

Professional Textbooks in English Didactics: Authors' Perspectives

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Abstract: This chapter is based on interviews with fifteen authors whose professional textbooks in English didactics are currently on the reading lists for the five-year teacher education programme in Norway called the *lektor* programme. The chapter starts by defining the genre of the professional textbook, and reviewing relevant research and terminology, before describing the digital interview and transcription processes. Of the many topics raised in the interviews, the following are highlighted in this chapter: the ways in which authors select their writing and publishing partners; how they address their intended reader; how they relate to perceived conventions about what sort of texts belong in a professional textbook; the reasons why student teachers need textbooks; and the varying emphasis placed on different kinds of knowledge: research, theory, repertoire and contextualisation in relation to the current school curriculum. The chapter ends with a summary of the authors' predictions for the genre, and a discussion of the role that the national accreditation system, CRISTIN, should, but does not yet, play in ensuring the vitality and quality of textbooks in both English didactics and other professions.

Introduction

This chapter reports on a study of textbooks in teacher education. More specifically, it investigates authors' perspectives on professional textbooks in English didactics. The empirical data comprises interviews with fifteen authors, who were chosen because their books were on reading lists in

Citation: Munden, J., & Meissner, C. V. P. (2022). Professional textbooks in English didactics: Authors' perspectives. In M. Dypedahl (Ed.), *Moving English language teaching forward* (Ch. 10, pp. 219–247). Cappelen Damm Akademisk. <https://doi.org/10.23865/noasp.166.ch10>
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English didactics modules in Norway for the academic year 2021–22. Our interest in this topic arose partly in response to the recent flurry of textbooks in English didactics, written and published for teacher education in Norway. The range of such textbooks from which teacher educators can now choose has led to international textbooks in English didactics all but disappearing from reading lists in Norway, where previously they had featured prominently (Caspersen et al., 2017; Moi et al., 2014).

Despite the current dominance of textbooks written for the Norwegian context, there is a striking neglect of textbooks of any sort in policy documents in Norway. For example, a recent White Paper, though it states unequivocally that there is too little research in and about teacher education (Meld. St. 4. (2018–2019), p. 67), makes no mention of books, let alone textbooks. Nor does the 2021 report of the executive agency of the Ministry of Education and Research – Diku – make any reference to books of any kind. By contrast, there are 129 occurrences of word combinations using “digital”, a quantification of the complete lack of policy, reference or statistics on syllabus literature and, indeed, other types of dissemination (see also Vestbø, 2020). In the most recent report from Diku, we see the same tendency: two pages are dedicated to the digitalisation of higher education, while syllabus literature and dissemination are not mentioned at all (Tungesvik, 2021).

The absence of textbooks in official policy documents is not new. Writing in 1993, Johnsen saw this omission as explaining why there was so little research on textbooks: as an object of study they had “not yet been sanctioned” (p. 22). More recently, research in the field of English for academic purposes has tended to focus on more prestigious research genres at the expense of instructional genres (Bondi, 2016). Digital education media receive far more attention in research and policy than do textbooks, and here publishers in the private sector are a key stakeholder. The development of digital educational media in recent years has led to the sale of paper-based and digital learning resources being of about equal worth in 2020 (Gilje, 2021). Today, the future of printed textbooks in schools is uncertain, and there is widespread concern that funding for new educational media may mean that the purchase of textbooks will lose out to one-on-one tablets and software licences (Kvinge, 2021).

Against this backdrop of neglect and the increasing focus on digital educational media, we set out to find out more about today's professional textbooks in English didactics for teacher education. We coined the term *professional textbook* to identify textbooks written for professionally-oriented modules in English teaching and learning, distinguishing this genre from textbooks written primarily for disciplinary modules, on topics such as English literature or English language. We sought out the experiences and perspectives of textbook authors, all of whom are employed in teacher education, or have been until recently, so that in addition to being authors, they are experienced teacher educators. This gives them a broad basis from which to discuss professional textbooks in English didactics. The overarching research question is:

What characterises the writing of professional textbooks in English didactics?

More specifically we ask:

What sort of decisions do authors make in shaping their professional textbook?

What do authors perceive as the need for professional textbooks in English didactics?

What importance do authors accord to different types of professional knowledge in their textbooks?

Although this chapter focuses on professional textbooks in English didactics, it offers perspectives that are relevant to teacher education in other subjects. One such perspective is the perceived value and financing of textbook writing. While we were initially wary of addressing this issue, the topic was repeatedly raised by our interviewees. We have therefore chosen to conclude this chapter with a reflection on the position of professional textbooks in CRISTIN, the current accreditation system for scholarly and scientific production and dissemination in Norway.

The genre of the professional textbook in English didactics

A commonly used term in the Scandinavian discourse about textbooks is *læremidler*, where *lære* denotes both teaching and learning. *Læremidler*

is variously translated into English as “educational media”, “teaching resources”, “teaching aids” and “learning resources”. The extensive theoretical literature associated with *læremidler* offers several useful distinctions. Didactic *læremidler* are those designed for teaching (Hansen, 2006), and it is in this category that we find textbooks. A further distinction can be made between didactic *læremidler* and “second order texts” (Selander, 2013). These latter can be used in an educational setting, though they are not designed for this purpose. Literary works are an obvious example in the context of teacher education.

