

# **The (trans)formative power of purpose and projectivity: a case study of teaching aimed to strengthen students' capacities for taking social responsibility**

Ester Fremstad

## **Abstract**

*The present study illustrates the educational power of purpose and projectivity if our aim is for students to become able to make socially responsible decisions and to act on their judgment. The study is based on interviews with academic teachers and analyses of course descriptions. Two empirical cases are analysed through the lens of 'practical reasoning' (Colby & Sullivan, 2008) and 'agency' (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) and illustrate the formative and transformative potential of 'purpose' and 'projectivity' for students, disciplines, professions, and society. The study contributes an empirical and conceptual basis for discussing what educating for social responsibility requires and a framework for analysing and planning teaching.*

*Keywords: agency, practical reasoning, professional responsibility, social responsibility*

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Corresponding author: Ester Fremstad, University of Oslo,  
Norway (ester.fremstad@link.uio.no).*

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## **Introduction**

Universities have a cultural and societal commitment to educate societally responsible professionals and citizens (Bologna Process Beyond, 2019; East, Stokes, & Walker, 2014; Kalleberg, 2011; Sutphen, Solbrekke, & Sugrue, 2018). During the last few decades, however, we have witnessed an increasingly instrumental discourse on teaching and learning in higher education that no longer views students as potential contributors to public good but rather as private investors in individual employability skills (Williams, 2016, p. 628). To sustain and revitalise the cultural and democratic obligation of higher education, we cannot settle for 'limited representations of learning, and societal and professional practices that weaken our potential commitment to the common good' (McEwen &

Trede, 2016, p. 225). Rather, we need to see beyond cognitive understandings of learning, instrumental understandings of graduate ‘attributes’ (Colby & Sullivan, 2008; Macfarlane, 2004; McEwen & Trede, 2016) and narrow economic understandings of public good (East et al., 2014, p. 1617). There is, however, a growing gap between research on teaching and learning and the literature focusing on broader societal and political contexts and the purpose of higher education (East et al., 2014; Macfarlane, 2004; Malcolm & Zukas, 2001; McEwen & Trede, 2016). This must be bridged if the societal and cultural commitments of higher education are to influence studies of and approaches to teaching and learning. Elaborated on and illustrated through two empirical cases, the present study proposes a set of interrelated analytical concepts that contribute to such a bridge.

First, I will examine the literature addressing societal responsibility in curriculum and teaching. Thereafter, I outline the analytical framework that combines Colby and Sullivan’s (2008) concept of *practical reasoning* and Emirbayer and Mische’s concept of *agency*. After presenting the method and material of the study, two cases are described, one from law and one from human geography. The cases are then analysed using the analytical concepts. The analysis illustrates the analytical and practical potential of the proposed conceptual framework, as well as the educational power of purpose and projectivity. In the concluding discussion, I discuss some general implications for conceptualisations and approaches to teaching in higher education and for further research.

### **Societal responsibility in curriculum and teaching**

An important strand of literature emphasises that instead of regarding learning as purely cognitive and individual, we must approach learning as identity-forming participation in communities of practice, where students identify with (or reject) knowledge, practices, and values (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Sfard, 1998; Colby & Sullivan, 2008; Sullivan & Rosin, 2008). Nurturing students’ capacity to make decisions and act according to professional and societal commitments and preparing them ‘to have the vision, the will, and the political savvy to create the kinds of institutions that we want to be creating us and future generations’ (Colby & Sullivan, 2008, p. 425) has been a significant agenda for both liberal and professional education, preparing students for responsible practice in professional and civic life (Fremstad, 2016; Macfarlane, 2004; Solbrekke & Englund, 2011; Sullivan & Rosin, 2008; Walker, 2018).

The literature in this vein makes evident that the cognitive capacity for critical thinking, highlighted across disciplines as the essential learning outcome in higher education, is insufficient if our aim is that students become able to make

responsible decisions and act on their judgment. Such capacities require combining critical thinking with practical and moral considerations (Colby & Sullivan, 2008; McEwen & Trede, 2016; Solbrekke et al., 2016), and it requires nurturing the will to engage with and influence future discourses, practices, and institutions (Colby & Sullivan, 2008; Fremstad, 2016; Solbrekke & Sugrue, 2020). In this regard, existing studies highlight the need for a vocabulary to address ‘learning about broader moral, political, and cultural issues in higher education’ (Sutphen & de Lange, 2015, p. 411) and to build ‘conceptual bridges between understandings of the societal and political context of higher education, epistemological enquiry, and discussions on teaching and learning’ (Malcom & Lukas, 2001, p. 38).

