

Extension and remodelling of teachers' perceived professional space

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Abstract

This article examines the sociocultural shaping of *teacher agency* by focusing on how various conditions *mediate* teachers' perceived professional space. Agency is understood from a *sociocultural* perspective as the mediated capacity to act, which is achieved and exercised *in* a professional space, and, consequently, shaped by the *perceptions* of this space. Based on thematic and interpretative analysis of interviews with Norwegian L1 upper secondary teachers, the article identifies several conditions that mediate the teachers' perceived professional space: the exam, the curriculum, accountability demands, school leadership, colleagues, students, learning materials, and subject traditions and purposes. Two aspects of mediation are identified, what we respectively term *extension* and *remodelling*. Extension conveys how mediating conditions provide resources or constraints that contribute to *expanding or narrowing* the teachers' perceived professional space. Remodelling, however, conveys how mediating conditions *qualitatively transform* the perceived professional space. Findings highlight the subject as a resource for teachers, and teacher agency as socioculturally shaped by the perceived size and character of professional space.

Key words: *teacher agency; professional space; sociocultural mediation; L1 teachers*

Introduction

This article will examine the sociocultural shaping of *teacher agency* by analysing how various conditions *mediate* teachers' *perceived professional space*. Agency is understood from a *sociocultural* perspective as the mediated capacity to act (Ahearn, 2001; Wertsch, Tulviste, & Hagstrom, 1993), which is achieved and exercised *in* a professional space, and, consequently, shaped by the *perceptions* of this space (Oolbekkink-Marchand, Hadar, Smith, Helleve, & Ulvik, 2017). As an empirical example, we analyse interviews with Norwegian Language 1 (L1) upper secondary teachers. Aiming for in-depth understanding, we concentrate on one national context and school level, and include the subject as an important dimension of teachers' practices. The article will thus contribute to answer Edwards' (2015) call for research into teacher agency that pays attention to how teachers are 'interpreting and responding to the demands of practice' (Edwards, 2015, p. 781), not limiting itself to how policies deliver demands for teachers to implement.

The research question for the article is:

How is teachers' perceived professional space mediated?

The article has the following structure: First, building on previous studies, we present a theoretical perspective for understanding and analysing teachers' perceived professional space. Then,

methodological choices are described, before we present and discuss our findings. Finally, the relationship between teachers' perceived professional space and teacher agency is discussed.

Theoretical perspective

Perceived professional space can be understood as entailing the size and characteristics of the space teachers *perceive* – that is feel, sense, and experience – they are acting in. This can be different from the *formal* professional space outlined in official rules and regulations (Oolbekkink-Marchand et al., 2017). The perceived professional space is thereby part of teachers' subjective experiences of their professional practice. Following a sociocultural perspective rooted in Vygotsky (1978), human interactions with the world is always indirect through different forms of *mediation* (Wertsch, 2007) understood as the mutual shaping of individuals and world (Daniels, 2015). We therefore conceptualise the perceived professional space as mediated by various *conditions* that are part of the teachers' sociocultural context – relations, systems, objects, concepts, and phenomena – and that provide resources and constraints. The space is thus shaped by teachers' interpretations of these conditions, and, mutually, teachers' capacity for agency is shaped by the features of professional space that they perceive. Teachers' perceived professional space is thereby to be understood as continuously negotiated, not passively received as given. Furthermore, agency is achieved and exercised *in* professional space, and as a mediated capacity (Ahearn, 2001), it relies on how the space is perceived regarding size, its *extension*, and qualitative characteristics, how it is *modelled*. In discussing our findings, we will use this understanding of mediation, the mutual shaping of individuals and world, to analyse how the L1 teachers' perceived professional space is mediated.