Læremidler is not the only central Scandinavian term that does not match up readily with an English equivalent. “Textbook” can be translated by two terms that the Norwegian Publisher’s Association distinguishes between, namely *lærebok* and *fagbok*. In their yearly statistics over book sales, the Norwegian Publisher’s Association describes the *lærebok* as intended for use in tertiary education, whereas the *fagbok* is also intended for a professional market (Den Norske Forleggerforening, 2020, p. 19). The distinction between these is, arguably, as much an issue of academic status and financial incentives as of content (Nylenna, 2017). For example, a *lærebok* allows the publisher to apply for state funding, provided the book serves a segment of Norwegian tertiary education that might not otherwise have access to relevant literature adapted for the Norwegian context (Diku, 2021). To achieve this funding, the book must be on the reading list at an institute of higher education. A *fagbok* does not qualify for this type of funding, but can be given accreditation in the Current Research Information System in Norway (CRISTIN). Such accreditation is important for the authors’ careers and universities’ funding (Nylenna, 2017).

The term *textbook*, then, refers to a flora of text types (Johnsen et al., 1997, p. 31), and defining the term necessarily imposes various degrees of restriction (Johnsen, 1993, p. 24). What all textbooks do have in common, whether designed for primary, secondary or tertiary education, is that they are part of an asymmetrical form of communication where the author knows and writes for those who know less (Selander & Skjelbred, 2004). So do what are sometimes termed “academic books”, but these fall outside our definition of professional textbooks, since, though “as

difficult to define as the academic disciplines themselves”, academic books are typically a long-form publication that conveys the result of in-depth research carried out over a period of years and which makes an original contribution to a field of study (Deegan, 2017). Academic books seldom need to be positioned in relation to policy documents or curricula. School textbooks, by contrast, must fulfil politically set agendas, as these find expression in policy documents and curricula (Skrunes, 2010, p. 62). Professional textbooks position themselves more freely between the two: they do not need to focus on the curriculum, although, as we shall see, some authors choose to do so. Furthermore, textbook authors must select, simplify and adapt (Askeland et al., 2017) to a far greater extent than must authors of academic books. This is also the case at tertiary level, where students, not least student teachers, have very diverse disciplinary knowledge and school experience.

All textbooks can be described in terms of their content, their purpose and their audience (Hyland, 1999), and the primary audience for a professional textbook of English didactics is student teachers, as well as in-service teachers interested in continued professional development. Professional textbooks present the knowledge and values that a student must master in order to successfully practise that profession. Hyland (1999) describes textbooks for undergraduates as “one of the primary means by which the concepts and analytical methods of a discipline are acquired”, as well as conveying “the norms, values and ideological assumptions of a particular academic culture” (p. 3). In teacher education they are therefore texts that “suggest and legitimise content, rules, norms, ideals, and discourses related to teaching” (de Cássia Fernandes Hegeto, 2021, p. 195).

We understand professional textbooks to have four main components related to the teaching and learning of English. They typically include *theory* related to English as a second or foreign language; *contextualisation* in relation to the national curriculum, learner diversity and other educational issues; and *repertoire*, by which term we refer to learning and assessment activities that teachers can use in the classroom. Finally, textbooks include *research* that sheds light on these three components.

Approaches to the study of textbooks

One of the most influential textbook researchers in Norway, Egil B. Johnsen (1993), once asked why the study of textbooks had never been established as a separate college or university discipline (p. 21). He offered as a partial explanation an observation by Hacker (1980), that research tends to focus on what is new and to steer clear of what is perceived to be on its way out. We will consider the demise or survival of textbooks towards the end of this chapter. But since Johnsen bemoaned the status of textbook research in 1993, the field has benefited from a period of intense activity at the Norwegian National Centre for Teaching Aids (1993–2000), including the work of Staffan Selander and Dagrun Skjelbred, amongst others. In more recent years research has tended to focus on digital educational media, with almost no interest in the ways that textbooks and digital learning resources are used in combination (Gilje, 2017).

Textbook theory and research have been heavily oriented towards primary and secondary school (Knudsen et al., 2011), and tertiary-level textbooks are a marginalised field of study (de Cássia Fernandes Hegeto, 2021, p. 195). Yet one can explore the relevance of studies of primary and secondary school textbooks for the professional textbooks in our study. For example, as just mentioned, school textbooks are usually written to meet the requirements of a particular curriculum (Tønnesen, 2013, p. 149), and so we can ask professional textbook authors to what extent they too write to accommodate the most recent school curriculum. Similarly, Selander (2013) defines an educational text as one that is “produced for a particular institutionalised use, an educational system with its own space, time and social organisation” (p. 31, our translation), and so we can ask in what ways the authors in the present study intend their books for particular institutionalised uses. A final example is the claim that “textbooks have the distinct advantage of having a relatively homogenous institutionalised function across diverse social, political and cultural spaces and time” (Christophe et al., 2018, p. 415). We asked authors to speculate on the institutionalised functions that professional textbooks may be called on to fulfil in 20 years’ time. Will these, as Christophe et al. claim, be much the same as today?

