How evaluation processes affect the professional development of five teachers in higher education

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Abstract: This paper presents research that investigates the nature of the connection between the professional development of five teachers in higher education and the evaluation processes they have to undergo. Since teaching, scholarship, and service are the three components that evaluation measures, this research examines how the teachers' professional development was reflected in these components, and how they viewed the connection between their professional activities and the evaluation process. One conclusion states that while the evaluation process is intimidating and taxing, it develops the skills for the teaching component. The contribution stems principally from a mentoring channel, which enables teachers to receive counseling and guidance from experienced veteran colleagues. Mentoring encourages the teachers and prompts them to seek advice, study, scrutinize their work methods, and improve the quality of their teaching. Another conclusion reveals that during the first years of work in higher education, evaluation was not found to influence activity in the scholarship and service components. The evaluation requirements notwithstanding, the extent of the activity in these components was limited and non-intensive as a result of the teachers' focus on teaching. Professional development deepens and expands as seniority increases and confidence in one's teaching abilities grow. Despite the limited scale of the study, the research conclusions may serve as recommendations for institutions of higher education to consider providing a mentoring channel for the teachers who are in their first years of academic work. Furthermore, institutions should demonstrate flexibility vis-à-vis the extent and depth of such individuals' activity in scholarship and services when evaluating them. Another recommendation is to encourage institutions to take into account the advantages of veteran teachers, and the fact that professional activities deepen and expand as seniority increases.

Keywords: higher education, scholarship, professional development, evaluation process.

I. Introduction.

Professional development is defined as an ongoing and systematic process that includes activities such as discussion, investigation, experimentation with new practices, learning, expansion of knowledge, acquisition of new skills, and the development of approaches, stances, knowledge, and work tools. In order to generate professional development, a work environment that values inquiry, experimentation, and renewal is required (Guskey, 2000). Teachers in higher education are committed to professional development by virtue of their being academics and by their

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obligation to keep abreast of the research world. Teachers' professional work contributes to their success and endurance in their work, to the community of peers, to the research world, and to the world of higher education (Secret, Leisey, Lanning, Polich, & Schaub, 2011). In an examination of the question 'What is the quality of higher education?' there is a demand for accountability (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Findlow, 2008) and an expectation that the universities prove their ability to serve as creators and purveyors of knowledge (Brooks, 2005). In order to emphasize the importance of professional development, institutions of higher education implement processes for evaluating teachers' work and contribution. The process occupies a cardinal place as a process that safeguards the academic standard of the institution and helps maintain the standard of teaching for the sake of the students (Findlow, 2008; Huber, 2002; Terpstra & Honoree, 2009).

The evaluation process is a topic of discussion and argument. As time goes by, the components and factors by which teachers are evaluated expand, the demands made of the evaluees increase, and the examination is performed in greater depth (Huber, 2002). For the purpose of tracking and evaluating professional activities in higher education, several components are taken into account. A difference of opinion exists regarding the place and importance of each component and its requisite scope in professional activities. The research literature discusses the nature of these components, analyzes the various emphases, and examines the weight of each one.

II. Theoretical Background.

Professional teachers are teachers who know how to lead their students to successful learning. In order for them to achieve this, they have to become professionalized (Guskey, 2003; Shagrir, 2010). Employing the term 'professional communities of practice,' Shulman (1998) relates to the obligation of professionals to perform professional activities out of a desire to safeguard their profession. Professional development in higher education is among the requirements that teachers are obliged to fulfill. In order to ensure that development takes place on a professional level, the institutions implement processes whereby they evaluate teachers' activities. Evaluation begins as soon as the candidate's suitability for the job is examined, and continues in the form of on-the-job evaluation. The fate of teachers' academic careers, progress up the promotion ladder, ability to be awarded appointments, and professional advancement depends on the meticulous and complex evaluation process that is held periodically (Caffarella & Zinn, 1999; Huber, 2002). The fact that instructions and guidelines are published regarding the professional demands made of teachers as well as desired achievements and rewards they can receive indicates the importance every institution ascribes to it (Earl, 2008).