Previous empirical studies on teacher agency have focused on relations to *identity* (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Buchanan, 2015; Sisson, 2016; Stillman & Anderson, 2015). For example, Lasky (2005) analyses how Canadian teachers' identities function as a mediating system used in resisting unwanted school reforms. Others have focused on how *individual and social resources in the sociocultural context* play a role for teachers' professional agency (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, & Hökkä, 2015; Vähäsantanen, 2015). Furthermore, teacher agency have been examined in a *professional development and learning* perspective (Pyhältö, Pietarinen, & Soini, 2015; Soini, Pietarinen, & Pyhältö, 2016; van der Heijden, Geldens, Beijaard, & Popeijus, 2015; Yangın Ekşi et al., 2019) and as *relational agency* by Edwards (2005), and Edwards and D'Arcy (2004). Other areas include teacher agency in *curriculum making and autonomy* (Erss, 2018; Priestley, Biesta, Philippou, & Robinson, 2015; Priestley, Edwards, Priestley, & Miller, 2012). Moreover, studies have explored how teachers' *beliefs* (Biesta, Priestley, & Robinson, 2015) and *language* (Biesta, Priestley, & Robinson, 2017) play a role in achieving or limiting agency. Finally, Oolbekkink-Marchand et al. (2017) have examined the concept of *perceived and exploited professional space* and its relation to

teacher agency in a comparative study of teachers in Norway, Israel, and the Netherlands. This study focuses primarily on the size of the perceived professional space, while the current study will include qualitative aspects of space.

Building on the research contributions that emphasize sociocultural context and relational factors in teacher agency, as well as the significance of the perceptions of professional space, the current study will further the notion of teacher agency as situated and exercised in a professional space.

Context of study

The context for this study is Norwegian upper secondary schools, level 11-13, which encompasses both academic and vocational study programmes, most often under the same roof. Upper secondary school is not compulsory; however, most students start education offered at this level. The Norwegian school system aims to offer a general education for all students, which implies many common core subjects independent of programme. Teachers who teach a core subject, like the L1 teachers in our sample, may teach in both programmes. The L1 subject is a main subject that is included at all levels in primary and secondary education in Norway. The subject consists of several traditions, from literacy education to cultural history to the Scandinavian concept of *Bildung*, called in Norwegian *danning*, encompassing the formation of one's full potential as a human being (Kim, 2013; Willbergh, 2015).

Method

Project participants and production of empirical material

This study is grounded in a qualitative research design based on semi-structured interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015) and both thematic and interpretative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Hatch, 2002), informed by a hermeneutic approach (Gadamer, 2004; Taylor, 1971). The project participants were ten self-selected L1 teachers working in eight different upper secondary schools in Hordaland County, Norway. They were invited to participate through an information letter sent to schools in the county. Ten teachers responded. The interviews were conducted in the spring of 2017. The first author conducted all the interviews using an interview guide (see appendix) developed in collaboration with the two co-authors. In addition, the interview guide was discussed with other researchers. An L1 teacher, who is a friend of the first author, read the interview guide and gave

feedback on how the language and phrasing would communicate with teachers. The interview guide was developed to explore a larger nexus of themes, and therefore includes questions with a wider scope than the aim of the study presented in this current paper. Of especial relevance to this study, were questions such as “What is enabling or constraining you from being the type of L1 teacher that you want to be?” and “What governs your priorities?” These questions were phrased to elicit teachers’ descriptions and interpretations of conditions mediating their perceived professional space. We envisioned the interview guide as contributing to a hermeneutic circle-like structure (Gadamer, 2004) where different versions of similar questions are explored as the interview progresses and the participant explores his or her own understanding.

Participants varied in gender, age, work experience, and central or rural location. In addition, the type of school, academic, vocational, or combined, varied. This was not seen as an aim for a representative sample, rather the aim was for *polyphony* among the participants. Before the interviews, the project participants were given a list of themes in order to be prepared for the interview. These themes were a condensed version of the questions in the interview guide. The interviews took place, after the participants’ wishes, in the office of the first author or at their work place, and lasted around one hour. During the interviews, an important role for the interviewer was to display an attitude of *deliberate naiveté* (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 33) in order to be open to the participants’ interpretations and experiences and critical of own presuppositions. Quotes from interviews are numbered as T1, T2 and so on for Teacher 1, Teacher 2 and so forth.

Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and the transcripts have been read by all three authors. We follow Hatch (2002) in arguing for the benefits of combining thematic and interpretative analysis, and, furthermore, the hermeneutic insights expressed by Taylor (1971) that interpretation encompasses all aspects of research. The analysis has been divided into two parts, where the first part centred on a thematic data driven analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Hatch, 2002) focusing on themes that were identified as common for the teachers across the ten interviews. During this part, the authors read all the interview transcripts individually while noting common themes between them. The authors then met to discuss the identified themes and the findings were constructed through this moderation process. Quotes from the different interviews were then selected as examples of the common themes. The second part of the analysis centred on interpretation of the themes in combination with quotes from the interviews in order to explore further the research question with the article’s theoretical perspective as productive prejudices (Gadamer, 2004). Below, we present and discuss the findings from the analysis.

Findings

Overview

Based on the data driven thematic analysis, we have identified several conditions that can be seen as mediating the L1 teachers' perceived professional space. Conditions grounded in the organizational features of schools consist of *the exam*, *the curriculum*, and *accountability demands*. Furthermore, there are conditions created by relations to *students*, *colleagues*, and *the school leadership*. Finally, there are conditions stemming from cultural products, here exemplified by the teachers' reliance on *learning materials* and *subject traditions and purposes*. These conditions illustrate the overall sociocultural mediation of the L1 teachers' perceived professional space. In the next two sections, we will analyse *how* the various conditions mediate the L1 teachers' perceived professional space. The analysis will focus on two aspects of the mediational process, namely how the conditions contribute to what we respectively term *extension* and *remodelling* of the perceived professional space.

Extension conveys how mediating conditions provide resources or constraints that contribute to *expanding or narrowing* the teachers' perceived professional space. This implies an almost quantitative view where the perceived professional space becomes larger or smaller due to the influence of mediating conditions. Remodelling, however, conveys how mediating conditions can *qualitatively transform* the perceived professional space. Such transformations can come about because a mediating condition is experienced as introducing, for example new phenomena or concepts into the perceived professional space, and thus remodelling the character of the space.

We emphasize that extension and remodelling are aspects of the mediational process, meaning that we foreground certain features in the material for analytical purposes. This should not be interpreted as claiming that mediational conditions strictly either implies extension or remodelling. Following the analysis of the mediational process, we will discuss how our findings relate to an understanding of teacher agency as being a socioculturally shaped capacity.

Extension: Expanding and narrowing

Of conditions grounded in the organizational features of the school, *the exam* is assigned significance by a majority of the teachers in influencing their perceived professional space. Overall, the teachers' experiences of the exam reflects it as a constraint that narrows their perceived professional space by constructing a *specific trajectory* for their teaching. The following quote is an example of the exam described as a constraining presence: 'The centrally mandated exam is hanging like a guillotine over both my own head and my students' heads. Because it raises certain

expectations.’ (T10). The image of the exam as a guillotine communicates how this condition is experienced as a constraint on prioritizing other pedagogical aims. During the interview, the teacher spoke about the exam in terms that emphasizes its conservational effects on teaching; the “expectations” it raises signals to the teachers what is valued as the outcome of their teaching. Another teacher articulates this dilemma: ‘There is the exam. I have classes in their final year, and I know I cannot do what I want because I know they have to know something for the exam.’ (T3).

Relations to *the school leadership* is noteworthy by being experienced as a resource because of its *absence* from the teachers’ daily doings. Below is a quote, which expresses how the local school leadership facilitates creativity and experimentation among the teachers by being absent: ‘The leadership leaves us alone and we are allowed to develop and try out things, so the standard in our school is rather high.’ (T4). The teacher directly links the leadership’s absence to the ‘high standard’ at the school. The type of school leadership can be described as *trustful absence*. Another teacher emphasizes a similar point: ‘[The principal] is the best I have experienced, because she trusts that we are doing our job. I think all the other teachers here feel the same. There is no control of our practice, if we are following the curriculum or not.’ (T3). The trustful absence expands the teachers’ perceived professional space to include development of practice and experiment with new ideas.