Despite these points of contact with existing textbook research, we, like Askerøi and Høie (1999) in their study of textbooks for vocational subjects, have had to draw on studies with limited application to our own. To illustrate this challenge, we may consider Gilje's categorisation of the four main areas of textbook research (2017). These are 1) the representation of ideology and history; 2) the analysis of multimodal texts; 3) investigations by educational stakeholders into the extent and use of learning resources and ICT in the classroom; and 4) observational studies of learning resources and social interaction in the classroom. Our study is not easily accommodated within this classification. It is better accommodated in an earlier categorisation on which Gilje drew. Johnsen (1993) distinguished between 1) historical investigations; 2) ideological research, a form of content analysis typically concerned with discrimination, ideology and democracy; 3) the use of textbooks in terms of accessibility, effectiveness and classroom practices; and 4) what Johnsen (1993) described as a less researched field: the study of authors, publishers, approval mechanisms, curricula, political approaches and user approaches (p. 311). It is in this last category that the present study belongs. It furthermore contributes to a current trend in textbook research that Fuchs and Bock (2018) describe as "a coming of age" in textbook research (p. 7). This trend is marked by the diversification from content analysis to the study of contexts and practices, which in our case entails the study of authors' perceptions of the multiple contexts of textbook production and use.

Methods

The authors who participated in this study were identified from the reading lists for the academic year 2021–2022 in English didactics modules at the seven universities in Norway that offered the *lektor* programme in English. This five-year teacher education programme was chosen because didactics is taught in separate modules, unlike programmes of initial teacher education in years 1–7 and 5–10, where didactics is integrated into the subjects (Nasjonalt råd for lærerutdanning, 2017, 2018a, 2018b). With the exception of one university, students in this education programme are required to take more than one didactics module, and reading lists

from all the didactics modules were therefore collected. We identified ten professional textbooks within English didactics that featured either in part or in whole on those reading lists, and whose authors were asked to participate in this study.

An interview guide was piloted with the two authors of a professional textbook in Norwegian didactics, and slightly re-written as a result. The guide included questions relating to

- their academic background and professional experience
- their motivation for writing the professional textbook/s
- the choice of co-author and publisher
- the editorial and publishing process and the book's reception
- the book's intended user and the inscription of this user in the text
- the role of different text types, such as case studies, questions and tasks

More generally, interviewees were asked to reflect on

- the balance between a “ready digested” professional textbook and the focus in teacher education on source criticism
- the status and challenges of writing professional textbooks in an academic institution
- the future of professional textbooks in English didactics

Interviewees were also invited to comment on any other aspects of textbook writing that they wished to address.

The interview guide served as a set of prompts in a conversation that was sometimes quite strongly interviewee-led, placing the interviews on a continuum between semi-structured and unstructured (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 511). Authors of the same textbook were interviewed together: seven interviews with a total of fifteen authors. Some authors had collaborated on more than one book. Each interview lasted about an hour and was carried out and recorded in Zoom, with both researchers present. The video and sound files were stored in the data collection tool Nettskjema. They were transcribed by the researchers using the Microsoft Word online transcription tool.

As there were always at least four people present, the interviews were not only data collection events, but also social occasions. This was in part because the first author of this chapter had met many of the authors in other professional contexts, but also because several of the authors, after having worked intensely together while writing their textbooks, had not met up for some time.

The transcription process followed the reflective practice advocated by Oliver, Serovich and Mason (2005), where transcription decisions are based on the purpose the interviews are to serve. In the present case the purpose was to gather information about the interviewees' perspectives. The transcription was therefore somewhat denaturalised, removing most hesitations, false starts and encouragements, and nearly all stammering. We have, moreover, standardised the grammar in direct quotations. What remained were those features of oral speech that we deemed to contribute to the informational or attitudinal content of the interviews.

The guidelines on informed consent, privacy and data storage from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data were followed throughout, and the authors' permission to use their full names was sought both before and after the interviews, and addressed at the start of each interview. This means that the respondents were prepared to be quoted by name, a premise that may well have affected their responses. We have since decided against naming the authors, because some of them reported being disconcerted when they saw in writing the hesitations and disfluencies of their oral communication. Another argument for anonymising the material is that our discussion of the academic accreditation system CRISTIN addresses themes raised by the authors, including guidelines for publication points, that could have an impact on their future publications.

While each textbook was formed by the authors' attitudes, values and understanding of English didactics, they also seemed to represent a "collective awareness, an understanding that is valid for the society and the time of which the author is a part" (Johnsen et al., 1997, p. 34, our translation). We came to see the seven interviews as a set, a shared conversation. They generated a wide-ranging and rich data, with the concomitant challenge of thematic analysis across 120 pages of dense transcription. It

is a challenge that the representation of a qualitative study must balance a holistic interpretation of the interviews with the fragmentation that necessarily results from categorisation (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 524). After each interview we identified possible themes and patterns of response. We discussed the interviews more systematically once they were all completed. Throughout the writing process we reviewed our perception of the interrelationship of the various themes and how different ways of organising the findings could throw light on our research questions. We have chosen to present our findings under three headings: Shaping a professional textbook; Why students need professional textbooks; and The relative importance accorded to research, theory and repertoire.