While ‘values and affective aims are being quietly airbrushed out of the curriculum of higher education’ (Macfarlane, 2004, pp. 28–29), we are reminded by existing research that an approach to ‘learning’ that includes societal and cultural commitments and aims to develop students’ judgment and capacity to act must relate to values as well as affective dimensions (Colby & Sullivan, 2008; Cowan, 2005; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Kalleberg, 2011; Macfarlane, 2004; Robinson & Katalushi, 2005; Strain, Barnett, & Jarvis, 2009).

As the sociologist of science Kalleberg (2011) notes, and as demonstrated in examples from different disciplines by Fremstad (2016) and elaborated with regard to psychology and societal sciences by Nafstad (2005), societal responsibility, while often approached as a generic feature, is integrated into the culture, knowledge, and practices of disciplines and/or professions. Nafstad (2005) shows how academics, as well as students, in order to take responsibility both for the discipline and its role in society, need to engage critically and reflectively with the values and assumptions in their discipline and profession and how these have implications for the production of knowledge and how they influence society. This, Nafstad (2005) elaborates, implies developing in students an ethical sensitivity and reflexivity and ‘a genuine moral interest in shaping one’s discipline so that it serves and improves society and human life’ (Nafstad, 2005, p. 158).

The above-described literature draws attention to the need to include in our language about learning in higher education concepts that focus on and allow us to address the relation between knowledge and disciplinary ways of thinking, practices, and skilled know-how, and ethical reflections and values. Furthermore, we need concepts for the empowerment required to enact the agency to deploy such judgment and act in accordance with such knowledge-based moral and practical reasoning, even in circumstances less than supportive of such reasoning and action.

To address these aspects of learning, the analytical framework chosen and developed for the present study combines Colby and Sullivan’s (2008) concept of ‘practical reasoning’ with Emirbayer and Mische’s (1998) concept of ‘agency’. Brought together, these concepts provide a vocabulary suitable for capturing an

educational agenda that shapes students' minds, motivations, and capacities for taking such broad societal and intellectual responsibility, something that could be used in analyses of teaching and curriculum, as well as for planning and developing courses and programmes.

**Analytical framework: Responsible judgment and action through the lenses of 'practical reasoning' and 'agency'**

Colby and Sullivan's (2008) analytical concept of practical reasoning captures how different forms of knowledge and learning are necessary to nurture capacities for responsible judgment and action. Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) analytical concept of agency provides an analytical space for understanding both the context and practice of agentic reasoning and action. In the present study, these concepts combined constitute the analytical framework. The framework allowed for addressing in detail the educational agenda and practice of nurturing in students a discipline-specific capacity for contributing to shaping both their discipline/profession and society.

Colby and Sullivan (2008) use the metaphor of apprenticeships to distinguish three forms of knowledge and learning necessary for students in professional education to become good and responsible practitioners: the intellectual, practical and ethical. While the object of Colby and Sullivan's (2008) study is professional education, their analytical conceptualisation of learning is equally appropriate for higher education in general (Sullivan & Rosin, 2008). The three apprenticeships (A1, A2, A3) included in practical reasoning are:

A1: the academic knowledge base and the capacity to think in ways that are important to the discipline and/or profession;

A2: practical skills and approaches (skilled know-how);  
and

A3: ethical standards and societal roles and responsibilities of the profession, grounded in the profession's fundamental purpose.

The three apprenticeships are distinguished for conceptual and analytical purposes. The integration of the three is essential for (nurturing) practical reasoning. Colby and Sullivan (2008) argue that the ethical grounding of purpose and responsibility (A3) gives this apprenticeship the strongest potential integrative power of the three, even though it is often neglected in curriculum analysis and rarely forms part of the assessment of students (Colby & Sullivan, 2008, p. 413).

Highlighting ‘the moral imagination and courage to create more constructive institutional structures or practices’ (Colby & Sullivan, 2008, p. 416), Colby and Sullivan point towards an agentic dimension, as well as an orientation toward future possibilities. To further conceptualise this point, I rely on Emirbayer and Mische’s (1998) definition of agency:

A temporally embedded process of societal engagement, informed by the past (in its ‘iterational’ or habitual aspect) but also oriented toward the future (as a ‘projective’ capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a ‘practical-evaluative’ capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment). (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 962)

In this conceptualisation, agency is constituted in the intersection between past, present, and future. Agency thus, according to Emirbayer and Mische (1998, p. 971), relies on

- 1) ‘selective reactivation of past patterns of thought and action’ in ways that inform and form ‘practical activity, thereby giving stability and order to societal universes and helping to sustain identities, interactions, and institutions over time’ (*the iterational element*);
- 2) creative reconfiguration of such ‘received structures of thought and action’ based on ‘actors’ hopes, fears, and desires for the future’ (*the projective element*); and
- 3) deciding between possible actions on the basis of critically and constructively combining selected received patterns of thought and creative projections of future possibilities (*the practical-evaluative element*).

