The Wisdom of Professional Practice
Jean-Luc Patry
University of Salzburg

Presentation at the Conference
Life-Long Learning in Applied Fields (LLAF)
The Mofet Institute, January 17, 2017

Department of Education
Erzabt-Klotz-Strasse 1
5020 Salzburg, Austria
jean-luc.patry@sbg.ac.at
The transfer from theory to practice is a genuine problem in education. One approach to deal with this problem is the concept of wisdom.

A brief definition of Wisdom (Sternberg, 2003): Wisdom is the use of one’s intelligence and experience as mediated by values towards the achievement of a common good through a balance among our own interests, considering our own environment in the long term.

- Judgment of action;
- Balance of creative and analytical intelligence;
- Importance of cultural context (or situation).
The Wisdom of Professional Practice

Perform an action with the highest degree of adequacy under the given circumstance...

Theories cannot be applied directly.
- Combination
- Interpretation
- Creation
- Evaluation

The attempt to achieve relevant societal goals
- Single case
- Educational goals

With a societal mandate
- Responsibility towards society
- Best possible fundament
- Based on scientific research (theories)
The Wisdom of Professional Practice

- Applied field
- Lifelong
- Requires Learning
Agenda:
1. Where to situate wisdom in the theory-practice transfer
2. Wisdom: Our research
3. Professional, societal, and personal wisdom
4. Teaching for wisdom
5. Conclusions
1. Where to situate wisdom in the theory-practice transfer
An example

Hannah, a mathematics teacher in the sixth grade, wants to teach the Pythagoras principles \((a^2+b^2=c^2)\) to her class. The students are very noisy, speak aloud with each other, interrupt the teacher, etc.
A model of the relationship between theory and practice

Practice (practical decision making) is guided by subjective theories.
A model of the relationship between theory and practice

(Scientific) theories can have an impact on action only if they are integrated into the system of subjective theories.
A model of the relationship between theory and practice

(Scientific) theories are mediated to become part of the subjective theories:
- Textbooks
- Teacher Education
- Etc.
(Scientific) theories are distorted when integrated into the system of subjective theories (→ perception theory).
A model of the relationship between theory and practice

The practitioners have other (non-scientific) elements besides the scientific ones in their subjective theories.
A model of the relationship between theory and practice

Educational (and other) goals are part of the system of subjective theories.
A model of the relationship between theory and practice

Situations (as perceived and interpreted) play an important role.
A model of the relationship between theory and practice

Decisions (cognitions) need to be „translated“ into actions: Pedagogical Tact.
The outcomes of one’s actions are perceived (according to one’s subjective theories), and the experience is integrated in one’s system of subjective theories.
A model of the relationship between theory and practice

Researcher

Theory

Mediator:
- Tell
- Show
- Counseling
- Coaching
- Do
- Teacher education
- Reading etc.

Situation

Subjective Theories

Educational Goals

Tact

Action

Experience (Feedback)

Hopefully, the outcomes of practical actions will also be studied by researchers.
A model of the relationship between theory and practice

Wisdom

Theory

Mediator: Tell show counseling coaching do Teacher education Reading etc.

Situation

Subjective Theories

Educational Goals

Research

Experience (Feedback)

Researcher

Practitioner

Action
2. Wisdom: Our research

Some aspects from our research programs
• in Salzburg
• LLAF
Overall:

- Wisdom is a very complex construct. I do not assume that the factors discussed here are complete, but at least they provide some concretization.
- Theories cannot take away the practitioner’s responsibility for what he or she does, they can only support him or her by providing reasonable suggestions.
- Wisdom needs to take into account normative issues, not only descriptive ones.
Some concrete issues:
(1) The factors are **situation specific**, hence one can assume that wisdom is situation specific. That is why I speak of wisdom of actions instead of wisdom of people.

→ *Wisdom is situation specific.*

→ *Situation specificity has not been researched at all.*
(2) The factors are different from person to person: They perceive the situations differently, they have different values, different theoretical knowledge, etc. This means: What is wise for one practitioner in a given situation, might be inappropriate for someone else in a seemingly similar situation.

→ Wisdom is person specific.
(3) But wisdom is not purely individual and situationally bound. There are *general features* (structural and content!) that need to be researched. → Because of the generality-concreteness antinomy, these general statements cannot be concrete!
(4) There is no simple and easily understandable answer to the question “What is wisdom?”

(5) It is difficult to do research on wisdom. Philosophy and empirical research is necessary.

(5.1) Philosophy:
- Normative issues (justice and care);
- General principles of human nature, society, and social interaction;
- Necessary general and therefore abstract (the generality-concreteness antinomy applies);
- Epistemology and philosophy of the theory-practice transfer.
(5.2) **Empirical research:**


**Our results:**

→ Situation specific!
→ Less general and more concrete than scientific theories;
→ More normative statements than in scientific literature (e.g., on praise);
→ More contradictions within the subjective theories than within scientific theories;
→ Practitioners often isolate contradictory concepts from each other and apply them situation specifically.
Action specific reflections: What do practitioners think in specific situations? Research program “Pedagogical Tact” (Method: stimulated recall): Our results:
(6) Corresponding teaching (empirical!)
(6.1) Philosophy

→ Teaching values, related with practice: VaKE (research program)
→ Development of VaKE-Tact (LLAF: Module in “Learning to Be”): Lydia Linortner with many partners;
→ VaKE and implications for LLAF: Rachel Eichler and team; Roxana Reichman and team; Maria do Rosário Pinto and team; Pedro Costa and team, Irit Levy-Feldman and team; and others.
→ In teacher training: Alfred Weinberger and team; Sieglinde Weyringer and team; and many others.
(6.2) **Subjective theories:**

→ Research for scientific theories that can be translated into subjective theories [Research program “critical multiplism on several levels”]

→ Situation specificity:
→ Multiple theories (antinomies);
→ Dealing with multiple goals
→ Etc.

