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Discipline Context shapes Meaningful Teaching– a Case Study of Academic Law

The relationship between academic disciplines and teaching has been thoroughly investigated. However, most studies define disciplines by their epistemological properties and thereby overlook contextual and local interpretations of disciplines. This case study based on in-depth interviews with nine academic lawyers examines the interrelatedness between discipline, teaching and context. It identifies discipline characteristics and shared understandings of teaching in a specific context. The results imply that teaching is shaped by its disciplinary context, and thus support literature stating that discipline matters for teaching. However, the analysis also reveal that discipline does not translate into teaching without difficulties. The study emphasises local differences - what is perceived meaningful for law teachers in one context differs in others. Thus, this study dismiss the notion of disciplines as unitary entities. Further, the article discusses the dangers of categorising statements about teaching without considering context.

Keywords: teaching; discipline; sociocultural theories; practice; law education

Introduction

The relationship between higher education teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning and the way they teach is well-described in the literature (Prosser and Trigwell 1997; Norton et al. 2005; Martin et al. 2000; Kane, Sandretto, and Heath 2002). Within this strand of research, a number of studies have found a relation between teaching and disciplinary affiliation , and further, that there is evidence that disciplines' epistemological structures as well as social aspects influence the way teachers perceive their students, their goals and assessment and feedback (Lueddeke 2003; Neumann 2001; Neumann, Parry, and Becher 2002; Smeby 1996). In recent years, there has been a growing interest in supporting teachers' understanding of their disciplines' distinctive features in order to guide students to become better learners. The literature on for example Ways of Thinking and Practicing (McCune and Hounsell 2005, 255-289) and signature pedagogies (Shulman 2005) contribute to our understanding of the

discipline as the relevant unit of analysis when we want to understand higher education teaching and learning. However, most of these studies perceive academic disciplines as unitary entities, without taking into account local, contextual factors influencing disciplines. Thus, the discipline is conceptualised as having essential epistemological properties across contexts. As a result, disciplines become generative in nature and processes of negotiation are overlooked.

Recently, there has been a call for research looking further into the mechanisms and variation in disciplinary practices (Trowler 2009). Roxå and Mårtensson identified how the success of academic development was dependent on a negotiation of its relevance at the meso-level (Roxå and Mårtensson 2013) and therefore it is interesting to move beyond the individual teacher's perception of teaching and instead scrutinise the contextual and social aspects of teaching (Ashwin 2012, 19). This paper responds to this need in current literature by shedding light on the complex relationship between teaching, discipline, and context. The intention is not to identify a signature pedagogy for law which has already been done (Shulman 2005, 52-59; Cownie 2004). On the contrary, the intention is to provide a detailed insight into teachers' understanding and interpretation of their discipline in a specific context by using a specific case study of an academic law department in Denmark. By doing so, the study makes it possible to illuminate how the discipline context shapes the way teachers ascribe meaning to their local teaching practice.

Through the illustrative case of academic law, this study answers two research questions:

- 1) How do teachers in a specific local setting understand and interpret the characteristics of their discipline?
- 2) To what extent is their teaching shaped by the discipline context?

Discipline and Teaching

Since Kuhn defined disciplines in terms of their scientific knowledge captured in paradigms, academic disciplines have most commonly been defined by their epistemological characteristics (Kuhn 2015). Especially Biglan's classification of disciplines according to the extent to which they were paradigmatic and applied have been influential (Biglan 1973; Jones 2011, 9-24). Clark (1987, 89) argued that there is an 'epistemological determination of work'. For instance, in relation to research strategies, publication and cooperation patterns as well as recruitment. Becher (1989) argued that disciplines have inherent social traits and cultural characteristics. In relation to teaching and learning, Neumann (2001) and Neumann, Parry, and Becher (2002) identified systematic pedagogical differences in epistemologically different disciplines. Teachers belonging to the hard sciences tended to prefer a quantitative, linear curriculum in relation to content as well as assessment whereas teachers from the soft sciences preferred a qualitative, spirally structured curriculum with other types of assessment such as essays, oral exams and peer-assessment. Further, authors also identified differences in teaching methods: hard science teachers preferred lectures whereas teachers of soft disciplines preferred small-group teaching. Similarly, Lindblom-Ylänne, Trigwell, Nevgi and Ashwin (2006) found that teachers from hard disciplines tended to report teacher-focused approaches to teaching, whereas teachers from soft disciplines reported more student-centred teaching. In line with these findings, Donald (2002) argued that different disciplines have different logical structures, strategies for researching and validating knowledge and consequently teaching and learning environments are different by nature in different disciplines.