One theme that captures many of the comments about relations to *students* is that of *increasing diversity*, here expressed explicitly: ‘The subject has grown larger, and the student masses less homogenous.’ (T9). An example of how student diversity mediates the extension of teachers’ perceived professional space is the variations between specific classes. A teacher puts it like this: ‘A lot depend on the class. How they take things. Now I have a really good and highly engaged class, so I can do a lot with them.’ (T5). The experience of having an ‘engaged class’ is a resource for expanding what this teacher sees as possible to do. On the other side are the motifs control and entertainment: ‘I think that the students themselves are more preoccupied with “On what page?” “How much?” They want very specific instructions on what they have to do, what questions, and what the answers to those questions are. They want control.’ (T8). Entertainment is expressed as: ‘You have to be a stand-up comic and you have to be entertaining at all times. You have to plan activities that are not boring. That word “boring” is used all the time.’ (T7). In contrast to the engaged class that expands the perceived professional space, the experiences of demands for control and entertainment from the students figures as constraints that contribute to narrowing the space.

Learning materials mediate the teachers’ perceptions of their space, especially the textbook: ‘The textbook governs a lot. When we change textbooks, I also change my teaching plans and the vocabulary I use, to align with the new book.’ (T4). Other teachers express similar views about how the textbook shapes their space: ‘It limits me from flying up into the sky.’ (T6) and ‘I am using the textbook more and more. I wish I could teach without the textbook sometimes, however, it is because of the students’ need to know where we find this or this’ (T8). Overall, the textbook seems to have an *anchoring function* for the teachers’ practice. There is a certain ambivalence toward the

textbook, which pushes closer to contributing to narrowing the teachers' perceived professional space.

The teachers' experience the *curriculum* as both a resource and constraint. The teacher below explains how the 'spacious' curriculum provides resources for his practice:

The subject is very spacious and you are free to choose literature and how you want to reach the learning aims. The learning aims are spacious, which makes it possible to tailor them to your own abilities and interests and to what engages the individual class. (T1).

This *tailoring approach* to the curriculum, made possible with an understanding of the curriculum as 'spacious', contributes to expanding the teachers' perceived professional space. It gives the teacher the opportunity to consider how abilities and interests, as well as considerations of what might be suitable for individual classes, can be used for the benefit of teaching. In contrast, another teacher interprets the curriculum as a constraint:

One should think a master's degree were the intended result [for the students]. That is scary. Because, you know, the "content jam" makes it impossible to work in-depth. You just swim on the surface and you are prevented from working with developing the student. (T2).

'The content jam' is the teacher's description of the amount of learning aims and different topics included in the L1 curriculum. This makes the curriculum into a constraint that hinders the teacher from creating in-depth work for the students. It thereby forces what we can call a *surface approach*. In this teachers' view, however, working in-depth with fewer topics is a precondition for true development. The two approaches outlined here, tailoring and surface, can be understood as examples of how the same mediational condition can be experienced differently by teachers engaged in the same practice. For the first teacher, the curriculum contributes to an expansion of his perceived professional space. For the second teacher the curriculum narrows it.

Relations to *colleagues* figure as a conflicting condition for the teachers' perceived space. For some teachers, colleagues form an 'academic community', which acts as a resource:

In our school, and probably other schools as well, there are many L1 teachers because it is such a large subject. Therefore, we have a large academic community and we make use of it; discuss miscellaneous issues with each other. (T5).

The same teacher mentions 'long traditions' (T5) as something that helps achieving her wanted practice. The "traditions", meaning knowledge and beliefs that are distributed among the community of colleagues, are resources for the teacher in enacting her professional aims. She describes the relationship this way: 'I am listening to what they are doing and what they find important. I am influenced by them, but in a good way. If I have forgotten an important theme, they can tell me about it.' (T5). Another teacher expresses a similar experience: 'I am lucky to be working at a school where we are all engaged and are pulling together' (T9). In both these examples, the colleagues are

resources that contribute to expanding the perceived professional space. On the other hand, colleagues embodying traditions can be experienced as a constraint:

I feel I should read the classics to convey the cultural canon that still reigns in Norwegian classrooms. Because the same people who taught 20 years ago, still teach today and have not changed. Facing the less concrete curriculum, I am at the mercy of my colleagues who are more experienced. In my classes, we often read the works they decide, because I lack the academic basis to make such decisions. (T10).