In the literature regarding evaluation, two trends can be identified. The first examines the nature and weight of the components that are taken into account (Becker, Cotton, & Grizzle, 2003; Centra, 1983; Elen, Lindblom-Ylänne, & Clement, 2007; Secret, et al., 2011; Serow, 2000; Smeby, 1998; Terpstra & Honoree, 2009). The second deals with the importance, role, and place of evaluation processes in higher education (Caffarella & Zinn, 1999; Halse, Deane, Hobson, & Jones, 2007; Lord, 2009; O'Meara, 2002).

A. *The Nature and Weight of the Components that are Examined in the Evaluation of Higher Education.*

An examination of the components taken into account in a teacher's evaluation demonstrates that the distinction among them is not always clear, and that it is difficult to distinguish the component to which a particular academic activity should be attributed (Colbeck, 2002). The central component that is examined is the quality of the teaching and the extent of its contribution to the students' achievements. Teachers in higher education are accepted for a post as a result of their expertise and experience in a certain field, and as a result of their ability to teach diverse topics within this field. When the search committees scrutinize candidates' applications, they allocate an important place to teaching skills and teaching experience (Meizlish & Kaplan, 2008; O'Meara, 2002). There are institutions in which candidates are required to present teaching philosophies and provide solid proof that these philosophies are reflected in their teaching experience. Preference is given to candidates with broader experience in teaching, particularly if they garnered their experience in a wide range of teaching contexts (Meizlish & Kaplan, 2008). In order to improve and position high-caliber teaching among teachers, several institutions have opted for solutions such as imposing additional teaching hours on the lecturers, giving awards for good teaching, and establishing centers for improving teaching (Halse, et al., 2007; Serow, 2000). One of the ways to encourage professional development is to create communities of practice (Shulman, 1998), which are helpful in several areas: provision of a professional and speedy response to joint institutional problems, assistance in transferring best practices, assistance in developing professional skills, and help with recruiting and retaining talent (Caffarella & Zinn, 1999; Wenger & Snyder, 2000). The teaching component is also important in research universities, which consider conducting research to be a cardinal objective for teachers (Elen, et al., 2007; Meizlish & Kaplan, 2008; Terpstra & Honoree, 2009), especially among those who teach at the undergraduate level (Landrum & Clump, 2004).

For the purpose of evaluating teachers' teaching, the institutions make use of anonymous student evaluations of teaching. The students relate to topics determined by each institution – for instance, teaching methods, use of sources of knowledge and teaching means, expertise in the field of teaching, and interrelationship with the learners (Earl, 2008).

Another channel employed by some institutions for evaluating the teaching component is the mentoring channel. A teacher under evaluation is paired with a mentor who is a teacher with seniority and experience. The mentor's job is to assist the teachers and ensure that their teaching is high-caliber and academic (Caffarella & Zinn, 1999; Gaye & Cullen, 1995). The mentoring channel has advantages both for novice teachers, who receive assistance by becoming acquainted with the work methods and professional requirements, and for veteran teachers, who give of their experience and empower their colleagues (Foote & Solem, 2009; Gaye & Cullen, 1995; Huber, 2002).

A further channel for evaluating the teaching component is an examination of the activities that supplement the actual teaching – for instance, holding personal consultations with students and advising them in the context of the assignments they have to carry out for their course studies. Teachers have to devote a great deal of time to these consultations, and are required to relate to each learner personally, which is more difficult to accomplish in the large lecture classes typically taught at the undergraduate level. In addition, the teaching-associated activities required of each teacher are measured – for instance, building course curricula,

planning and preparing assignments for the students, setting and checking papers and exams, evaluating students, and giving grades (Colbeck, 2002; Huber, 2002; Krahenbuhl, 1998).

The second component of the evaluation is scholarship. This component examines activities such as conducting research, disseminating academic publications, giving lectures and presentations at conferences and meetings, editing journals, refereeing colleagues' papers, writing grant proposals, and building curricula and teaching materials (Becker, et al., 2003; Colbeck, 2002; Krahenbuhl, 1998; Landrum & Clump, 2004; Shagrir, 2010). The performance of such activities enhances the cutting-edge nature of the innovations and developments in the field of expertise, and contributes to the body of knowledge, to the enrichment and updating of the students (Centra, 1983; Guskey, 2003; Serow, 2000; Smeby, 1998; Terpstra & Honoree, 2009), and to the enrichment of the community of researchers (Krahenbuhl, 1998; Shagrir, 2010). The evaluation of this component includes an examination of the teacher's professional products: the extent to which the products withstand the criticism of peers, the extent of the contribution and the influence of the products on the world of research and higher education, awards and honors, large research grants, the publication of papers in prestigious academic journals, and the extent to which they are referenced in other researchers' studies. The requisite intensity and scope of these activities differs according to the teacher's rank and the program in which he/she teaches (Brooks, 2005). Assessing and rewarding multiple forms of scholarship within academic reward systems encourages teachers to emphasize different kinds of work and elevates the status of teaching and service to their rightful place beside research within academic culture (Huber, 2002; O'Meara, 2002).