In all of these studies, the discipline is conceptualised based on its epistemology. This has in recent literature been called a strong epistemological essentialism when disciplines are assumed to possess essential properties that are generative of behaviour (Trowler 2009, 181-

195). Studies within this frame tend to understate the significance of internal tensions and multiple narratives within disciplines, and thus focus on disciplines as unitary entities. This is problematic if we want to know how and why teaching is conducted as it is. The focus on the perception of teaching-learning environments emphasised in especially studies of teachers' approaches to teaching (Prosser and Trigwell 1997, 25-35; Lindblom-Ylänne et al. 2006, 285-298; Trigwell, Prosser, and Waterhouse 1999, 57-70) will downplay social processes and foreground psychological perceptions (Ashwin 2012, 36). Instead, Knight and Trowler (2000) suggest that teaching is better understood in a sociocultural perspective in which practices emerge and reproduce in local surroundings.

Sociocultural Theories of Disciplines, Teaching and Learning

Among sociocultural studies of disciplinary cultures, research into for example Ways of Thinking and Practicing (McCune and Hounsell 2005, 255-289) has already shown how teaching and learning are meaningfully constructed in complex disciplinary contexts. Similarly, Quinlan (1999) found that disciplinarity interacts with several different social aspects of university life. She showed how historians in the same university department shared perceptions of goals, students, and role of the teacher. Nevertheless, at the same time the teachers consistently differed in their views on other themes, such as structure of knowledge, purpose of teaching and course organisation. Fanghanel (2009, 576) called for a reintroduction of complexity without losing sight of the 'historicist, paradigmatic and epistemological dimensions' of disciplines. The moderate epistemological essentialist position accommodate this. Disciplines are defined as

...reservoirs of knowledge resources which, in dynamic combination with other structural phenomena, can condition behavioural practices, sets of discourses, ways of thinking, procedures, emotional responses and motivations. Together this constellation of factors results in structured dispositions for disciplinary

practitioners who reshape them in different practice clusters into localised repertoires. (Trowler 2014, 1720-1731, 1728)

This conceptualisation of disciplines offers a wider scope for examining disciplinary influence on teaching and learning. To understand how teachers interpret their disciplines in a concrete context, it is necessary to look at not only teachers' reservoir of knowledge but also their discourses, their emotional responses and their understanding of the history of their discipline. Trowler argues that 'workgroups which engage together on common projects over extended periods of time develop a set of contextual specific characteristics' (Trowler 2008). Accordingly, this study seeks to identify the meaning teachers ascribe to their practices in relation to the discipline they teach and inhabit.

Method

To answer the research questions it was necessary to examine a teaching environment in depth. Consequently, the case study design was selected. It was conducted in a law department at a large research-intensive Danish university. The purpose was to illuminate the *whys* of teaching and the meaning teachers ascribed to their actions. Data was collected during nine in-depth interviews with teachers of academic law. As the purpose of the study was to examine local academic practice, teachers were recruited from the same department and they all taught on the same programmes (undergraduate and graduate law). Participants were strategically sampled based on four criteria 1) teachers teaching public and private law, 2) teachers from the majority of mandatory courses, 3) male as well as female teachers at all career levels, 4) research as well as teaching experience. The director of studies identified 15 teachers who met these criteria. They were all invited to participate; nine accepted. All nine participants had Danish nationality and had completed their law degree in Denmark.