The three temporal dimensions are always present as ‘a chordal triad’, where the three elements are not always harmonious, and one may be more resonant (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 972). This concept of agency provides temporal dimensions to study ‘practical reasoning’ as well as analytical categories to address context and sources of agentic reasoning, judgment, and action.

Both the conceptualisation of agency and practical reasoning build on the Aristotelian notion of praxis, which includes emotional and moral as well as cognitive engagement, and which relies on participation in an ongoing community of discourse (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 995). Thus, although agency is lived out by individuals, it is reliant on collective agency and ‘an ongoing community of discourse’, which is, in turn, embedded in specific structural and cultural—and in

this case, disciplinary/professional—contexts. This collective ‘deliberation includes cognitive, moral as well as emotional engagement with the specifics of the situation’ and ‘a conscious searching consideration of how best to respond to situational contingencies in light of broader goals, projects, and purposes’ (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, pp. 998–99).

In the analysis below, this framework of practical reasoning and agency is used to analytically identify and critically discuss how responsible judgment and action is approached and nurtured in the two cases from Human Geography and Law.

### **Method and material**

During spring 2018, I arranged in-depth conversations with five university teachers whom I knew to be particularly concerned with integrating societal responsibility in their teaching. The aim of the conversations was to gain insight into how these teachers understood and approached nurturing students’ capacities for taking societal responsibility as part of their teaching, and also for them to share and learn from each other’s ideas and experiences. Thus, the participants were invited to share ideas and experiences, and reflect together. Chairing the conversation, I introduced the overall topic and initiated the conversation but largely let the participants discuss whatever concerned them. During the conversation, I made sure that everyone took part, and asked probing questions, prompting participants to elaborate and/or become more concrete about their aims, reasons, practices, and experiences.

The conversations were video recorded with the participants’ informed consent. The data were collected and stored in accordance with national ethical guidelines and approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data. The data are presented in Table 1.

Conversation 1	Two law professors and one human geography professor	2 hours
Conversation 2	One informatics professor	1 hour
Conversation 3	One informatics professor (same as conversation 2) and a second human geography professor	1 hour
Course descriptions	Human Geography; Law; Informatics	

Table 1. Empirical material

After an iterative process of reviewing the literature and exploring all three conversations and course descriptions, I decided to construct two case vignettes based on Conversation 1, as a way of presenting the empirical material but also as a basis for further analysis. This particular conversation provided the most elaborate and encompassing descriptions, allowing me to construct two vignettes in a narrative form that includes the necessary context for both reader and researcher to make analytical sense of the data. The vignettes re-present aims, considerations, and experiences that emerged as central throughout the material but are delimited to the two specific disciplinary contexts of Law and Human Geography. In the process of constructing the vignettes, I used the respective course descriptions as sources of contextual insight and validation. Writing the case vignettes, I aimed to keep the tone of voice and the wording as close as possible to the voice of the informants. However, formulations were adapted to the narrative and written language. Participants provided comments on the case vignettes and analysis to ensure their validity, and also to ensure they were comfortable with the way they were presented. Subsequent analyses were performed based on the vignettes but with a broader view of the whole material in mind.

The empirical basis for this study is limited, and additional insights and examples could, of course, be gained from conversations with other teachers from the disciplines, as well as from other disciplinary, institutional, and national contexts. However, when put in dialogue with the analytical conceptualisations, the cases offer empirical examples and practical and analytical insights on how to understand, discuss, and approach teaching for societal responsibility with relevance across contexts and point towards important paths for further investigation.

During the analysis, theory and data shed light on each other through an iterative abductive process of interpretation (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009), with the aim of understanding, conceptualising, and illustrating how societal responsibility can be integrated into disciplinary teaching and discussing implications for conditions and practices of education. Through this process of interpretation, analytical concepts gained important meaning in light of data, and data was illuminated by theory. Thus, both theory and data contributed to an

analytical as well as practical understanding of what it requires to nurture students' capacities for taking societal responsibility.

### **The two cases**

#### *Human Geography*

O teaches several courses on topics related to climate change: how we can tackle challenges related to climate change, what it does to societies, how societies adapt, and not least, the need to change systems, rules, and regulations to move towards a sustainable future. In a world that is constantly and rapidly changing, nurturing the desire to continue learning and the willingness to adapt to new circumstances, but also to critically consider how we can change the course of the development, are crucial to educating students for the future, she argues.

Students learn about innovations that address 'the grand challenges', and to consider the societal consequences of such innovations. Connecting knowledge from different sources is crucial to understanding the adaptation and action necessary, as well as the societal consequences. Students need not only a solid disciplinary basis, but also to learn how to approach climate change with a transdisciplinary problem orientation and how to cooperate with businesses and municipalities. Therefore, graduate students have, as part of their studies, internships working with innovations and transformation. Perspectives on sustainability and change from other disciplines, such as law and psychology, are also included in the courses.