In this example, the colleagues act as a community that sees their aim as preservation of the cultural canon of Norwegian classics. Decisions on what to read are taken by this 'more experienced' community, which the teacher feels he has to abide by because of his lack of experience and the curriculum lacking specificity. The perceived professional space is thereby narrowed by the constraints provided by the colleagues.

Above, we have discussed findings that illustrate extension as an aspect of the mediation of the teachers' perceived professional space. The conditions span from the exam, curriculum, and school leadership to colleagues, students, and learning materials, and they all provide resources or constraints that contribute to expanding or narrowing the perceptions of space. Furthermore, the teachers interpret conditions such as colleagues and the curriculum differently, which might be an indication of how local school culture and traditions for curriculum interpretation influence the extension of professional space, and thereby shape teachers' agency. Also on the local level, the school leadership is experienced unambiguously as a resource for expanding professional space through showing trust in the teachers, which encourages an agentic approach to teaching.

Remodelling: Qualitative transformations

As mentioned, remodelling is how we term the second mediational aspect. Like the remodelling of physical space, which can change its function or possibilities, remodelling of the perceived professional space points to transformations that create a qualitatively different space. Our analysis of this aspect will concentrate on the conditions *accountability demands* and *subject traditions and purposes*.

Explicit mention of various accountability demands, such as prescribed documentation, reporting, and measurement of students' progress and results, are not as prominent in the material as, for example the exam and the curriculum. However, when they are mentioned, it is in relation to how they change the teachers' practice. The quote below is a salient example of how one teacher describes a division between his teaching work and the 'meta-work' created by accountability demands:

The authorities have many good intentions. They want to do all this for the students, however, in reality we are using up all our time on this work, which is a meta-work, or some kind of work that does not

influence the student. It is not the student we are working with, it is the system. It think that this is unfortunate and it prevents development. (T2).

Good intentions from the authorities are experienced as transformed into ‘meta-work’ for the system. This is perceived as taking up too much time from what is reckoned as real teacher work, which in turn limits the teacher in prioritizing the students’ development. The teacher expands further on this: ‘I think that teachers are prevented from working with the student because we are compelled to document that we are working with the student.’ (T2). The teacher highlights the seemingly paradoxical experience of being steered into *documenting* work rather than doing it because the authorities fear it will not be done. As a mediating condition, accountability demands contribute not just toward the extension of the teachers’ perceived professional space; they also transform it by filling the space with “meta-work”. The “meta-work” populates the professional space with new aims and tasks, which the teacher describes as working with the system, rather than the student. This is an example of how the perceived professional space is remodelled by mediational conditions that transform the character of the space.

Furthermore, there are moments when teachers express how things currently *just are* or *have to be*, often related to subtle experiences of accountability demands. An example of this is:

It does not seem like we want a society where people are independent and able to think for themselves. I do not think this is much valued. Therefore, I do not think the subject will change. It will be smaller and less spacious for the teacher. Both less time, narrower room, more demands to how you are supposed to do things. In my next life, I do not think I will become an L1 teacher. (T8).

The teacher describes how societal developments contribute to a change in what is valued as educational aims, and, thereby, threatening to transform the space in which teachers are working. In the interview, the teacher calls these developments ‘instrumentalism’ (T8) and describes how ‘the purpose of a lot of those new pedagogical demands, about feedback and documentation, brought a lot of positive changes’, however, ‘When it comes out in the other end of the school system, with schools being compared, everything measured and weighted. Everything is destroyed’ (T8). Similar to the authorities’ good intentions, useful tools for the teacher are perceived as ‘destroyed’ by a culture that only values measurable results. Similarly, another teacher describes how she would have liked to explain why L1 teachers make the choices they do:

That it has to do with measurement possibilities and such. That the reason for all this specific subject terminology is that we have to measure the student on something. Moreover, that I do not necessarily agree with this as an L1 teacher, but this is how it is nowadays. (T5).

Here, the necessity of measurement is expressed as a sort of ‘spirit of the times’, which the teacher does not agree with but nonetheless must adhere to. Both the explicitly mentioned ‘meta-work’ and the

more subtle ‘measurement-spirit’ are examples of how the perceived professional space is qualitatively transformed due to mediating conditions, in this case various forms of accountability. Different aims and tasks are introduced or created that contribute to this remodelling of the professional space.