Interviewees are not further described to ensure their anonymity. To allow teachers to elaborate on their experiences and to take up themes that came to mind during their interview, a semi-structured interview was used. The interview guide focused on teachers' experiences with teaching. Teachers were asked to describe their teaching practice (e.g., 'what do you do when you teach this course?'), their exams (e.g., 'will you describe what you look for in an assignment?') and their students (e.g., 'how would you describe a typical law student?'). The purpose was to focus on their actions and the meanings ascribed to them. Furthermore, they were asked to explain their subject and the purpose and characteristics of the discipline. Interviews were conducted throughout summer term 2014 and lasted between 55 minutes and 2.5 hours. Approximately eleven hours of interviews were transcribed verbatim. A total of 300 pages were produced. All names used in the analysis are pseudonyms.

Steps in the qualitative Data Analysis

Data were firstly analysed using thematic analysis with an inductive approach (Boyatzis 1998). Five overarching themes and one subtheme were identified. Only two of the themes were further analysed for this article: one about the nature of academic law and one about how to teach law. These two themes related directly to the research question and descriptions were extensive. The thematic coding produced 59 pages of explanations about the nature of law and 75 pages of descriptions of teaching. To conduct an in-depth analysis of the material, a semantic analysis was undertaken. Firstly, each of the two themes were re-read in context. Secondly, data were coded with open codes looking for descriptions of either law or teaching to allow data to structure the analysis. Thirdly, all codes were listed and identified common features among codes which allowed categorisation into groups of semantic clusters. Fourthly, all categories were given a label to summarise the meaning of the codes. This line of analysis helped draw pieces of data together in patterns of meaning (Feldman 1995, 24).

Patterns were displayed in tables, which formed the basis of further analysis (see Table 1 and 2).

In the coding phase, different approaches were undertaken to code the two themes. A semantic approach was undertaken to gain access to different clusters of meaning expressed by teachers when they talked about their discipline (Feldman 1995). All statements of the type ‘law is....’ were coded. These phrasings were particularly frequent – approximately 50 unique statements and many statements occurred more than once. Teachers had a strong sense of their discipline indicated by the explicitness of statements, the broadness of the vocabulary they used and the richness of examples. The statements were grouped into categories constituting the discipline. In contrast to the thick descriptions of the discipline, only very few statements of the kind ‘teaching is...’ were identified. Teachers did not provide such clear statements about their teaching as they did about their discipline. Instead, the material was scrutinised for statements where teachers used metaphoric language to describe what they did (e.g., “I try to structure students’ paths of thought”). A metaphor is the ‘understanding one domain of experience (that is typically abstract) in terms of another (that is typically concrete)’ (Kövecses 2017, 13). Statements where teachers used metaphoric language to describe an aspect of their teaching were identified and coded. In order to test the face validity, the final analysis was presented to the director of studies and a group of 40 teachers and practicing lawyers who fully recognised the descriptive features of their discipline.

Results

The analysis showed that it is possible to identify different constituting dimensions of the discipline of law wherein some dimensions related to the content and methods of the

discipline and others related to the values, the relations to society, and the traditions of the discipline. Table 1 shows the themes, a summary of their content and the in vivo codes. As can be seen in Table 1, most of the themes were present in all nine interviews, whereas two themes were identified in seven and six interviews.

[Table 1 around here]

Academic Virtues

The first theme concerned the content of the discipline described as the virtues of law in academia. The words in the first column do not only mirror knowledge properties but also the teachers' understanding of their discipline's characteristics. The discipline was described as well organised, a system where everything was connected and related. Further, language and the ability to speak and write correctly were important virtues in the discipline. Teachers experienced the content as mathematical and systematic. They emphasised the structure and the logic as characterising the discipline's content. The following quotes illustrate this point.

[The discipline] law is mathematical in a way I cannot account for but there is some kind of system in it. (Henrietta)

There is an inner coherence in these systems and this coherence is not for discussion. (John)

John emphasised that the text was a given, non-negotiable curriculum defined by the legislative power of the state. The law, the written text, was perceived as defining the area in which the academic lawyer could work and this was not to be discussed. Therefore, it was important not to be normative - one teacher described it as having solid ground under his feet.