A central learning goal of the courses O teaches is that students do not take for granted that media representations or political discourses provide a holistic and accurate image of the state of affairs and the possible ways forward. Therefore, she focuses on discourses: students must learn what a discourse is, how it is linked to beliefs and values, as well as to power and how society is organised. For example, the 'technology discourse,' which states that technology alone will save the world, is just that: one of several possible discourses. In her classes, therefore, she focuses on discussing the different types of societal transitions and transformations that are considered necessary for creating a resilient and sustainable future to nurture students' capacity to envision possible futures and possible changes.

In O's experience, students sign up for these courses because they are globally oriented and want to be involved in changing the world. Still, she finds it difficult to stand in front of a hundred young students, telling them about the inevitable consequences of climate change, as this could be very discouraging for students. It is crucial, she argues, to provide students with the sense that we have an opportunity to change the course of things. In this regard, she notes a tension: students are keen to pursue knowledge to be able to make a difference, but at the



same time, the sense of urgency makes them question taking the time to pursue a master's degree.

*Empowering students to think that they can influence the future* is at the core of O's teaching. This, she highlights, includes critical thinking: that students do not take for granted what they read and learn. Thus, facts, which are rapidly changing, are not central. Rather, teaching and teaching materials are about how to understand and approach questions, to help students grasp complexities, without making it complex to the extent that students become paralysed. *Capacity for action* is a central aim. One way of approaching this aim is to give students experiences with transformative responses to global environmental change. As opposed to looking only at how we can adapt to climate change, O aims to help students see how we can act to influence the future. In this regard, teaching students to be critical and to take a comprehensive perspective and reflect on their own assumptions is essential to nurturing their capacity to critically and actively engage in society and to empower them to think independently and voice their knowledge-based views concerning the changes needed. Thus, for example, she makes students write an opinion piece. The students must state their views, show empirical evidence for their standpoint, and choose a newspaper to reach their selected audience. This activity, she finds, requires that students think through their views and their arguments, and how and for whom they want to formulate them. She terms this capacity 'political agency' and emphasises that such agency includes recognising the omnipresence of values, that most conflicts are value conflicts, and that we cannot be objective and neutral. Thus, awareness of and reflection on the values of others, as well as the values oneself holds, how to state them, and how to communicate with people with different worldviews and values, are central to understanding what change implies and how to approach it. Working with cases, O and her students reflect on where actors come from, and who and what has influenced them and their beliefs and values. This is essential for 'political agency', which can, for example, be performed when working with white papers and municipalities. Yet she stresses that there is an important boundary to be drawn between such political scholarship and political activism.

### *Law*

T and E emphasise that to prepare Law students for societal responsibility, students must come to understand the limits of law and the legal system and, for example, recognise that laws and regulations have been constructed—by someone and in a specific context. Furthermore, students must become able and willing to see the broader societal perspective. While learning existing law, handling the amounts of detail, and becoming skilled in using the legal method is important in a society that is constantly and increasingly changing, but it is not sufficient. In many areas,

existing laws are unsatisfactory for handling legal questions, and many terms in laws and regulations, such as ‘sustainable development,’ are difficult to define legally. Thus, legal practitioners must acknowledge that, in many cases, different answers are possible, and furthermore, legal norms and practices may be dysfunctional. This means that in legal education, there is a need for knowledge, insights, and perspectives from not only law but also other disciplines, and thus, collaboration across departments and disciplines must be established to provide cross- and interdisciplinary teaching. This, T and E find, is not facilitated, but rather made difficult, by structures within their university.

As society changes, the discipline—which exists not in its own right but to serve society—needs to change. An essential change, they argue, is that societal and critical questions should be integrated into all legal disciplines. However, they find it difficult to determine how far to include students in the complexities and uncertainties of these questions. In this regard, E describes taking dilemmas as the point of departure to address complexities. For example, she uses previous verdicts that include dissent among the judges. Often, she argues, these are good dissents in the sense that the arguments are good on both sides. These cases illustrate dilemmas, value conflicts, and conflicts between different perspectives and interests, and thus challenge students to analyse different arguments and reflect, discuss, and make up their own minds.