The third component of the evaluation is service, which includes activities that make a contribution within and on behalf of the institution. These activities are reflected in membership of departmental, collegiate, and university committees as well as other bodies such as boards and commissions that operate in the local community and in the education system, bodies that work for society, and non-profit organizations (O'Meara, 2002). Some researchers recommend reducing the service component in teachers' professional activities in order to free them up so that they can explore the two components they consider to be cardinal: teaching and research (Terpstra & Honoree, 2009).

B. The Importance, Role, and Place of Evaluation Processes in Higher Education.

Evaluating teachers is a procedure according to which a candidate is accepted or rejected for a job in higher education (Landrum & Clump, 2004), and it serves as a test of the teacher's professionalism, quality, and success during the course of his/her work. Brooks (2005) mentions three research areas that represent the definition of the quality of higher education: reputation, scholarship productivity, and students' educational experiences and outcomes. Professional activities also enhance the institution's reputation and exert a positive influence on candidates who are deciding where to study (Becker, et al., 2003; Findlow, 2008).

The three components taken into account when evaluating teachers demonstrate that integrative professional activity that includes all the components actually lays the foundations of academia and the profession (Colbeck, 2002). The institutions support the teachers and encourage them to conduct and publish research. It transpires that in an institution that supports research activities, the teachers manifest greater research efficacy (Becker, et al., 2003; Guskey, 2000).

There is "rivalry" between the teaching and scholarship components (Halse, et al., 2007) with regard to the question of which one is more important and esteemed for the purpose of evaluation, and which factors are taken into account when they are evaluated (Caffarella & Zinn, 1999). Some consider teaching and research to be of equal importance and to benefit each other. Whoever is involved in research alongside teaching improves the quality of his/her teaching, and whoever is involved in teaching can add inputs and insights to his/her research (Centra, 1983; Elen, et al., 2007; Halse, et al., 2007; Serow, 2000; Smeby, 1998; Terpstra & Honoree, 2009). There are institutions that consider professional experience in conducting research to be more significant and crucial for getting a job than the teaching component and teaching experience (Landrum & Clump, 2004; Serow, 2000). Achievements in the scholarship component determine teachers' careers as well as the significant benefits they gain such as tenure, promotions, and salary increments (Centra, 1983; Earl, 2008; Lord, 2009; Terpstra & Honoree, 2009).

In recent years, institutions have begun encouraging teachers to be partners in governance issues, thus increasing the emphasis placed on the service component (Terpstra & Honoree, 2009). Some researchers believe that the evaluation process must give the same weight to service as it does to teaching and research activities because it occupies an important place in the scholar's professional identity and in his/her contribution to the institution and its reputation (O'Meara, 2002).

The research presented here examined how five teachers in a research university perceived the nature and weight of the various evaluation components, investigated the meaning they ascribed to the evaluation process, and analyzed the contribution of evaluation to their professional preoccupation with the components as reflected in their everyday academic work.

III. The Research.

This qualitative research study was conducted at an American research university[2]. The university publishes *Guidelines for Appointment, Review, and Promotion of Practice and Clinical Faculty* (2009), a publication that contains instructions for the evaluation process and lists what is required of the teachers. Instructions specify professional demands, obligatory procedures for professional activities, professional development, advancement tracks, and job preservation. The three components of professional activities – teaching, scholarship, and service – are taken into account in the institutional evaluation, and every teacher is obliged to perform them. Every teacher in the practice track receives mentoring assistance from a tenured teacher. The mentor observes the evaluee's lessons at least six times during the course of the academic year; after these observations, the mentor gives him/her professional feedback; following the teaching and the feedback, personal reflective conversations take place; the mentor helps the evaluee plan lessons by providing guidance with regard to building syllabi and lesson plans. With reference to the mentioned guidelines, the research was based on three questions:
  (1) In what professional activities are the participants involved in each of the evaluation components?
  (2) To what extent are they involved in each of these components?
  (3) How does the evaluation process affect the participants' professional development?
The research population comprised five teachers – four women and one man – who worked as non-tenured in the practice track at the college of education. All of them held teaching certificates, had school teaching experience, and taught undergraduates. For the sake of