For him that meant to check and double-check evidence before making a claim. In line with this, the language and the ability to master the legal discourse was perceived as a crucial ability because precision was an academic virtue. As rules and laws were written, the precise language was a key prerequisite to be able to navigate in the discipline. Specific words defined content with specific meanings and associations. Teachers explained how novices would reveal their lack of understanding if they mispronounced words or used them in a false context. To master the discipline, students had to understand the latent structure of law.

Techniques of Law

The firmness of the academic virtues were challenged by the techniques of the discipline. The second theme captured descriptions of different techniques and methods teachers brought up in statements about the nature of law. In contrast to stable and structured academic virtues, the methods were described as dynamic and context dependent. This contradiction went seemingly unacknowledged by the teachers. Further, where teachers had no trouble talking about the content of their discipline in clear statements, they had more difficulties defining the properties of their method as shown in this quote from Daniel.

Law is a way of thinking and I don't think you can get many lawyers to tell you what legal method is. It is super elusive but it is somewhat hermeneutic. It is a way of understanding, a way of thinking with which you solve legal problems.

(Daniel)

Without exceptions, all teachers described legal method as the most important thing students would have to learn. They described legal method as a process where you sort material, find the relevant facts and focus on these. They defined law as hermeneutic, dialogical, flexible, and as a way of thinking. In the following quote, Eric explains how the method, the process, is the basic foundation for the discipline.

Our decision process is constructed as a dialogue between two persons defending their different standpoints. That is the basic idea, right? It is kind of Socratic. (Eric)

The almost tacit or at least impalpable notion of law as method was in apparent contradiction with the systematic, well-defined boundaries of the discipline. The descriptions of the disciplines' scientific properties (content and methods) in this context revealed an internal tension that teachers had no difficulty to accommodate. Teachers talked about the dynamic relationship between content and method and that mastering the dialogical approach was a prerequisite for understanding the discipline.

Virtues, Society and History

Further, the analysis showed that the discipline consisted of more than its knowledge properties and methods. A crucial part of teachers' statements about their discipline related to its values, its relationship with society, and its history. The three columns to the right in table 1 illustrate these themes.

Teachers described how the discipline had great responsibility to contribute to a well-functioning society. The following quote exemplifies this.

A society without law wouldn't be a society. It wouldn't be a well-ordered society. The opposite of a well-ordered society is an anarchistic and chaotic society, so I guess that's bottom line. If we didn't have law we needed to invent it. (James)

Teachers shared the opinion that academic law owed to society to take on this responsibility and along with this came a moral obligation to serve society and country. Several teachers mentioned that it was necessary to be a decent human being to be a lawyer.

It is not okay to be an unengaged judge. [Students] have to make an effort because it is a profession. Thus, we have a responsibility: when we graduate, we should master the required skills. Then one can expect of us to be able to acquaint ourselves with a field of law and do a proper job. (Henrietta)

The worst thing someone can say to you is that you are not well prepared. That would be the most humiliating – it is the worst thing that can happen to a lawyer. (Roger)

Norms and values such as equality, predictability and quality were emphasised by the teachers when they described the discipline. The obligation to society - as the educators of professionals - was predominant. There was a strong sense of duty – not only to current society but also to the legal tradition. The majority of interviewees stressed the historic and traditional values. They referred to law as a long-standing discipline. Teachers stressed that law has a long tradition as a university discipline and present practices build upon these – as a foundation. They described it as a matter of continuity where teachers experienced themselves as a part of an ongoing narrative.

Somehow, it is an academic milieu, where you sustain or it is like there, metaphorically speaking, is a tacit dress code you simply adhere to and develop the academic tradition. (...) That is why I feel a responsibility to continue the existing tradition. (James)

It was valued and gave a sense of belonging to a community but at the same time, Daniel described how it also made the discipline ‘aggravating conservative’. For him that meant routines and habits were difficult to change; things were done in the same way in so many years that they became uncontested.