Findings

Shaping a professional textbook

In this section we consider how author partnerships were initiated and how the quality of professional textbooks was addressed. We also report on the authors' intended audience, the types of text they thought it appropriate to include, and whether or not they contextualised their textbook in relation to the current school curriculum.

When asked how author partnerships were initiated, interviewees reported that it was often one person who had an idea for a professional textbook who then invited another person to participate. Several authors said that their idea would not have become a book were it not for their writing partner. The choice of whom to collaborate with was usually based on existing or previous professional relationships. One author, for example, said that they knew "that we can work well together, that it's a productive partnership". Other factors that influenced the choice of co-author included shared professional interests or a shared place of employment. Another partnership experienced that the publisher already had a book in mind, so that "they asked us more to do than we asked them to be allowed to do this". In the case of edited books, interviewees explained that they went in search of contributors with an expertise that they themselves lacked. There was also one example of the publisher initiating the textbook and writing partnership:

It was the editor who reached out to me and asked if I would be interested [...] and then I think that you [...] also came over, joined us and this is when she suggested [...] as the third author, so that's – she basically hooked us up.

Some author partnerships reported that the choice of publisher was straightforward since they already had a well-established relationship with a publishing house with which they had previously collaborated. Some even referred to their confidence in a particular editor at that publishing house. Others, however, experienced a more challenging process in finding a suitable publisher. One author partnership recalled that before the publication of the first edition of their book, they had had to argue for the need for textbooks in English didactics written for the Norwegian context. They recalled some colleagues being sceptical of their ambition to compete with international publications, remembering an attitude of “why are you writing this book, because there are so many books on English teaching methodology. Not written in Norway, but written for the world market, so you know, who do you think you are, really?” They were also met with resistance from the publisher they approached, who initially believed that there wasn't a market for this type of book. More recently, a few authors described as drawn-out or problematic the process of finding a publisher who was committed to meeting their aspirations, or who shared their understanding of the amount of work involved in creating a revised edition.

Authors typically reported that although they were themselves entrusted with the main responsibility for ensuring the quality of their text, the publisher was in most cases involved in recruiting an external reader before the book went to print. Whether the external reader was designated “peer reviewer” or “consultant” seemed to depend on the conceptualisation of the book rather than the rigour of the review process itself. While authors generally expressed satisfaction with this situation, several authors pointed out that co-authorship in itself provides an ongoing process of revision and peer review.

Turning now to the authors' intended audience, we found them to be in agreement that their books were written to cater for a diverse group that includes both initial teacher education and in-service teachers. Since *lektor* courses qualify students to teach in secondary school, some of the

textbooks focused on secondary school only, whilst others also saw primary school student teachers as their intended audience. Some authors also discussed whether targeting a broad readership was a possible weakness of their textbooks. Firstly, as one author explained, there is little indication that most in-service teachers read research. And secondly, several authors made the point that students who train to become teachers have many different knowledge bases and textual experiences, which means that it is challenging to write textbooks that both include everyone and captivate a diverse group of readers. It was our observation that authors from the same institution tended to have a shared understanding of their students' abilities, and that this may have influenced their understanding of their intended audience. Some spoke of their students being "at a very high level", while others were concerned to cater to the needs of their "C-students".

When it came to what types of text it is appropriate to include in a professional textbook, opinions differed as to how the genre should be understood. This was significant, since the categorisation of the textbook itself was in part determined by the types of texts the authors included. One author, for example, distinguished their textbook from what they called "plain textbooks", a genre which they characterised by its inclusion of text types such as tasks and questions. Another negotiated the same issue by saying that their textbook was "not a textbook as such, but *fagbok* [...]. So it's important to use those words if you have peer reviewed, done those things". Several authors expressed a dislike of conventions that in their perception unreasonably restricted what they could include in their professional textbook, although for pragmatic reasons they abided by these conventions. For example, in one case both authors were very much in favour of "reflection questions and tasks and what have you", but knew from experience that these text types would trigger a fight for publication points "and the quarrelling and the arguments and all the emails". Other authors, however, not only expressed dissatisfaction with the expectation that they should not include certain text types, but successfully flouted these expectations by deliberately including reflection questions and making sure that they otherwise documented that they had fulfilled the requirements of a *fagbok*. They

described the convention that tasks be excluded from textbooks at tertiary level as “strange” and out of line with comparable international research-oriented publications.

For some authors it was important that their textbook was conceived or revised in order to respond to new topics and priorities in the national school curriculum of 2020. For one author partnership “a close and consistent engagement with the curriculum” was central to the second edition of their book. For others it was not, because, as they explained, a book tailored to the current curriculum would soon become outdated. They did not wish to be forced to rewrite their books with every new curriculum revision. One author partnership explained that they saw the purpose of their book as equipping student teachers to think critically and constructively about central didactic issues so that they would be able to implement and adapt their teaching to any curriculum.

The need for professional textbooks

We turn now to the reasons our interviewees gave for why student teachers need professional textbooks. These included the need for a text that provides the basic information a student needs, that a book is a handy format, that textbook authors are better equipped to select and summarise theory and research than are most students, and that textbooks initiate students into the discourses of language didactics and a holistic academic tradition.