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[2] The name of the university in which the research was conducted has been omitted for the sake of confidentiality.

confidentiality, a pseudonym designating each participant has been allocated. Table 1 presents information about the research population:

Table 1. Information about the research population.

Name (pseudonym)	Seniority at the college	Prior teaching experience
Peter	First year	Eleven years' high school teaching experience (still teaching)
Annie	Second year	Nine years' experience working with children as a diagnostician of learning difficulties
Ellen	Second year; in her first year, she served as a co-teacher	Five years' experience working as a teaching instructor and teaching demonstrator in schools
Nicole	Third year	Ten years' experience teaching in schools
Minnie	Tenth year	Ten years' experience teaching in schools

Two research tools were employed for collecting data: The first was a one-off interview, and the second was a comprehensive electronic questionnaire. The use of an interview and subsequently of a questionnaire permitted broad, first-hand documentation that had the potential to elicit extensive information concerning professional activities, opinions, visions, statements, and perceptions. In order to gather rich qualitative data in response to the research questions, the interview and the questionnaire dealt with three issues. One issue explored the activities that reflected the participants' professional activities, such as learning, research, writing, publishing, participating in conferences, building curricula, and membership in professional organizations. Another issue examined the circumstances under which the professional activities were performed as well as their frequency. The third issue investigated the extent to which the evaluation process affected professional activities and its frequency.

Each participant underwent a semi-structured, open-ended, in-depth interview. The interview questions were prepared in advance, but open conversation was permitted. The interviewees were afforded opportunities to express personal views, arguments, experiences, knowledge, and interpretations (Zanting, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2003). The interviewer added questions that were inspired by the interviewees' body language, gestures, hesitations, and cessation of speech. The interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher.

The questionnaire enabled the respondents to think the issues through without the presence of the researcher and to document their insights and responses. The entire questionnaire consisted of open questions; at the end, there was an open space that permitted comments and insights.

The collected data were examined for context sensitivity with the aim of finding connections between attitudes and perceptions and among professional activities. To this end, a

content analysis methodology (Sabar-Ben-Yehoshua, 1990; Stemler, 2001) was employed. Content analysis can be a useful tool for examining trends and patterns, permits the data to be presented objectively and methodically, and enables the research to be repeated (Holsti, 1968; Sabar-Ben-Yehoshua, 1990; Stemler, 2001). The transcriptions of the recorded interviews and the completed questionnaires were reread several times, and during the reading, recurring words and terms were marked. The data were then processed in correlation with the three research questions. The first two questions deal with the participants' professional activities in relation to the three components according to which they were evaluated, and the third deals with their perceptions regarding the contribution of the evaluation processes to their professional development. The distinction between the personal level of the participant's work and activity on the one hand and the general level of his/her conception of professional development on the other yielded interesting findings, which are explained in the following section.

IV. Findings.

The first and second research questions deal with the participants' professional activities. The findings show that they were involved in the three types of required activities, but to differing extents. The analysis revealed a clear distinction between the activities performed by the participants who were at the beginning of their careers as teachers in higher education and those performed by the more veteran participants.

The novice participants who only had several months' to two years' seniority declared their professional activities to be associated mainly with the teaching component and with their efforts to be good and successful teachers. They considered teaching to be the main professional activity they had to perform, requiring many hours of work, including numerous consultations with students.