The presented themes illustrate the complex nature of the discipline. The discipline was not only understood by its knowledge but equally by its values, relationship with society, and its tradition. The discipline was described as precise and systematic, and at the same time flexible and dialogical. This seemed to pose no conflict in teachers' understanding of their discipline. In summary, teachers of law described their discipline as a traditional discipline founded on a number of values associated with an ideal society and with a responsibility to uphold the order of a well-ordered society. They experienced their job as a duty with a heavy responsibility. Becoming a lawyer depended on students' ability to think, act and talk in a certain way. In the following, it is shown how this translated into teaching.

How Teaching and Discipline are intertwined

The analysis revealed that for law teachers, *how* they taught made sense in relation to *what* they taught. Thus, the purpose of this section is to illustrate how teaching is explained and grounded in the structures of the discipline in this specific context.

Table 2 is a listing of sentences used by the interviewees to describe teaching. The first column shows the verbs and the second column shows the nouns which they expressed in metaphoric language.

[Table 2 around here]

One noticeable element was the direction of the verbs when teachers talked about teaching. Teachers experienced teaching as giving. The activity was mainly on the teacher's part. He or she was responsible for delivering, for example structure, to students. Many nouns refer to structure or to a system to be revealed for students, which echoes the

academic virtues. Several teachers stressed the importance of the discipline's history for current teaching practices. Roger specifically emphasised the age of the discipline and how tradition affected how he and others taught.

It is an age-old university discipline. It is a fact you cannot ignore; such an old discipline has some traditions, which for good or bad affect the way we teach.

(Roger)

A couple of teachers mentioned how legal textbooks were traditionally based on transcripts of oral lectures. For them, a teacher of academic law stepped into the history of law teaching and its strong tradition for lectures. Thus, the foundation of law was also a foundation of a way of teaching.

The societal and the academic virtues came through in teachers' descriptions: successful teaching was mostly the responsibility of the teacher and for more than one reason a lecture was a self-evident choice of teaching method. Teachers experienced their content as given within basic structures that were already established. The purpose of teaching was for students to receive and understand the structure. Several teachers stressed that it was not a matter of transmission. In fact, students had to be well prepared and had to be able to apply their knowledge to legal problems but as they were not yet fully aware of the relationship between different legal areas, teaching was a matter of revealing a structure – *handing over* an overview. Consequently, teachers took the responsibility to *give* students a *framework* or to *show* them how the material was all interrelated.

During a lecture, it is possible to show the connection points and give them the structure, totally. You might as well do that in a lecture as in a small class setting. (John)

John underlined why he was fond of lectures compared to small group teaching. As his aim was to *show connection points*, a lecture was the perfect way to initiate students into his insights. John and others stressed that lectures were and always had been suitable for illustrating structure and coherence.

Then, you can make sure that all the students get the same teaching and more importantly the same qualified teaching. The problem is when structure is so important for their opportunity to understand - not only to remember but also to understand - you start to gamble when you change lectures into small class teaching. (John)

This quote from John shows how teaching is also a matter of equity. Many teachers would prefer small class teaching where teachers would be able to interact with students. However, for John it was important that students received the same teaching and qualified teaching. He could not be sure that teaching assistants or external lecturers would be able to present the structure as clearly as he could. The preserving role of law and its role in society came through when teachers talked about education. Teachers believed that the undergraduate programme was the prerequisite basis for all lawyers and a necessity for graduates to be able to fulfil their role in society. Hence, content and structure of the undergraduate programme had to be maintained and only changed if it was absolutely necessary.

Sometimes one realises that change is perceived as good per se, but it challenges the discipline of law, you see, because thoughts of legality are crucial in the discipline. Remember, predictability is a part of the lawyer's DNA. That is, we only make changes if change makes sense. (James)

The virtues of law were the same across contexts. Predictability was important in the way a lawyer acted in society and equally important in the way an academic lawyer acted in the university. To prepare students for their profession, all teachers stressed the importance of using examples to show students how rules were applied in everyday situations.

