to differentiate between professional actions and personal qualities, thereby applying both in the best possible manner in relation to pedagogical tasks.

As I have shown, reflective methodologists deviate from the reflective practitioner in a number of ways. First, the reflective methodologists' reflection is not individual, but is instead linguistically embedded in a professional community. As such, reflection has a clearly collective and evaluative dimension (Kjær, 2010, p. 142). Second, symbolic mastery and practical mastery are coupled by a culture of communication, which is based on discussing pedagogical principles and concrete pedagogical actions, as well as a combination of the two. Third, colleague relationships are built upon a logic of professionalism, pragmatism and a focus on pedagogical tasks, making it culturally and socially legitimate – and encouraged – to evaluate colleagues' practice. Fourth, attention is paid to the danger of producing de-coupling when communicating questions related to symbolic mastery on the one hand, and related to practical mastery on the other. The difference between de-coupled and coupled communicative order is related to the interconnectedness between symbolic and practical mastery, and thereby to the functions and consequences of symbolic mastery. The de-coupled order is produced by a symbolic mastery that systematically creates homeblindness, as only principles and not specific actions or occurrences are critically discussed. The coupled order is produced in close relation to the construction of a professional identity in which habitual inclinations, specific skills and actions are viewed as a matter of collective critical scrutiny.

## 5. The Way Forward

There is nothing to suggest that society's demand for quality, quality assurance and quality development with regard to the pedagogical profession will diminish in the years to come. It seems likely that a welfare society under economic pressure will expect to get as much value for its money as possible from day-care services as well as other areas. During times of crisis, when the media reveal professional discrepancies, failures and injustices, the response is often a call for closer scrutiny of pedagogues' work. Municipal inspections are tightened, and demands for firm procedures are put forth; in this way, non-pedagogical logics set the agenda. The wall of silence that is created by tacit knowledge and knowing-in-practice increases the risk of imprisoning pedagogues instead of protecting them. Efforts to work towards a pedagogical profession that is comprised of reflective methodologists may provide the opportunity to base discussions about quality and quality-assurance work on pedagogical perspectives.

Developing the profession involves expanding and consolidating professional terminology, and thereby dispensing with tacit knowledge as a means to de-couple practical and symbolic mastery, action and discourse. Rather, establishing a coupling between symbolic mastery and practical mastery will link abstract principles and intentions to specific actions and events. But this can only happen if pedagogues commit to critically examining their own and their colleagues' actions and tendencies in practice. In other words, every institution and staff group must dedicate themselves to continuing cognitive and developmental processes – not as individual reflective processes, but as processes of analysis, discussion and reflection that are supported by colleagues. The construction of a culture of colleagues in which such criticism and scrutiny are perceived as relevant, necessary and legitimate is closely connected to the possibility of creating such practices.

But can the norm of 'the reflective methodologists' become part of the profession's common foundation? If this happens, it could pave the way for a more qualified discussion about quality, making it part of the pedagogues' everyday activities rather than something

that is forced on them from outside. The concept of ‘the reflective methodologists’ emerged from my studies of particularly competent groups of pedagogues and their activities (Kjær, 2010), and it is my attempt to describe not just a norm or an ideal, but also a practice. In particular, it is an attempt to conceptualise a specific competence within the pedagogical profession: the ability to question and examine habitual tendencies and truisms. The evaluation criteria in these examinations are always the extent to which the pedagogical practice is orientated towards an objective formulated by society (e.g., by law). As demonstrated with the concept of ‘the reflective methodologists’, the pedagogue’s identity involves a pursuit of quality that makes use of doubt and critical analysis in the task of creating a practice that fulfils its societal role.

The construction of such a professional identity could be one of the objectives of pedagogues’ education and training, which must also consider how to couple symbolic mastery and practical mastery – both in the practical modules of their education and training, and in the modules held at university colleges. Furthermore, it would be good for municipal inspections to take into account existing knowledge about the gap between pedagogical learning plans and pedagogical practice. The consequence of this lack of cohesion is that documentation becomes an irrelevant extra task, which wastes time that could be spent working with children, and it is largely symbolic to the rest of society (Dahler-Larsen, 2012, 2007, 1998). Moreover, it is important that pedagogues in the sector recognise this issue and strive to meet the demands for documentation and quality in ways that make it the pedagogues’ own project, and thus a meaningful and functional part of what is central to their profession: Working with children.

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