Authors were usually motivated by their perception of what was lacking, either in the courses they taught or in the market in general. One respondent spoke of their “driving force” being that “most people probably didn’t know that they needed this book. So it was more a question of putting this on the agenda”. Most frequently mentioned, however, was the need to provide students with an introductory text. The value of an introductory book as an overview and guide to English didactics was expressed through a range of spatial metaphors. Professional textbooks were described as providing “a starting point”, “a basic level introduction” and “the foundation that helps them make sure that they’ve covered all the ground”. One interviewee used navigational metaphors, describing

professional textbooks as “a good map and a guide” that showed the reader “the path”.

The need for a path was explained by another author: “The more complex the field of English didactics becomes, the more need there is, and will be, for books that give a good basic overview over complex topics”. As well as being an increasingly complex field of study, it is also relatively new, and for this reason, too, it requires a careful introduction:

The students struggled to really see: What is English didactics? What is this field all about and how does it differ from pedagogy? And they needed a book because it was easier for them then to sit down and leaf through the book and see: what can English didactics mean? What kind of topics are relevant and how does this differ from a book in pedagogy, for instance? So we really felt this need for a book.

Several authors raised a more pragmatic argument for a one-volume introductory text: that it is easy to use. They reported that students had previously appreciated compendia for this same reason. In fact, one author partnership had formed to write the first edition of their book in order to gather into one place the resources they had developed in their courses for initial and in-service teachers. Yet although authors talked of the advantages of having one book, their own teaching practices tended towards picking out individual chapters on the same topic from more than one book for students to read on the same topic. It was in fact seen as an advantage of a one-volume book that it facilitated such selection: “Take it or leave it. Take parts of it, leave parts of it. You know, it’s a handy format”.

Another frequently mentioned argument for the professional textbook in English didactics was the need to make research accessible: “If nobody creates that material, then the students would be left with reading 50 research articles in their first year, and that’s just not going to happen”, one author commented. Accessibility has to do with selecting relevant sources and highlighting what is most important, but it also has to do with writing with a clear reader-orientation, because, as one writer remarked, “You’re not fooling anyone if you’re using simple language”. The process of digesting large amounts of research and theory and making them

accessible to students at bachelor level was described by several authors as a demanding form of self-education.

We challenged authors to reflect on whether their selecting and summarising of research and theory could undermine the development of critical reading and the students' ability to find and assess sources in connection with their assignments and research projects. This criticism of textbooks was consistently rejected by the authors in our study. They typically argued that "in order to be able to reflect on something and make your own choices, you need some input, some basic input to what is this all about, before you can go to the next stage". Another described the textbook as "a basis for proceeding with further individual research and more specialised articles". Several authors mentioned that textbooks can help students become independent readers because they suggest further reading at the end of each chapter, and because they are thoroughly referenced, thus providing students with opportunities to pursue more independent learning.

There were a couple of instances when authors explained alternative ways in which they conceived of critical thinking. Students are developing their critical thinking, said one respondent, when they develop and adapt the repertoire suggested in the textbook. Another made the case that their book develops critical thinking by broadening students' awareness, in that it offers them "a diverse range of literary titles related to a variety of topics such as multilingualism, identity struggles, LGBTQ+, et cetera". This argumentation can be seen as an example of the importance attributed to literature in English didactics, and its potential to develop the whole student. For one author, developing the whole student – *Bildung* – was nothing new but integral to the university at which they worked. It has, they explained:

a tradition which is worth taking care of, and which you do not find in international books at all. And I mean this distinction between methodology and didactics has been quite important for us. And I think also some of the Norwegian books in didactics have less focus on this than what we wanted.

Their co-author concurred: "Bildung is central in everything that we do". Similarly, another respondent said that without textbooks "what

you might miss then is sort of the holistic passing on of an attitude". Textbooks, in other words, were seen as providing a site for shared learning experiences and shared values.

We had ourselves wondered about the resilience of textbooks as a shared learning experience, given student teachers' exposure to a digital landscape that offers them so many choices and possibilities. When we asked the interviewees what role they foresaw for the shared learning experiences that a printed textbook offers, most, though by no means all, shared our concern. As one concerned author said, "Everything is a click away, but that's everything. And you don't want everything, you want what you need [...]. It's the relevance and the focus, which you don't get if you just Google something". Other respondents expressed similar concerns about the limitations to the types of knowledge students tend to acquire using online resources as their primary learning texts in English didactics. They worried that these resources were not yet able to replace the systematic and research-based presentation of what is and is not important that professional textbooks offer the student teacher.

When it comes to whether students will need professional textbooks in years to come, authors found it challenging to predict with any certainty whether professional textbooks in English didactics would be part of moving language teaching forward in the long term. One foresaw that the combination of paper and digital resources that is typical for today's school practices is a trend that universities would come to adopt, just as they tended to lag behind but finally adopt other school practices. What the professional textbook will look like in twenty years' time entails questioning what a book is, said another author, who pointed out that "reading a book" is already a much more diverse activity than it was before audio and digital books came along. The future of the professional textbook might be as an open access resource or a digital document where individual chapters are available for purchase, suggested an interviewee, while another was confident of the need for something that served the purposes of today's professional textbook, although it might not go by that name:

I can't imagine that there will be no need for a textbook. Maybe the word "text" will be gone. Maybe the word "book" will be gone. But something that shares

not only content, not only ideas, but also what works in the classroom or what works in the learning environment.