→ Research for conveying appropriate subjective theories (again, research program “subjective theories”)

→ Within LLAF, Module in “Learning to Be”: Astrid Dürnberger
3. Professional, Societal, and personal wisdom
*Professional wisdom*: Related with the official public mandate by administration, policy, parents, students.

*Societal wisdom*: Related with the unofficial demand by the society

*Personal wisdom*: Personal individual concepts and interpretation of the task

Many differences of these three types of wisdom when regarding the aspects already discussed.
Some issues:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Professional</th>
<th>Societal</th>
<th>Personal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility instance</td>
<td>Formal regulation, codes of ethics, etc.</td>
<td>Unformal public opinion, social media</td>
<td>Conscience, personal values system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctions</td>
<td>Direct (legal) sanctions possible</td>
<td>Public recognition or critique</td>
<td>Only internal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>Justice, occasionally care</td>
<td>Care frequently more important than justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which theories?</td>
<td>Teacher training curriculum; legislation</td>
<td>Public subjective theories</td>
<td>Subjective theories incl. external theories as perceived</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generality-concreteness</td>
<td>Necessarily general and abstract</td>
<td>Necessarily general and abstract</td>
<td>Reduced generality, increased concreteness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction rules</td>
<td>Formalized rules</td>
<td>Unformal rules</td>
<td>Personal principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Teaching for wisdom

Given the complexity: very difficult.

→ Just some suggestions, to be taken in a “wise” sense!
(1) Provide information about the relationship between theory and practice.
(2) Provide understanding of the limited power of theories, that they are provisional, the need for multiple theories, the generality-concreteness antinomy, etc.
(3) Teach good theories in a way that students do not distort them too much, and that they can integrate them into their system of subjective theories.
(4) Teach about issues of situation specificity.
(5) Foster moral competence and professional, societal and personal responsibility.
(6) Foster theory-related creativity and intuition.
(7) Provide and discuss examples (prototypes) of good practice while keeping flexible.
(8) Give the practitioner the possibility to act and to make errors and to get feedback from the situation ("the situation talks back"), and foster his or her sense of doing research on his or her own practice and to anticipate.
(9) Give feedback to the practitioner in a way that you would accept feedback yourself while keeping in mind that what might be good for you might not be good for your student, and vice versa.
(10) Help the preservice teacher be aware and overcome the impact of 1500 hours of experienced teaching by often unwise teachers during their education.
(11) And above all: Let the student construct him- or herself, with your support, and let him or her check what fits best through rationality and experience.
5. Conclusions

“To understand wisdom fully and correctly requires more wisdom than any of us have.” But ”the recognition that total understanding will always elude us is itself a sign of wisdom.” (Sternberg, 1990, p. 3)

→ Wisdom is probably even more impossible to understand than most topics of research. But this does not mean that we should avoid doing research on wisdom at all.

But simultaneously, wisdom – or in our terminology, Pedagogical Tact – is crucial:

“For the question on which depends a man's being a good or bad educator is solely this how tact forms itself in him, so as to be faithful or so as to be false to the laws enunciated by pedagogic science in its universality?” (Herbart, 1802/1896, p. 21)

This means: The most important concept – Wisdom – is among the most difficult to do research on.


http://www.archive.org/stream/herbartsbcofsens00herbuoft/herbartsbcofsens00herbuoft_djvu.txt
About the difficulty to do good practice

• Good practice should be theory-driven;
• The system of (subjective) theories should include descriptive (empirically testable) as well as normative (ethical, prescriptive) theories.
• But we must not be the slave of theories, because theories always leave some places vacant.
• Rather, we must take the theories “with a grain of salt”.

About the roles and responsibility of the practitioners:

- The professionals’ role as stakeholders in the society requires responsible decisions.
- Responsibility requires using the best possible knowledge base, but also knowing what this knowledge base is worth.
- Responsible practitioners need to take into account professional, societal and personal responsibility in a balanced way.
- This balance is also an issue of wisdom.
- Simple or even simplistic solutions are likely to create more problems instead of solving them.
About the difficulty of teaching for the practice as a practice of its own;

• Teaching such a complex, personal and situation specific concept like wisdom requires both theory as well as practice, in a coordinate way (not independent).
• It requires a joint effort of all who are involved.
• *Joint effort* means a common underlying framework which can be based on the idea of wisdom.
• This includes support by the society within which the professionals act responsibly, i.e., the society must also take responsibility for its professionals.
About the difficulties of doing research in this field

• Simple or even simplistic solutions are inappropriate in research as well.
• A full understanding will never be possible, but reducing the degree of ignorance is better than doing nothing.
• We need research programs dealing with this topic.
• We need inter- and transdisciplinary research.
• The limits need to be acknowledged.
About the future of wisdom of professional practice
• Because of the importance of practical wisdom, it is important to do research on it and to convey the results to the practitioners.
• And rationality in professional action as well as rationality in research (as far as possible) are the key for progress, without neglecting the role of creativity and intuition – wisely balanced.
• In any case: the practitioner retains responsibility.
Thank you for your attention!

jean-luc.patry@sbg.ac.at