

## **Doctoral thesis: "Between settling and unsettling: Professional learning trajectories of pastors in a changing knowledge society".**

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In this doctoral thesis I have studied professional learning in a pluralistic and changing knowledge society. Having a professional background within education, I have a particular interest in how value-based professions develop new knowledge. I have chosen a profession being object to many changes in society, namely pastors. Pastors are selected because they can show the intermediate positions of value-based professions in today's knowledge society. Pastors find themselves between established, unified traditions and pluralistic approaches to knowledge and truth, in between academic knowledge regimes and care, as well as between normative knowledge tasks and more undefined professional roles.

In this thesis I ask: What characterise the professional learning trajectories of pastors? I aim at developing pedagogical tools to analyse interactions and professional learning processes in a changing knowledge society. In order to study professional learning I take on a socio-material approach to learning. A socio-material approach to learning considers learning as more than individual processes from A to B. Instead, professional learning is a collaborative issue, and I analyse how interaction is constituted by both social and material factors.

I have written three articles taking two empirical, qualitative angles namely an analysis of curriculum texts and an analysis of an ethnographic case study. In the first article I analyse the conditions for the professional learning of pastors in Norwegian and Dutch professional education. I have also conducted an ethnographic study of the professional learning among five pastors in the Church of Norway. In the second article I explore the professional learning of everyday interactions at work. In the third and last article I analyse the unfolding of different learning dynamics when a(nother) reform is introduced. The thesis also consists of an extended abstract including a discussion of the theoretical and methodological assumptions, and I also discuss the overall argument across the three articles. The findings in the thesis are also connected to another value-based profession - teachers.

The results of the curriculum study show how learning in professional education can be rigged in widely various ways. The findings in the first article show how the Norwegian and the Dutch professional education create different learning profiles, despite many similarities in educational structures and subjects. The learning profiles can clarify how professional education in various manners frame knowledge, what a process is and the student's space for action. The results in this study illuminate how professional education in different degrees equips future pastors for developing new and complex knowledge.

I have also been following pastors through their workdays. I have got to participate in personal prayer time, on staff meetings, in funerals, in counselling and in teaching confirmands. The article about everyday learning shows that pastors relate to a broad

spectrum of tasks and actors. The crucial part of this article is that professional learning cannot be described as a straightforward process from intention to result. Instead, every relation creates a new learning process. These processes are not alike. On the one hand, pastors create 'facts' ('blackboxing'). Such fact-making happens for instance when pastors and other actors define singular and safe knowledge, when they refer to 'God's order' or 'these are the basic facts'. On the other hand, professional learning can also be described as open, creative and imaginary processes ('unfolding'). However, in between blackboxing and unfolding, there is yet another learning process that comes into view. This process appears in problem solving and negotiation of practical, minor details. I call this 'tinkering'. A key insight is that learning is not only a personal issue. Instead, the analysis of interactions shows how the pastors are pushed and pulled by different actors. In many cases actors like volunteers, outsiders, buildings, more or less effective technology affect which knowledge is foregrounded.

A third article displays the learning dynamics developing when a new reform – as one of many – is introduced. As the Church of Norway introduces a new church service reform, important parts of the pastor's expertise are put on trial. The church service organisation, roles, music, ritual and even the version of the Lord's Prayer are replaced. To some pastors, the reform is negotiated through controlling new elements and keeping it on a distance. Professional learning is 'slowed down'. To some pastors the reform seems to permeate all former practices, and result in intensified processes of inspiration and questions ('energising'). To a third group, the reform causes confusion and a state of 'limbo'. Thus, one and the same reform creates three widely different learning dynamics. The findings show that professional learning in times of reform cannot be described as factors of success or failure. Professional learning dynamics are instead dependent on which spaces for action that are created between the reform and the pastor networks.

Professionalism is often discussed in relation to how expertise is developed. I argue that the professional learning trajectories of pastors are characterised by settling and unsettling. Professional learning means more than acquiring something old and something new. This implies more than learning something old and something new. Instead, professional learning is about how to handle a number of learning modes. On the one hand; education, everyday interactions and reform establish expertise as settled knowledge and unquestioned routines. On the other hand, the pastors create fluctuant, critical, creative and also chaotic knowledge. The findings show that these learning modes are seldom a controlled process. Instead, professional learning can be characterised by how knowledge and aims are constantly displaced and negotiated. For pastors – as well as teachers – these negotiations happen as a result of increasing numbers of participants and negotiations. Value-based professions, then, do not only deal with increasing numbers of tasks. Expertise is rather a complicated issue of dealing with many parallel forms of learning.

The thesis points out many implications for the fostering of expertise of value-based professions in education and in further studies of professional work. A crucial task for value-based professions is to illuminate and foster learning skills of negotiation and flexibility. Such skills can be decisive when ambiguity and plurality and change make a basis for the expertise of value-based professions.