All in all, although most of the respondents found it challenging to envisage the future of professional textbooks in teacher education, they shared the hope that there would be a continued need for an introductory text that developed a common understanding of what English didactics is, and of what it means to teach English in Norwegian schools.

The relative importance accorded to research, theory and repertoire

In this section we look at how authors try to define and structure the field of English didactics through their emphasis on and positioning of three kinds or domains of knowledge: research, theory and repertoire. One can see the authors' differing perspectives as part of an argument about whose knowledge is of most worth. It is even played out on the covers of their books: a sober cover underpinning the weightiness and seriousness of the academic field; pictures of engaged students signalling a focus on the active and collaborative learner.

The authors typically focused on what they identified as central and underrepresented aspects of the field, and varied considerably, not least in the extent to which they viewed repertoire as a central kind of knowledge. Using repertoire was by many considered necessary to help prospective teachers expand their practices. Authors sometimes describe their textbooks as addressing student and teacher weaknesses. By contrast, other authors wrote in the tradition of a university discipline, seeking to improve on previous textbooks that they felt to be insufficiently theoretical or research-oriented. These authors were also concerned to clear up misconceptions, such as the deficit view of multilingualism, or inadequate conceptualisations of communicative competence.

Changes made in the few years between the first and second (and in one case third) editions of the textbooks in this study indicate which kinds of knowledge are most valued. Authors reported that in their later editions they had typically included more theoretical perspectives and

added recent research. For one pair of authors, the centrality of research was self-evident, and the reason for writing their book in the first place. “Because we started teaching from that principle from research to practice [...] before we wrote the book”. They explained that it is a guiding principle for the five-year education programmes that they are research based”, and that this had determined the structure of the chapters in their textbook, and to some extent which topics they had chosen to include. In their view, “We cannot make sure that our teacher education is research based unless we make sure that they use research in their education”.

No matter the relative emphasis placed on repertoire, theory and research, all the authors expressed the need to link different kinds of knowledge, rather than seeing them as “distinct domains”. For most authors this linking should be done in the textbook, but for the author partnerships at two universities, repertoire belonged not in the textbook, but in seminars and school placements/practicum. There is perhaps an issue of authority and tradition here, an issue of what types of knowledge are considered to be of most worth. One writer had been criticised for “not being research-based enough”, despite having more than 30 years’ experience as a teacher educator. They and their co-author explained that their practical experience was just one of several sources of knowledge in their book, which was “developed out of [...] own experiences, knowledge, background, reading and research”.

Discussion

It has been said that “Until recently, very little was known about which actors have taken the initiative in order to shape what is included and excluded from textbooks” (Christophe et al., 2018, p. 418). Our findings indicate that whether or not it is the publisher or the prospective authors who initiate contact, it is still the case, as Caspersen et al. (2017) reported, that authors tend to have their contacts in various publishing houses, developed over time in various projects. While there was one example of an editor putting together an author partnership, most authors teamed up with a familiar colleague. The interview situation, in which co-writers were interviewed together, as well as the fact that at the time of the

interview both the respondents and the researchers believed that all participants would be named in the presentation of findings, mean that the interviewees were not likely to speak poorly of their co-author, other textbook authors, their publisher or the quality control to which their texts were submitted. On the contrary, the respondents tended to report positively on most aspects of the process of shaping their textbook, or at least of the completed process.

The question of peer review is worth commenting on here. The textbook authors in Caspersen et al.'s (2017) study reported, as did the authors in the present study, that peer review and quality control were strict and thorough (p. 80). However, since each textbook in the present study had apparently just one reviewer, it is a reasonable assumption that the reviewer was not a specialist in all aspects of English didactics that the textbook addressed. That the review process was applauded by the authors should therefore be interpreted in light of the unlikelihood that they would wish to publicly question or undermine a review process on which the academic accreditation of their textbook depends.

In explaining the need for professional textbooks in English didactics, our interviewees participated in a bigger conversation that goes beyond the concerns of teacher educators or even textbook writers for the different professions. As one university teacher and author put it, textbooks introduce people to the bigger picture by creating knowledge structures and presenting a range of perspectives (Storø, 2016). Similarly, in defence of both professional and disciplinary textbooks, Vestbø (2020) writes that “[...] the medium of the book is unparalleled when it comes to providing students and the general public with in-depth knowledge in an accessible form” (our translation). We find similar arguments raised by the authors in the present study. Firstly, students need textbooks to introduce them to the field of English didactics. Secondly, and related to the first argument, the delimiting function of textbooks allows students to focus on what is central to each topic rather than navigating the vast resources available online. Thirdly, textbooks can initiate students into the discourse the authors deem most desirable, whether it is that multilingualism is a resource or *Bildung* is the foundation on which all education should build.