My starting point is examples. It might be court rulings. I am very lucky to teach a subject with good stories and then I try to build it up and say why do we end up with the result we do. (Sharon)

As Sharon's quote indicates, teaching was very much about presenting relevant content in a structured manner. Teachers told how they drew systems and scales on the blackboard to illustrate structure and ways of thinking. All teachers brought in examples, pictures or legal documents to help students see how the legal material related to real life problems. They went through assignments in the same manner students were expected to do. They spent time on explicating the dialogical structure of the legal method, showing students how to build an argument and saying the words out loud in the right way. The tension between the discipline as a well-ordered system on one side and as a flexible method on the other was no challenge for teachers to master but the complex relationship between content and method was difficult for teachers to transfer to their teaching. Teachers taught and students listened which favoured the content element but for their exams, students were expected to be able to master the methods as well.

One reason for teachers' focus on content was that the majority of teachers felt that students needed to study a couple of years before they had acquired sufficient legal knowledge to take part in discussions. Judith believed that students needed the basic understanding of the system prior to discussion of legal matters.

If you make first-semester students discuss, it is like letting go of 10 000 tennis balls from fourth floor height. They jump in all directions. We usually say to students in first year that their arguments are like a bag of potatoes thrown onto the floor. Instead, they have to be put nicely into line. (Judith)

It was not a matter of mistrust in students' abilities to learn. Teachers felt responsible to deliver the necessary structure and thereby guide students' effort. Many teachers faced some challenges with students who were not as capable of applying legal methods as the teachers had hoped. Consequently, some of the teachers had given up on the students in the sense that they took over the students responsibilities by *spoon-feeding* them or by lecturing through small group classes. Some of them talked about the possibility of leaving the classroom when students were ill prepared but they decided that students had the right to 'receive teaching' and that it was the teacher's obligation to society to continue – in spite of a lack of enthusiasm from students.

To sum up, the local interpretation of the discipline came through in teachers' descriptions of their teaching. All the elements of the multifaceted discipline emerged in reasons for teaching. Thus, the teaching of content and methods were deeply embedded in teachers' understanding of the values, virtues, and traditions of the legal discipline.

Discussion

Addressing the questions posed in the beginning of the paper, this study finds that it was possible to identify characteristics of the discipline based on the interviewed teachers' descriptions. The characteristics relate to content as well as methods and relations to history and surrounding society. The moderate essentialist position adopted to analyse this context has the advantage of being able to show how the apparent tension between firmness and predictability in content versus flexible, hermeneutic application of methods is so embedded

in teachers' way of thinking that they do not verbalise it or even acknowledge its presence. The results presented show how teaching is congruent with the ways teachers understand their discipline. Teachers draw and present, they make links and connections to guide students into the system and the logic of an important discipline rich in traditions. For teachers, good teaching has to be fair and equal. It needs to present the right structure in the right words in accordance with their understanding of their discipline and in that sense teaching is shaped by the disciplinary features expressed by teachers. Similarly, McCune and Hounsell (2005) found that teachers' chose assessment strategies and teaching-learning activities that were congruent with their specific interpretation of the discipline.

The findings of this article show that the contradictions, tensions, and richness of discipline values are intertwined with teaching. Thus, it becomes easier to understand why change of teaching practices is so difficult (Trowler 2008). If teaching is attached to discipline values, changing of teaching might challenge a disciplinary self-understanding and academic identities (Healey and Jenkins 2003). Despite the fact that there are limited number of studies available, it is widely acknowledged that lectures are inefficient for promoting thinking compared to more engaging activities (Bligh 2000, 8-10) and many teachers lecture out of necessity due to the number of students or economic constraints. However, in this case an additional factor has to be added to understand why lectures are sometimes preferred. That factor is disciplinary dispositions. This local interpretation of law makes this type of instruction meaningful. Teachers' reasoning illustrated what they had agreed upon among their colleagues. This supports the moderate position towards disciplines, acknowledging the social aspects and the on-going negotiations (Trowler 2014). In this specific context, teachers shared the understanding that the lecture was a valuable teaching method because it gave priority to important aspects of their discipline. Had the present analysis only addressed teachers' statements about teaching and not their perception of their discipline, teachers could

be categorised as teacher-focused as many of them talked about delivering content to students with the teacher as the primary actor. Wegner and Nückles (2015) argue in line with previous research that teacher-oriented approaches are lowest in the hierarchy of teaching approaches. However, this would label a group of highly dedicated law teachers as unsophisticated in their approaches to teaching. It would be a meaningful theoretical categorisation based on teachers' statements about teaching but it would be very far from a meaningful contextual categorisation. Their teaching might not be expedient for promoting student learning but it is not easily changed because the understanding of teaching is deeply rooted in the understanding of the discipline.