Legal scholars, they argue, increasingly need to recognise that Law relies on a set of values, such as democracy, human rights, and principles of the rule of law. These values must be incorporated into teaching for students to develop an awareness of values, societal questions, and implications regarding legal questions. In the courses Human Rights, Discrimination Law, Legal Sociology, and Method and Ethics, such perspectives naturally have a place, and the aim is that students learn to recognise and use various perspectives in their critical thinking. According to E, these perspective courses are placed in the third and fourth years of the programme, since at this stage students have developed some degree of confidence regarding what law is and begun to master the very specific form of reasoning required of law students as well as professionals. In her experience, students start seeing the gaps and sense a need to examine law from societal and critical perspectives at this point in their studies. However, introducing such perspectives already in the first and second year is important—but challenging—they both argue. Although faculty deans have, not once but eight times or so, stated that human rights and gender perspectives shall be made part of all courses, this is still, in the experience of the two teachers, not the case. To facilitate the interdisciplinary integration of societal and critical perspectives in legal education, there is a need, they claim, for institutional change.

T uses an example from Family Law to illustrate the need to broaden the perspectives taught in classical legal disciplines: Family Law is a classical legal discipline with long roots. The sources and ways of using them are well established, the textbook has been used for decades, and one can easily reuse materials and procedures from previous years when teaching this course. However, this way of approaching the discipline does not resonate with T's notion of what students must learn to prepare for tasks they may face as future legal practitioners. One experience elucidates the discrepancy: One morning, T teaches classical questions related to interpreting wills: 'Curt and his kennel were listed as beneficiaries in Uncle Martin's will. Curt no longer has an interest in dogs. How can Uncle Martin's will be interpreted?' In the afternoon, she is on national radio talking about 14-year-old girls, married and pregnant, fleeing armed conflict and crossing the national border to seek refuge. Legal questions emerging from this situation are not addressed in family law. The legal sources traditionally applied, and thus used in the Family Law course, are of little or no use. As society changes, she argues, we must include new and relevant sources, in legal practice and in legal education, sources that contribute to legal practitioners' ability to address the legal questions arising from new societal circumstances. Although the sources exist, for example, in the Human Rights Convention, how can she fit this complexity into a course which to date has not encompassed these issues, especially when students, in her experience, already find the course challenging?

The role of the legal practitioner is also changing, T and E argue, from someone who has or finds the right answer by applying the law to someone who knows how to explore a question and is able to participate in societal discussion and recognise that relying on the discipline alone is often insufficient to handle legal issues. This implies that legal-political, socio-legal, and critical activities, to which the establishment of free legal help and environmental law are presented as examples, should take place, as interdisciplinary activities within law as a discipline. However, it is crucial, they reflect, to think thoroughly and critically about the role one fills and about the boundary between discipline-based judgment and political opinion.

The two cases portray complex teaching endeavours. In the following analyses, I use the above-elaborated concepts of practical reasoning (Colby & Sullivan, 2008) and agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) to analytically understand and critically discuss what teaching for societal responsibility entails. Through these analytical tools, this study brings to the fore insights with relevance beyond the specific cases, addressing issues raised in the above review of literature: concepts of learning that include identity-forming participation in communities of practice; the importance of (moral and political) vision, will, and values; the role of practical and moral considerations; societal responsibility as integrated into

disciplines and professions; and critical reflection on how assumptions and approaches to knowledge influence society. These implications are addressed in the final discussion.

### **Practical reasoning and agency in the Human Geography case**

#### *Empowering students*

How can teaching empower students to believe they can make a difference? In the Human Geography case, change, and possible futures are at the core of the teaching endeavours described by the teacher, who aims to provide students with the sense that they can influence the future. The dimensions of agency, and in particular the future-oriented projective dimension, helped to pin down how this teacher aims to empower students. The *projective dimension* is the most resonate in this case and includes the creative reconfiguration of received structures in the form of knowledge and ways of thinking in the discipline, as well as the generation of possible future trajectories of action, based on hopes, fears, and desires for the future of climate and society. Three types of projective elements emerged as the essential educational aims articulated in this case: 1) the prospects of contributing to change in systems, rules, and regulations, as well as human behaviour; 2) learning to think critically and independently, and to formulate knowledge-based projective images; and 3) a critical perspective on projective images presented in development discourses.

By nurturing students' capacity for practical evaluation of current contexts in light of potential future trajectories, the teacher strengthens students' ability to exercise agency. Empowering students through the projective dimension requires, however, different forms of and approaches to knowledge and learning. These can be categorised in terms of Colby and Sullivan's (2008) conceptualisation of practical reasoning. All three apprenticeships of practical reasoning that emerge are essential and distinguishing between them provides an analytical tool for discerning the knowledge base of agentic judgment and action.

The apprenticeship constituted by purpose, values, and responsibilities, however, emerges as an essential integrative force, as it is where past, future, and present come together, and where determination and conviction are nurtured—informed, of course, by disciplinary knowledge and know-how.