Our respondents saw the textbooks as providing an entry to the field of didactics, and their decisions on what to include and exclude are based on their own perceptions of what students need to know. This means that students are dependent on textbooks authors, at least initially, as models for how to write about didactic topics. Hyland (1999) addresses this dilemma in his study of tertiary textbooks, concluding that they did not equip students to read or write research articles independently. “The primary goal of textbooks authors”, he said, “is to make intellectual content accessible rather than to provide undergraduates with the means to interact effectively with other community members” (p. 21). Similarly, Bondi (2016) writes that textbooks are poor models for student writing and research because they “seem to conceal the argumentative nature of disciplinary knowledge, by presenting a well-established set of facts and theories” (p. 325). However, as our respondents made very clear, students need to build up their skills through a process of academic socialisation, where professional textbooks have an essential role to play in the early stages of their education. As Bondi (2016) acknowledges, textbooks “are key to the process of acculturating novices into the epistemology of the discipline” (p. 328). Without professional textbooks that select and delimit content, students might look online to find immediate answers to questions that come up. This is a concern, considering that a study in the field of nursing education found “many students are too uncritical when they search online, especially in the first part of their education” (Poulsen & Brodersen, 2011, our translation). Our interviewees express these same concerns, based on their experience as teacher educators as much as on their being writers. Unlike a textbook, the internet has “no beginning and no end, everything is equally important/unimportant, and the user is his or her own doorkeeper who finds out, rejects, and chooses through informational channels, and keeps up to date with the possibilities” (Askerøi & Høie, 1999, pp. 24–25, our translation).

Textbook authors take on the responsibility for assuring that the content they present allows students access to the field, and some authors explicitly spoke of a holistic approach to language and language learners as being central to their understanding of the field. In so saying they corroborate the view that “educational texts are always produced in a context

that can be political, moral, economic, as well as related to the subject itself or more general educational contexts. Their purpose has always been to contribute to the education of citizens” (Johnsen et al., 1997, p. 17, our translation). Similarly, Skrunes (2010) talks of all textbooks developing the whole learner, of their being part of educational practices where certain values are more or less promoted.

As well as promoting values, textbooks can be understood as promoting different types of knowledge to varying extents. More than thirty years ago, Christian-Smith (1991) claimed that questions and arguments about whose knowledge is of most worth were prominent in textbook research (p. 7). His claim provides an insightful approach to our consideration of today’s professional textbooks. We identified types of knowledge under the headings of repertoire, contextualisation, theory and research. For some authors, an emphasis on repertoire was central, inasmuch as it promoted engaging lessons, something that both they and their students saw as pivotal to successful language learning. For others, the knowledge most important to grounding English didactics was theoretical or research based.

Though it would be incorrect to suggest that our data identified an outright contradiction between these positions, we did find that the authors sympathised to differing extents with questions and arguments about whose knowledge is of most worth in defining what English didactics should be in teacher education. The question of whose knowledge is of most worth is by no means unique to Norway or even Europe. In her diachronic review, de Cássia Fernandes Hegeto (2021) identified what she termed “axes of development” had led to changes that she found across pedagogical textbooks in teacher education in Brazil. These included a less instrumental perspective, meaning less repertoire, and a greater focus on reflection and research (p. 199). The authors in this study acknowledged the importance of research, thus aligning their textbooks with key policy documents in Norway, including White Paper 4 (2018–2019), which states that higher education is to be research based. Particularly pertinent to the present study is the national curriculum for the five-year *lektor* programmes, which specifies that students have to “actively and critically relate to research, and learn to question the contributions and uses of research” (Nasjonalt råd for lærerutdanning, 2017, p. 5, our translation).

Textbook authors must position their books in alignment with these policy documents, and in so doing they may find that there is a slight disconnect between themselves and some other teacher educators. In a recent study, for example, most teacher educators reported that although they wanted to be closely linked to school practice, they experienced that “abstract knowledge” was accorded more status at their teaching institutions than the competence gained through years of school experience (Ulvik & Smith, 2018).

Despite the different ways in which the authors conceived of English didactics, and the differing weighting they gave to its components, they shared an understanding of their role as contributing to moving the field forward. They believed that their books could make a significant difference in the lives of both student teachers and the pupils that the students would themselves go on to teach. It is therefore far from adequate to describe a professional textbook in English didactics simply as one “that informs, explains, discusses and rounds up: this, and only this, is what we know” (Johnsen, 2010, p. 14). Taken as a whole, the interviews show that professional textbook authors see themselves as contributing to an ongoing definition of the field of English didactics in Norway. A textbook, they said, should equip students with a theoretical grounding and an understanding of research that will enable them to respond critically and appropriately to what we do *not* yet know.

Implications

We start this section with some as yet unfulfilled predictions about the demise of the school textbook. This possibility was raised already in the 1920s by teachers in the Reform Movement, both in the US and in Europe. School textbooks were considered to be under threat when cheap paperbacks came on the market (Purves, 1993, p. 14), and again when audio-visual technology was heralded as the scientific way forward for language learning after World War 2. A survey published in 1998 found that almost half of the head teachers in upper secondary school predicted, prematurely as we now know, that the internet would be as important as textbooks in education by 2003 (Askerøi & Høie, 1999).