Another relevant question is how consistent the identified relationship between discipline and teaching is across contexts. That is, how far is it possible to infer conclusions from this small case study? One could fairly ask whether the identified tensions and type of teaching in this study could be found in other law departments supporting a position towards disciplines that gives priority to knowledge structures and epistemological traits across contexts. In fact, features of law in this setting resembles law in other settings. For example, Donald's extensive description of the features of academic law in an American university setting resembles the categories of the present analysis. She quotes a law professor (2002, 181):

The main goal of the course is to develop students' ability to "do law", which requires a high degree of analytic ability. Although this ability requires understanding and knowledge of the legal system, it comprises much more. Most essential for students to learn in this course is how to think like lawyers.

The skills and methods of analysis and procedure are developed through this methodology.

In this statement, the law professor emphasises students' need to learn the legal methods. The content knowledge is acknowledged but learning to *think* like a lawyer is the main goal. The interviewees of this study would most likely agree with this. Shulman writes in his analysis of the signature pedagogy of the legal profession that students questioned fairness of legal decisions and instructors answered 'that they were there to learn the law, not to learn what was fair – which was another matter entirely' (Shulman 2005, 56). In the present context, teachers presented similar arguments. They stressed that students needed to learn not to pity the charged no matter which life situation he or she was in because it was of no relevance to the legal judgement. Even more striking in resemblance is Cownie's description of English doctrinal law: 'The doctrinal or 'black letter' tradition assumes that the law is an internally coherent and unified body of rules, which are derived from a small number of general principles. It is the job of the (doctrinal) academic lawyer to describe and explain these general principles' (Cownie 2012, 56). Cownie's description of a coherent and unified body of rules resembles the virtues of academic law in this context. Law is described as mathematical, logical, and systematic. Based on the above mentioned studies, we could expect similarities in ways of teaching as well. However, that does not seem to be the case. Shulman shows how discussion classes is preferred (Shulman 2005, 53), Donald describes case based learning as the natural choice (Donald 2002, 178), the legal school in Bergen teaches problem based learning (Wilhelmsen 2014, 311) and in this case, lectures and small class tutorials are chosen. These examples show how apparent similar understandings of the legal discipline create different meaningful teaching behaviour. Consequently, it becomes difficult to talk about a 'signature pedagogy' for law across multiple settings. The act of

teaching is always embedded in social, local practices giving priority to some aspects of the discipline over others. Understanding discipline features make us able to understand something about the type of knowledge needed to become a successful member of the discipline - in this case academic law. However, it is not enough to understand why law is taught differently across settings. The discipline seems to be a necessary but not sufficient element in understanding how teaching is made intelligible. We must add the level of local interpretation and sociocultural dynamics to the analysis, which is also stressed by Quinlan (1999).

What is to be learned from this analysis is the complex relationship between the discipline, the context and teaching which together form a set of interrelated practices. By isolating statements about teaching, the meaningfulness of actions is overlooked and categorisation is in danger of becoming too simple. By looking solely at discipline as epistemological structures, we are in danger of making them unified entities with limited options for variation and development (Trowler 2012, 19-21). Instead, guided by practice theories and moderate positions towards discipline it becomes possible to understand why law teachers in this context do not strive for students to define their own concepts or discuss their opinions. Some of the teachers prefer lectures, because lectures give priority to their academic virtues: structure, logic, precision and language. Teachers find it necessary that students learn basic structures before they engage with the material – students need to know the boundaries of the system to have a qualified discussion. On the other side, they also want students to work independently between classes, to possess organic knowledge and to be able to master legal method. However, the techniques are so elusive, a way of seeing and understanding, that these are rarely addressed and practiced with students. The discipline practice does not translate into a teaching practice without difficulties. Teachers do not

verbalise their implicit understandings of the relationship between the academic virtues and the techniques of law. Because teachers' do not experience the tension of the discipline, they find it hard to grasp why students struggle so much applying legal knowledge. It is paradoxical but it makes sense in this context.