Moving on from the accountability demands, subject traditions and purposes in the L1 subject are the second example of how mediating conditions can transform perceptions and thus contribute to remodelling the professional space. Below is an example that illustrates the general view of the L1 subject as containing traditions that are an enrichment for the teachers:

There are so many possibilities. Any subject is relevant, right. We can meet the students in so many different ways. Either in film or through reading or producing texts our self and switching. I think there are many possibilities. It is this I find exciting and fascinating. (T8).

More specifically, some teachers relay on one subject tradition, which provides them with a purpose that has to be built into their professional space. Below is an example of how the concept of *danning*, the formation of the person, provides the teacher with means to articulate an interpretation of the L1 subject:

The subject, for me, is a subject for *danning* more than a subject for providing tools and skills, to refer to that debate. It is important to keep it that way. I feel that there are not many great authors that I do not want to touch on, and I make time for this. (T3).

With *danning* as a stated purpose, this teacher ‘makes time’, that is transforms professional space, to include practices that contribute to this. In her case, it is teaching ‘great authors’. She also uses the tradition of *danning* to position her own interpretation of the subject in contrast to an interpretation that emphasizes the subject as ‘tools and skills’ – an interpretation that can be seen as closer to the ‘measurement-spirit’ mentioned above. Other teachers also emphasize *danning* as central to the L1 subject, calling it ‘The great subject for *danning*’ (T4) or ‘*Danning*-subject number one’ (T1). As a subject tradition, *danning* seems to provide the teachers with distinct ways of articulating and viewing the L1 subject. Similar to the accountability demands that produced ‘meta work’, the subject tradition qualitatively transforms the teachers’ perceived professional space by introducing *danning* as an aim for education and, consequently, something one has to ‘make time’ for. The following example will look closer into how these reflections on subject and purpose contribute to a change in the character of space. Here is a teacher describing how she spent time trying to figure out the subjects’ purpose:

It was something I struggled to understand when I started working as an L1 teacher. I had to, in a way, because the curriculum was different from when I went to school, I used one year to form an opinion of what, my interpretation, of the purpose. What I mentioned earlier, really. That the subject is about reading and writing on a more and more advanced level. (T5).

The L1 teacher then describes how, because of these reflections, she gradually tried to make the subject her own by modelling a new professional space. In this process, she uses subject traditions, especially a notion of personal growth that is reminiscent of *danning*:

I try, I practice quite actively now to make time for those, those themes that can both inspire the students and make them grow as persons. However, that is, to make time for this in between all the other themes. Make room for the little themes. That is something I have not, that I have not dared to do before. Therefore, I have made a change, really. Because then you get away from the, it is very hurtful when a subject only becomes about grades and exams. Because that is not the aim. Rather, for most the aim is to experience something. (T5).

It is central to note how the teacher describes how she ‘made a change’ from reflecting on the purpose of the subject, and consequently how this sense of purpose creates a different professional space. Aims such as inspiration and personal growth are gradually populating the professional space, remodelling its character away from being mostly about grades and exams. Similarly, another teacher claims that: ‘Experience makes you able to see through a lot of those things [various accountability demands].’ (T2), and another explains: ‘In the beginning, when you are very fresh, you are very governed by the curriculum.’, however, after 8 years finds it ‘easier to skip things without thinking it unwise. I know approximately, what we have to get through.’ (T7).

To summarize, remodelling highlights a qualitative aspect of how the teachers’ perceived professional space is mediated. Conditions such as accountability demands and subject traditions and purposes contribute to a qualitative transformation – a remodelling – of the perceived professional space. The findings indicate how the ‘meta-work’ and the measurement aims created by accountability demands remodel an alienating professional space where teachers do not recognize themselves in their own practice. Furthermore, in contrast to the school leaderships’ trustfulness at the local level, accountability demands on the governmental level is experienced as lacking trust in the teachers as professionals. On the other hand, subject traditions and purposes, presumably intertwined with work experience, contribute to a perceived professional space characterised by broader educational aims, which offer the teachers resources for exercising agency in their practice.