So what about the professional textbook? Does it have a future? It is hardly surprising that many of the respondents struggled to answer this question, given that embedded within it are many other uncertainties, including uncertainty about the development of digital educational media, the capacity for sustained reading of coming generations of screen-oriented students, uncertainties relating to the organisation of higher education and teacher educations in particular, and indeed uncertainty about the future of the world itself. It was, nonetheless, one of the central questions that prompted the present study.

More prosaically, the study was prompted by the number and diversity of professional textbooks in English didactics written for the Norwegian context. It is surprising, perhaps, that there are so many, given that in Caspersen et al.'s (2017) finding that the development of *læremidler* was mentioned as requiring “a special inner motivation” (p. 83). A recurring theme in the interviews was just that, the authors’ motivation, their desire to make a difference by defining the field and influencing how English didactics is taught and understood, “a feeling of wanting to be one of the voices, perhaps turn it in a certain direction”. Several authors clearly expressed how important they felt it was to write a professional textbook because of the role it could play in teachers’ and pupils’ lives. The interviewees acknowledged, and indeed emphasised, that more students would read a professional textbook than research articles by the same author. Comparing their more prestigious academic publications with their textbook, one author declared:

I mean, we have hundreds and literally thousands of students in Norway each year reading our books and the impact is just immense compared to this publication points article somewhere. So it doesn't make any sense.

In addition to wanting to define the field and reach as many readers as possible, authors reported that textbook writing made sense to them on both a personal and a professional level, notwithstanding that it sometimes came at the expense of more prestigious academic activities. They said, for example, “Institutions want us to write textbooks and I've been surprised by how many people mentioned the book, know the book, seem to, you know, respect the fact that I've been involved in this book”. They

said, “You see there’s a need. And then the privilege of being able to do something about it. It’s meaningful. It gives me a good feeling professionally”. And one of the authors was gratified to find that researchers at an international conference were referencing their book.

Whether there will ever be a new batch of professional textbooks in English didactics of comparable breadth will depend in part on whether and for how long the authors of the present batch continue to revise their textbooks to meet changing educational discourses, policies and research developments. In a larger perspective it will depend on the survival of the genre of the professional textbook in teacher education. The authors in this study are unanimous in seeing a central role for something, in whatever format, with the functions that are now fulfilled by professional textbooks. But there are many factors at play: the complex interrelationship of private and public sector publication policies; local and national teacher education policies; students’ willingness to obtain and read books; and the quality and accessibility of digital alternatives.

One factor that will continue to play a part in determining the quality and vitality of professional textbooks is academic publication policy. As previously mentioned, we did not initially intend to write about national and institutional policies relating to the accreditation and status of professional textbook writing, but in light of the strong opinions that were expressed in most of the interviews, we came to regard this as a central component of the authors’ shared conversation. Just as almost all the respondents in Caspersen et al.’s (2017) report mentioned the pressure to produce publication points as a challenge for the development of textbooks for teacher education (p. 74), nearly all of our authors expressed dissatisfaction with what they perceived as the limitations and inconsistencies of the current accreditation practices.

To illustrate the vagaries of the system, we can take the case of *Textbook X*, which was motivated by the authors’ conviction that their textbook addressed an important and underrepresented aspect of the field of English didactics. *Textbook X* is research-based, the authors explained, but it does not present new research, and the book was not conceived with a view to receiving publication points. Instead the authors found themselves rewarded in other ways.

In Norway, academic productivity is measured in the Current Research Information System in Norway (CRISTIN) which requires the fulfilment of four criteria. By far the most problematic for professional textbooks is the criterion that it be a *scientific* publication, defined as one that presents new insights:

[...] While an academic text disseminates existing knowledge and is primarily aimed at students, professionals and the general public, a scientific publication will expand or challenge the status of knowledge in the academic field of research. (Høyskolen Kristiania, 2022)

As this quotation implies, professional textbooks are not the obvious place to publish new research or theoretical perspectives because they are not where fellow academics in the field would expect to find them. The example of *Textbook X* illustrates something of the complexity of determining whether a publication expands or challenges the status of knowledge. It is arguably one of the more ground-breaking of the professional textbooks in this study. Although it does not present new research, it is *research-oriented*, as are they all, to varying degrees. And yet, unlike most of them, it neither aspired to nor received accreditation.

The fifteen authors in our study adduced strong arguments for the continued centrality of professional textbooks in teacher education. In the autumn of 2021, however, CRISTIN was widely criticised as an impediment to the writing of good textbooks for tertiary education. In our opinion, what is needed is an accreditation system and a process of peer review that can properly assess whether a professional textbook makes a significant contribution to the nationally identified ambitions for teacher education. The same conclusion was drawn by Moi et al. (2014). Better recognition in CRISTIN, they said, and criteria that are more related to teacher education, would motivate research and development linked to the professionalisation of the teaching profession and the integration of theory, practice, disciplinary studies and didactics (2014, p. 27). Such a system would also, in our opinion, make possible a more open debate about the relative importance to be accorded to different kinds of knowledge in professional textbooks. It would be fairer, more rigorous, more transparent and more reliable than the negotiations and compromises

that some authors reported. Most importantly, a fairer accreditation system would contribute to the quality and even the survival of professional textbooks in teacher education.

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