*Purpose as an integrative force*

The case illustrates how the three apprenticeships are closely knit together in both the projective and practical-evaluative dimensions of agency. For example, we see this in how discourses were approached. Discourses on climate change and possible solutions were highlighted by the teacher as central knowledge in the courses, as is knowledge about innovation and societal transformation (A1). Combined with the know-how of recognising and critiquing discourses, identifying and addressing the values and beliefs they are based on, and acknowledging value conflicts (A2), this form of knowledge was presented as essential for preparing students for partaking in changemaking. The underlying premise and integrative force, however, were the values, responsibilities, and purposes associated with global environmental and societal sustainability (A3). The projections of possible future trajectories were based on purpose and responsibility (A3), and in this case, it was this combination of purpose and projectivity that emerged as the central integrative as well as empowering force.

While this combination of purpose and projectivity was clearly salient, both the projective element and A3 remained largely abstract and general, captured in the notion of ‘sustainable development.’ Surely, teaching and curricula addressed what sustainable development means in concrete terms, but this was not elaborated in course descriptions or conversation. In the data used for this study, the apprenticeship related to ethical standards, responsibilities, and purposes (A3) was thus left as very general, lacking concrete examples of capacities and responsibilities, as well as of educational activities and experiences. Similarly, from the conversations or course descriptions, we do not learn in more concrete terms what teaching aimed at nurturing the capacities for handling value conflicts and conflicts of interests, and for reconfiguring actions and considering possible future trajectories of thought and actions in order to ‘respond to situational contingencies in light of broader goals and projects’ (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 999) may look like.

What we do learn, however, is that this form of addressing purpose and projectivity includes nurturing critical thinking but also capacities for creative and passionate engagement in deliberations about possible futures, and, moreover, the capacity (reasoning, judgment, and agency) to act on such images. This, as previous research has highlighted (Jones, 2009; Nerland, 2016), rests on students becoming enrolled as critical and creative members of the discipline/profession.

*Becoming a critical and creative member of the discipline*

How may teaching support students in becoming critical and creative members of the discipline? We know from previous studies that being initiated into the ‘epistementalities’ of the discipline is key to being able to manoeuvre the field of

knowledge and practice in independent and critical ways (Donald, 2002; Jones, 2009; Nerland, 2016). Consequently, such enrolment is essential for renewing the discipline. This reminds us of the importance of avoiding a ‘foreshortening of time perspective to the future alone’ (Anderson & McCune, 2013, p. 154) and to look also at the iterational dimension of agency: the selective reactivation of societally schematised patterns of thought and action (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Agency requires that students are sufficiently enrolled in the practices of the discipline to become empowered by them (Nerland, 2016).

In the case of Human Geography, existing knowledge on climate change, and, moreover, the forms and consequences of innovations and societal transformation, are proposed as essential. Moreover, ‘the way of understanding and approaching questions,’ and also how to relate to the various discourses, are described as essential to equip students with the necessary capacities to actively engage in professional as well as in civic life. This constitutes essential iterational elements, and agency is supported through such enrolment. However, the conversation and course description were not very elaborate about the need to enable students to shed critical light on the epistemic tradition and practice of the discipline. One exception is however important, although its potential does not seem fully realised. Awareness of values—both others’ and one’s own—were in the case highlighted as important and related to political agency. However, values were not addressed in terms of the discipline, and thus the educational task of developing in students the ‘ethical reflexivity and sensitivity for values and assumptions defining and influencing our [research] projects as they are embedded in our approach to the problem, concepts, methods, and theories’ (Nafstad, 2005, p. 152) was not addressed in this case. In an ever-changing context, reflections and projections concerning the discipline’s future, which relate critically to *past* habits, practices, and rituals, as well as to the *present*, and possible *future* trajectories, are arguably essential for a discipline if it is to sustain or enhance its societal contribution and uphold an agentic approach to society and its own endeavours.

### **Practical reasoning and agency in the Law case**

#### *Disharmony between iterational and projective elements*

The different temporal dimensions of agency are always a triadic chord, but the dimensions are not necessarily harmonious or of equal strength. How can teaching handle discontinuities and tensions between iterational and projective elements in the discipline/profession in ways that support agency and responsible judgment and action? In the Law case, such discontinuity and tension between the iterational and the projective was a core feature.

In many respects, the *iterational* dimension took centre stage in this case: learning the specific way of thinking about and approaching legal questions was emphasised as essential to legal education, and, according to the teachers, required considerable attention from both teachers and students, particularly during the first couple of years of the Law programme. The way laws and regulations have been interpreted and used in previous legal cases is ‘routinely incorporated in practical activity’ (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 970) in teaching and learning, serving as strong stabilising influence, shaping practices, and supporting students’ identity formation as future legal practitioners. Learning the disciplines schematised patterns of thought and action are essential to the way of reasoning (A1) and the craft know-how (A2) that students, as law students and future legal practitioners, must master, and also for becoming enrolled in the ethical norm and guidelines of the profession (A3).