> You need to become a teacher, what are the core activities that you use, what are the key assignments that you do. Teach and program development is the bulk of what I do… Most of what I do is… advising… a lot of advising. [Ellen]
> I do a lot of program design, large scale of assessments, redesign our program, and meet with the students a lot. [Peter]

With regard to the scholarship component, the novice teachers were still at the pre-research stage in which they were scouting out interesting research topics. They were involved in a process of choosing a research topic or in filling out applications for research grants in collaboration with colleagues. They wanted their future research studies to have practical significance, to deal with topics taken from the world of teaching and practice, and to contribute to the improvement of their teaching. They declared that this component was not easy to put into practice, voiced their need for guidance, and requested the professional accompaniment of a colleague who had experience in conducting research. The teachers contended that because of the heavy teaching load, they were unable to free up sufficient time for research, and were therefore unable to engage in intensive research activity. The taxing demands of the teaching component compelled them to devote less time to scholarship, thus reducing their research product. Similar claims have been voiced in other studies (Becker, et al., 2003; Huber, 2002; Secret, et al., 2011). The heavy teaching load imposed by the teaching component engendered a feeling of constant struggle among the novices as well as a need to survive and preserve their jobs.

> ...we should … be provided with a research mentor who could help us and potentially collaborate with us for our research requirements. I have to make it something that is feasible within the context of my job, but we don't have a lot of time for research. [Annie]
>
> It is very difficult to find time to conduct and complete research projects. The requirements have to be a little bit more flexible. [Annie]

In their struggle for success, the novice teachers sought support among their colleagues and worked with them in informal collaborations that occurred in the departmental setting in the form of conversations about work matters and a dialog on the development of work approaches.

> These collaborations have fostered a spirit of support and shared mission. Interestingly, the architecture of our office suites creates a climate conducive to collaboration. We regularly meet in the shared conference center and discuss ideas and lessons. I think a departmental retreat could have been innovative. [Peter]

The veteran participants, whose seniority ranged between three and ten years of college teaching, conjured up a different picture with regard to their professional activities. While the teaching component occupied a significant and considerable place with them as well, they performed more activities that were identified with the two other components – scholarship and service. The activities in the latter components are diverse, and the veterans deemed them highly significant. They considered conducting research to be a prominent facet of the nature of their job, and as such it constitutes one of the job components of a teacher in higher education.

> When you are active and researching, it keeps you thinking in particular ways all the time, and so you are looking at the world with particular views that help you to continually develop. [Minnie]

The veterans' activities included conducting research studies, writing presentations, participating in conferences, serving as members of professional organizations and editorial boards as well as on internal, university, municipal, and national committees, building curricula, and setting achievement exams for the education system.

> In addition to teaching, I'm a committee member: a departmental committee, a college committee, and a national committee. I've just completed a small-scale research study, so that in addition to teaching, I also conduct research and write. At the moment, I'm working on a presentation for a big conference, and I'm being assisted by a student who's doing the literature review for me. [Nicole]

The third research question asks about the participants' perceptions regarding the contribution of the evaluation processes to their professional development. Their attitude toward the evaluation processes resembled their attitude toward the requirements they were obliged to fulfill on behalf of the institution. When they spoke about the evaluation, they used the pronoun "they" in reference to the institution's regulations and the activities the institution expected them

to perform. The attitude toward "their" (the institution's) demands obliged them to engage in professional activities; they felt obligated and deprived of choice:

> We are supposed to also be doing scholarship… doing research… I think they want the person in this role to be doing more presentations around the country and publishing. We are supposed to be doing something related to research. [Ellen]
> We have to do research, present, and remain very current. [Annie]

The participants declared that they were aware of the fact that according to the evaluation requirements, it was mandatory for them to conduct research and present it. They considered scholarship to be an obligation that had to be met in order to preserve their jobs, and deemed success in this component to be extremely significant for their advancement at the university. They stressed that they complied only because of the requirements, and that what they did was minor. They admitted that if there were no requirements to engage in scholarship, they would expend their time and energy solely on teaching. One of them stated that she was involved in teaching activities almost to the exclusion of anything else, and she knew that she was not meeting expectations.

> I am more of a teacher so I tend to pull myself from that direction, we'll see if I last… [Ellen]

As mentioned previously, the novice teachers were required to undergo the intensive professional accompaniment of a mentor as part of the evaluation process. They appreciated the value of this channel for their professional development. As is evident in other studies (Caffarella & Zinn, 1999; Foote & Solem, 2009; Gaye & Cullen, 1995; Guskey, 2003; Shulman, 1998), the participants declared that the accompaniment of mentors enabled them to improve the quality of their teaching. The fact that they could talk to an expert colleague and share topics that they usually had to deal with on an individual basis reinforced and empowered them. They compared their teaching abilities before and after the expert assistance, and identified progress, development, and improvement. The participants stressed that because the mentoring process was ongoing and consistent, they were able to see an improvement in their work and feel empowerment in their professionalism. When the collaboration succeeded, the participants considered it an important opportunity and took effective advantage of it.