Some limitations should be considered. First, the number of interviews were limited to nine. This could have downplayed conflictual elements in perceptions of values, goals and accounts of teaching. Teachers were recruited to cover as much of the study programme as possible but the analysis will inevitable be a certain interpretation of the discipline made by these nine teachers. Conflicting accounts will exist in the same department. Second, the single case study of one department limits the possibility of comparing the influence of discipline and context respectively. The focus of this analysis has been a thorough investigation of one setting. However, future research could add to these findings by interviewing more people across contexts and across disciplines. Another interesting aspect would be to examine a disciplinary community over time to explore the stability and change in their interpretations of discipline and teaching.

Conclusion

This article presents an example of how teaching is shaped in the context of an academic law department. The paper examines a local interpretation of academic law characteristics and shows how discipline and teaching is connected in teachers' reasoning. This study illustrates the importance of analysing this complex relationship. The sum of nine teachers' accounts of what they did when they taught and how they perceived their discipline bring insights into how academic law consist of more than its knowledge properties. It is also shown how discipline and teaching form a meaningful whole and how teaching is constructed in

correspondence with values and goals of the discipline and how this resulted in inexpedient teaching-learning activities challenging students as well as teachers. The results are not contradictory to former studies of the discipline (academic law). Instead, it adds to our understanding of teaching as a part of a larger practice where some things make better sense than others do and points to the fact that the same discipline might be interpreted differently elsewhere. The interpretations are tacit in nature and exist unacknowledged which illustrates why development work can be a very challenging activity.

The findings are not just relevant in the context of law. The article contributes to the existing literature in two ways. First, the article adds to our knowledge about the importance of disciplines. The study supports the claim that discipline matters for teaching by showing how the understanding of the discipline becomes guiding for choice of teaching methods. Second, the article raises the awareness of the importance of acknowledging the local, social context in which the discipline is embedded. The interpretation of discipline is rooted in an ongoing negotiation – in this case about how law is usually taught. In that sense, this study supports the recent turn towards social practice theories and calls for further studies across contexts.

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Table 1. Themes identified in teachers' description of law

Themes	Virtues of law in academia	Techniques of law	Interdependence between law and society	Virtues of law in society	Foundation of law
Summary of content (number of interviews in which the theme occurred)	The discipline of law is a well-ordered system where borders and features are not to be discussed. (9)	Doing law is acting law. The methods are crucial and defining. (9)	There is strong interdependence between society and law. One cannot work without the other. (9)	The discipline of law has normative features that guide appropriate behaviour. (7)	The discipline of law is old, has a long history and is well founded in the university. (6)
In vivo codes	Language Precision The scale Systematic Structure Mathematic A code It's not a laissez-faire game Very tight Stand on solid ground Concrete Individual Geeky	Method Tools Hermeneutic Socratic Hands-on A pair of glasses to see the world through Dialogue To exchange facts to law A way of thinking Understanding	Profession Society Reality An expensive method Slow Practical Reason and sensibility Callous process	Decency Legal norms Responsibility for society To find the truth Quality A good process Thorough Prosaic and stringent Predictability Equality Proportionality Correct Human	Tradition A shared understanding Classic questions An age-old university discipline A product of the Enlightenment Conservative

Table 2. Teachers' statements of what teaching is.

Teaching is to....	
Verbs	Nouns
spoon feed	-
give	tools
give	more and more pieces for a puzzle
give	more angles
give	a framework for an assignment
give	structure
teach	structure
show	connection points
hand over	an overview
draw	lines
put into	frame
gather	the threads
guide	on the right path
condense	metres of books
equip [students]	for monopoly