A critical and *projective* focus on the discipline and profession was explicitly stated as in tension and competing for time with these iterational features, but it was still very much at the heart of the two teachers’ endeavours. This critical and projective focus was grounded in the overarching societal purpose of Law (A3), and the need to see Law in a wider societal and critical perspective constitutes the basis for the experienced need for ‘reconfiguration of received structures, and generation of possible future trajectories of action’ (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Law does not exist in its own right, but for society—which is constantly and increasingly changing. Thus, the discipline must change as well to address legal questions arising in new societal circumstances and to fulfil a professional role that is changing from holding the right answer to knowing how to explore it, acknowledging that several answers are possible and using insights from various legal sources, and from several disciplines, and being able to participate in societal dialogue. As in the human geography case, societal purpose and responsibility (A3) were at the core of projective features. For teaching, as well as for the discipline and the profession, this means including complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity, which implies challenging existing practices by means of critical perspectives.

#### *The place and practice of critique*

Critical perspectives, on society as well as on Law, were repeatedly highlighted in this case as essential for nurturing societal engagement and responsibility among students. Critical and projective images rooted in perspectives on the societal purpose of the discipline emerged as essential to the two teachers. As with the Human Geography case, *projective elements* were closely intertwined with values, responsibility, and purpose (A3), which seemed to provide both perspective, direction, and engagement for images of the future.

While the teachers argued that such critical and societal perspectives are important in all legal disciplines, in the current Law programme, such perspectives, they argued, are included for the most part in distinct courses, such as Human Rights, Discrimination Law, Legal Sociology (optional course), and Ethics. Moreover, in terms of teaching, these perspectives were largely expressed as theoretical-intellectual questions (A1), and apart from the cognitive capacity of critical reflection, the teachers were not explicit about implications in terms of practical skills (A2) or values and ethical reflections (A3) needed and aimed at through teaching. Thus, the aims and activities of teaching and learning to support ‘the capacity of actors to make practical and normative judgments among alternative possible trajectories of action, in response to the emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities of presently evolving situations’ (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) seemed largely delimited to critical thinking. This is potentially an important point: the critical element may remain at an abstract level of critical thinking (A), without implications for the craft know-how to practically deal with such questions (A2) and for the conceptualisation and enactment of responsibility (A3). If these intellectual-critical capacities shall gain practical implications as an integrated part of legal reasoning as well as practice, there may be a need to become more specific in terms of consequences for the practice and apprenticeship of legal reasoning.

Moreover, according to the perspective on practical reasoning (Colby & Sullivan, 2008) and agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998), the three apprenticeships, as well as the *iterational* and *projective* elements, need to come together in the reasoning and practice of legal students and professionals for them to become equipped for taking societal and professional responsibility through their reasoning, judgment, and action. It seems, in this case as in many previous studies (Colby & Sullivan, 2008; Fremstad, 2016; Robinson & Katalushi, 2005; Strain et al., 2009), to be an unrealised integrative potential in explicitly addressing values, purposes, and responsibilities (A3) when dealing with complex and ambiguous questions, which often concern conflicting values and interests.

#### *Realising integrative potential*

How can we, in and through teaching, realise the integrative potential of projectivity and purpose? Projective elements grounded in A3 *are* essential in this case, expressed as a necessary response to societal change. Society is constantly changing, creating new circumstances, and Law needs to keep up and respond to new questions with renewed sources. This normatively grounded self-reflection and critique of one’s discipline/profession in light of a broader vision of the societal contribution of one’s field of knowledge and practice (in line with Nafstad’s argument elaborated above) have the potential to realise important integrative powers of purpose in legal education, given that students are included in the



deliberations. The societal engagement argued in this case implies, as explicitly formulated, a form of political agency. In teaching, students were given assignments aimed at nurturing their ability to reflect on and analyse different arguments and make up their own minds. Still, this teacher expressed reluctance regarding unbounding disciplinary knowledge and political engagement.

Furthermore, although societal engagement was emphasised and related to projections for the future of Law as a discipline and a profession to fulfil its societal role and responsibility, in contrast to the Human Geography case, there was little explicit mention of proactively influencing societal development. Should law be projective on behalf of society? It is difficult to see how areas such as human rights and sustainability, and even Law in general, do not involve such projective elements. Nevertheless, conversations and course descriptions leave this kind of projective feature implicit—and thus, this kind of societal responsibility remains unclear and is perhaps left to the individual rather than shared within a professional and/or disciplinary community.

