

**Enacting Scenarios of Professional Learning:
An Ontological Examination of Professional Learning**

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- **Objectives or purposes**

In this paper we argue that teachers enact scenarios of professional learning in multifaceted ways, suggesting the existence of multiple ontologies of professional learning in schools. We investigate how professional learning is performed in the socio-material contexts of teaching and professional development. We argue that exploring the socio-material dimensions of professional learning provides contextualized insights on how school actors translate and recontextualize educational policy in their daily work.

- **Perspective(s) or theoretical framework(s)**

We adopt the position that we can understand the ontology of professional learning through an analysis that considers how policies are enacted (Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012). Using the conceptual notion of multiple ontologies proposed by Mol (1999; 2004), we argue that teachers enact different ontologies of professional learning as they go about their professional practice.

- **Methods, techniques, modes of inquiry.**

In this paper, we aim to put forward an argument about the nature of professional learning as an enactment of educational policies in order to raise questions about how we think about the ways in which policy is put in practice in school. To ground this argument in a practical context, this paper draws upon data collected through a study of professional learning in one school in Alberta, Canada, using semi-structured interviews and focus groups that included open-ended questions meant to give the participants the opportunity to describe their experiences in relation to professional learning. The interviews were transcribed and analysed for emerging themes.

- **Data sources**

The data was obtained during a study in 2009 that examined the idiosyncratic ways in which teachers enacted the scenarios of professional learning in a school in rural Alberta in Canada and builds upon other work in which the authors theorize about the different scenarios of professional learning (Riveros & Viczko, 2012). In this paper, we contextualize the saliency of examining policy enactment by reflecting on data that examined how teachers talked about their professional learning to ontologically examine professional learning.

- **Results and/or conclusions**

We note that professional learning in schools is not performed as a discrete event that occurs in a single scenario, but instead, we observe that professional learning is ontologically diverse. The multiple ways in which professional learning is performed suggest the existence of simultaneous enactments of professional learning that coexist in schools. When professional learning is conceived of in its material multiplicity, we are better suited to understand how educational policy is enacted in the classroom, how teachers' professional learning emerges in the context of their daily lives, and how such learning is embedded into their practice of teaching.

- **Relevance or importance to educational administration and leadership**

Professional learning is the concern of many policy initiatives in Canada (Riveros, Newton & Burgess, 2012). The idea of multiple ontologies of professional learning requires a shift in how policy makers, administrators and practitioners conceive of and develop strategies aimed at transforming teaching practices.

- **Connection to conference theme**

Discourses on school reform have positioned teacher learning as a key mechanism of educational change and subsequently, professional development has entered the agenda of educational policy makers in several jurisdictions around the globe. The perceived need to align teaching practices with the goals of reform (Blackmore, 2010) has given visibility to a number of contradictions and tensions between the realities of teaching practices and the realities of educational reform.

References

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