Concluding discussion

Following the findings, teacher agency can be understood as shaped by a range of conditions that together mediate the teachers’ perceived professional space. A central argument is the connection between the professional space teachers perceive and the form and extent of agency they can exercise. This connection emphasises how teacher agency can be understood as *sociocultural* in the sense of Ahearn’s definition of agency as the ‘socioculturally mediated capacity to act’ (Ahearn, 2001, p. 112). The mediation, or shaping, of teacher agency depends in large extent on, first, the

extension of professional space, and the expanding resources or narrowing constraints provided by conditions such as a trustful school leadership, colleagues' values and traditions, students' demands, role of learning materials, and interpretation of the curriculum or exam. However, teacher agency also depends on the modelling and remodelling of professional space, mainly by ideational conditions like subject traditions and accountability demands. This qualitative aspect of professional space can be viewed as contributing to in what sense the teachers' professional space is perceived as meaningful or alienating, which, furthermore, influences teachers' capacity to give direction to and make choices in their work. Teacher agency is then not only shaped by the size of space, but also by what is characterising the space and found within it for the teachers to make use of.

A key point in the findings seems to be Norwegian L1 teachers' access to *danning* as a language and a living tradition, providing the teachers with resources to remodel their perceived professional space. As shown in the findings, the educational aims inherited in *danning*, models a perceived professional space where students' personal growth is legitimate to strive after. These findings further support Biesta et al. (2015, 2017) in arguing for beliefs and language as central to teacher agency. The L1 teachers have resources to give direction to their practice and act as agents, because their professional space is modelled with beliefs and languages that can be used for this. Furthermore, *danning* as a language and living tradition among teachers is contingent on sociocultural and historical circumstances, which underscores the contextual sensitivity of the extension and (re-)modelling of teachers' perceived professional space. At the same time, the material shows how the more subtle experiences of accountability are close to the policy technology Ball (2000, 2003) calls *performativity*, which focuses attention on controlling the institutional field of judgement to decide what counts as valuable output. Ball describes the effect as 'the translation of complex social processes into simple figures or categories of judgement' (Ball, 2003, p. 217). This concept seems to capture the effect of both the 'meta-work' and the 'measurement spirit' present among the teachers, and is an indication of how global educational policy trends are reshaping local contexts and teacher professionalism by remodelling teachers' perceived professional space.

The aim of this study was to explore teacher agency as a socioculturally shaped phenomenon by focusing on how various conditions mediate teachers' perceived professional space. Based on the findings, the study contributes to, *firstly*, enhancing the understanding of the notion of teachers' perceived professional space by showing two aspects of how conditions are mediating this space. Teachers' perceived professional space is mediated qualitatively through the aspect of remodelling, while a quantitative mediation is provided through the aspect of extension. *Secondly*, the study has emphasized the subject as a central dimension in teachers' perceptions of professional space. The focus on the subject and subject teachers have made it possible to identify more clearly the abovementioned aspects of mediation. Agency is achieved and exercised in a professional space and depends therefore on the perceived quantitative and qualitative aspects of this space. The article is

thus, *thirdly*, a contribution to an understanding of teacher agency as a mediated capacity, shaped by the sociocultural context.

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Appendix

Interview guide

- (1) Can you start by telling me about your educational background?
- (2) How long have you worked as a teacher and why did you choose the teaching profession?
- (3) What makes being an L1 teacher meaningful to you?
- (4) What type of L1 teacher do you want to be?
- (5) In the current school system, what enables or prevents you from being the type of L1 teacher that you want to be?
- (6) What gives you good or bad conscience as an L1 teacher?
- (7) Do you feel loyalty to the L1 subject or a specific part of the subject?
- (8) What do you see as the purpose of the L1 subject? What type of subject do you want it to be?
- (9) What conditions do you experience for teaching the L1 subject in accordance with your own view of it?
- (10) What governs your priorities? Would you make other priorities or choices?
- (11) Do you have any thoughts on the future of the L1 subject and its role in Norwegian schools?