## **Discussion**

In this study, Colby and Sullivan's (2008) conceptualisation of practical reasoning helps draw attention to and identify not only the cognitive but also the practical and ethical, all too often omitted in the language of learning in higher education. They emphasise that the third form of knowledge 'serves as the driving force for integration of professional understanding, craft, and purpose,' as it 'draws together and grounds the two most essential features of high-quality work: deep expertise and ethical commitment' (Colby & Sullivan, 2008, p. 411). The present study has also illustrated the educational and integrative powers of projective capacities (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) in combination with attention to purpose, values, and responsibilities. In the two cases, projective images based on societal purposes concern the potential future of the discipline as well as society, and were linked to integrative, directional, empowering, and motivating potentials.

In a society constantly changing, higher education needs to enable students to cope with unforeseen challenges in an unknown future. A core consisting of purpose, values, and ethical deliberations has the potential to become a driving force of continuous learning, reflections, and deliberations for the individual professional, and moreover, for communities of professionals and researchers, in their collective endeavour to shape their practices in new and changing circumstances. In addition, this core may constitute an important basis for resilience when faced with expectations, structures, and incentives not aligned with the purpose of the field of knowledge and practice (Solbrekke & Englund, 2011).

However, values, commitments, and purposes cannot be addressed as unchangeable in a highly changeable society. Rather than being tools for maintaining the status quo, the present study illustrates the need for radical shifts in approaches and roles and indicates that a specific form of empowerment is needed for students (and staff) to become able to redefine purpose, handle a plurality of values and purposes, and draw implications for approaches to knowledge and practices.

Participants in the present study, as in previous studies (Fremstad, 2016; Robinson & Katulushi, 2005), pointed to the role of values and the affective domain in higher education. However, within current university curricula, ethical issues mainly concentrate on prescriptive rules of conduct and the prevention of misconduct, or on theoretical and abstract perspectives not explicitly related to (knowledge) practices (Fremstad, 2016; Nafstad, 2005). Further, we know that students often enter education with a sense of idealism, fascination, and passion, but faced with the rigour of teaching—and of exams in particular—such engagement and sense of purpose tend to dwindle (Colby & Sullivan, 2008; Fremstad, 2016). Although curious, engaged, lifelong learners are often stated as the aim of higher education, such capacities are seldom used as criteria for evaluating curriculum, pedagogy, or assessment (Colby & Sullivan, 2008). The lack of any mention of affective objectives in the literature on teaching and learning in higher education may, in part, be due to a reluctance to formulate such aims as predefined learning outcomes and assess their achievement (Cowan, 2005). Including values, purpose, and responsibility in education requires not distance but engagement, not scepticism but commitment. However, studies have shown that both faculty and students contend that teachers are not responsible for shaping students' ethical development, and that such enterprise would not be considered legitimate (Colby & Sullivan, 2008; Fremstad, 2016). Although the framework used in the present study convincingly includes values and emotions as essential to the capacity for societal responsibility, the cultural residue of value neutrality in higher education institutions (Barnett, 2004) implies that these sources of reasoning tend to be viewed as suspect (Colby & Sullivan, 2008).

Still, empowerment of the individual student has long roots as an important element of higher education (Barnett, 1990) and is essential to prepare students for responsible judgment and action as professionals and citizens in a complex and changing world, where they are bound to navigate a complex web of commitments (May, 1996), orienting by means of knowledge but also moral values (Taylor, 1989). We are reminded by, for example, Solbrekke et al. (2016) that agency relies not only on individuals' capacities but also on collective will formation, which constitutes a foundation for subjective judgment and individual action. Collective experiences, conceptions, and approaches may, however, also hinder agency. 'Actors who feel creative and deliberative ... can often be highly reproductive of

received contexts' (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 1008). Agency requires that students become sufficiently enrolled in the disciplinary community, and that they learn to 'subject their own agentic orientations to imaginative recomposition and critical judgment' (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 1010) to provide for 'the capacity to imagine alternative possibilities' (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 962). Thus, from the present study, we can draw the conclusion that giving creativity, moral vision (Hoshmand, 1998), and moral commitment an integrative role in teaching and learning is essential to avoid merely reproducing received disciplinary, professional, and societal contexts.

The present study reveals integration as well as disconnect between the three sources of reasoning, and the three dimensions of agency, and thus shows how the framework can be used by teachers and researchers to identify challenges to and potentials of nurturing societal responsibility in higher education. Further studies focusing on teaching and learning are necessary to identify other fruitful ways of combining iterational, projective, and practical-evaluative elements and theoretical, practical, and normative contents, questions, and approaches, as well as the kind of formative processes this combination could entail. Such studies should bring additional insight into epistemic questions, including the relation between professional and political claims and the institutional and epistemic challenges of interdisciplinary teaching and learning.

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### **Author biography**

*Ester Fremstad* (PhD) is an academic developer and higher education researcher at the University of Oslo, Norway. Her professional interest includes the societal role and responsibility of higher education and conceptualisations of and approaches to teaching and learning. Also, she takes a research interest in the roles, responsibilities, practices and potential contributions of academic developers.

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