> She [the mentor] did meet with me during my second semester on a weekly basis... since my first semester evaluations were so poor. I met with her constantly to discuss small details as regards things that I may not be aware of… We discussed what I was planning to teach the following week and she came to observe in each class I taught and we discussed her observations [feedback] in order to improve my performance… [Annie]
> I could not have survived without the caring, reflective mentoring I have received. [Peter]

One of the veteran participants did not view the evaluation process as something that motivated people to engage in professional activities. She considered such activities to be a part of her job as a teacher in an institution of higher education, and did not associate them with the evaluation processes that were held in the university. She deemed it important that in parallel to

teaching, every teacher engage in activities that enhance the profession and the good reputation of the university faculty.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations.

The findings of this small-scale study were subjected to an analytic generalization (Serow, 2000; Yin, 1994) that permits the presentation of conclusions and generic arguments. The conclusions may contribute to the understanding of central themes in the domain of the professional development of all those involved in higher education. The emergent picture shows that teachers in higher education perceive the evaluation process as an obligation imposed by the university, and as a taxing and stressful process for those wishing to succeed and preserve their jobs. In their first years of work, they devote most of their attention and energy to teaching and student consultations. An examination of the links between the evaluation process and their professional development yields two conclusions:

The first conclusion indicates that the evaluation process makes a significant contribution to the development of the professional activities required in the teaching component during the first years of working in higher education. The novice teachers viewed teaching as a task that must be accomplished properly so as to survive in the workplace and succeed. They considered success in teaching to be a first stage that would ensure their survival in their jobs. The mentoring channel that was obligatory in the evaluation framework prompted the teachers to expend time and effort in order to become more professional. Mentoring exerts a significant influence both on the development of teaching skills and on the nurturing of professional confidence. It makes a meaningful contribution to the development and cultivation of the tools, skills, and methods that constitute good, professional teaching. It enables teachers both formally and informally to conduct themselves as professionals, accompanied by an institution-appointed colleague. It is responsible for creating an atmosphere of shared responsibility, for reinforcing collaboration among colleagues, and for enabling experienced experts to empower beginners. As a result, teachers become professionalized, students gain better teachers, and the good reputation of the institution is bolstered.

By identifying the contribution of the combined mentoring–evaluation process to the teaching component, a recommendation to adopt the mentoring channel as part of the evaluation process can be made to the various departments in institutions of higher education. Through the mentoring channel, novice teachers receive professional accompaniment, while veterans are recruited to ensure that there is professional academic teaching in the institution in which they work.

The second conclusion indicates that the evaluation process does not exert a significant influence on the scholarship and service components. These components hardly benefit from the evaluation process, and they occupy a limited place in the first years of work. Because of the intensive involvement in teaching activities as well as a lack of experience in academia, there is no room for novice teachers to focus on any activity that is characterized by research or extra-institutional activities such as participating in international conferences, joining a professional peer community, becoming a member of the editorial board of a journal, or conducting inter-institutional research. The present study shows that as the participants' seniority increased, so did their confidence vis-à-vis job preservation and their understanding that professional development must include research and service. Their involvement in scholarship and service occupied a prominent place. One veteran teacher declared that she performed her research activity not because of a feeling of obligation to the institution or because of the evaluation

process, but rather because she was a teacher in higher education and had a commitment as a professional to be constantly involved in research, writing, and publishing.

Despite the limited scale of the study, it is recommended that the institutions of higher education take this conclusion into consideration when evaluating the professional development of beginning teachers. It is important to demonstrate flexibility with regard to scholarship and service. A further recommendation is to take into account the inherent advantages of seniority and experience. Teachers in higher education who wish to be professionals undergo a process as they accumulate seniority and experience – a process that enables them to channel their energy into practice in a broad range of professional fields. The more their seniority increases, the more their professional activities multiply in tandem to become a prominent part of their job.

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