

# *Is teaching EAP a profession? A reflection on EAP's professional status, values, community and knowledge*

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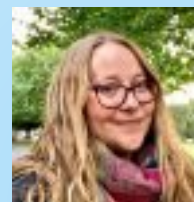
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## Is Teaching EAP a profession? A reflection on EAP's professional status, values, Community and Knowledge.

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### Abstract

This article reflects on the extent to which teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) can be regarded as a profession by investigating and evaluating: the status, values, community and knowledge associated with teaching EAP (English for Academic Purposes.) The findings suggest teaching EAP has an objectively-recognised status as a profession with a well-established community of professionals e.g. IATEFL ESP SIG and BALEAP with shared professional values and knowledge informed by a broad and comprehensive academic and professional knowledge base.

**Keywords:** EAP (English for Academic Purposes), BALEAP, IATEFL, university, higher education, TEAP (Teaching English for Academic Purposes) Accreditation Scheme, blended professionals, BLEAPs.

### Introduction

My first academic task as a new professional doctorate in education student/EdD researcher was reflecting on professionalism and professional knowledge. However, I found myself first needing to determine if teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) can even be considered a profession by evaluating the status, values, community and knowledge associated with teaching EAP.

Searle's (1982) paper, on the evolution of the profession, describes older learned occupations [e.g. teaching] needing to profess [publicly declare] knowledge, firstly via the church, and subsequently via organisations e.g. universities and societies. The need to publicly declare knowledge is based on socioeconomic definitions of professions wherein the public decide if an occupation is considered a profession (Merriam & Brockett, 2007). Occupations need to be objectively recognised as a profession by service users i.e. students and general public (Millerson, 1998). Hargreaves (2000) claims when teachers discuss themselves as a profession, they often mention how they are seen by others in terms of status. In 2013, participants, from 20 different countries, consistently ranked teachers with mid to high status when comparing teachers to 14 other graduate professions (Dolton, Marcenaro-Gutierrez, Pota, Boxser, & Pajpani, 2013). Although, the research from Global Teacher Status Index only includes primary and secondary school teachers, it could be assumed university teachers are ascribed a similar status. For example Elliott (1972) describes teaching at university as

a 'status profession'. In addition, in my specific area of education, teaching EAP (English for Academic Purposes) the status ascribed by my students (mostly from mainland China) may be higher as the Index reports Chinese participants ascribing teachers the highest status ranking (Dolton et al., 2013).

### Constellation of Criteria for Professions

Public declaration, and subsequent public approval, is not the sole measure of a profession. Over 100 years ago, in 1915, Flexner (reprinted in 2001) was first to offer criteria for professions:

"professions involve essentially intellectual operations with large individual responsibility; they derive their raw material from science and learning; this material they work up to a practical and definite end; they possess an educationally communicable technique; they tend to self-organization; they are becoming increasingly altruistic in motivation."

Flexner's criteria have been criticised for their aspirational nature, what a profession 'ought' to be, rather than what a profession is. This more conceptual method for developing definitions, Davis (1999) claims, began as early as the 16th century with the philosophical work of Descartes. Following Flexner, definitions were more sociological, rather than conceptual, and focussed on what professions had in common. This led to much focus on commonality between the established/old/mature (Beck & Young, 2005; Grace, 1984; Larson, 2014; Sachs, 2016) occupations many may regard as professions e.g. medicine. (Goode, 1957) In addition some definitions offered further criteria to differentiate professions, not just from occupations, but also 'semi-professions' (Howsam, Corrigan, Denemark, & Nash, 1976) However, Habenstein (1963) was particularly critical of this 'constellation of characteristics' approach: where some stars [characteristics] burn brighter depending on your position. In an attempt to avoid the constellation, trap I will try to focus, not only on the characteristics that burn brightest for me, and ergo teachers, but instead focus on characteristics that are prominent and persistent in the literature. Thus, a profession can be identified based on its professionals, professional community and knowledge.

## Profession Defined by Individual Professionals' Values

"A profession is a number of individuals in the same occupation organised by a certain moral ideal" (Davis, 1999).

Davis's (1999) definition begins with the professionals themselves, as individuals, in order to define a profession as a whole. Durkheim's (1957) *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*, published in 1957, was one of the first to highlight professional morals. The importance of professional morality is a persistent theme in the literature. Macdonald (1995) suggests professionals can utilise their 'moral authority' by using their professional knowledge outside their immediate context. Morals are also prevalent in the literature for teachers as professionals: Chalke's (2016) 'heart' element (beliefs and values) of professionals and the metaphor research from Jin & Cortazzi (2016) in which morality metaphors were one of the most commonly used by Chinese students to describe teachers. Some definitions of profession identify moral values individual professionals should uphold: altruistic motivation and service (Cullen, 1983; Flexner, 2001) and a strong service orientation/motivation/ethic (Grace, 1984; Hargreaves, 2000; Howsam et al., 1976). These moral values have been criticised by some as 'unnecessary and subjective motivation' (Habenstein, 1963) and do not feature at all in some definitions. Additionally, these moral values could also characterise many occupations not considered professions e.g. charity work. Thus, these moral values will be treated as aspiring, rather than defining, characteristics and explored no further.

However, another type of moral value: independence, autonomy and academic freedom feature in many definitions (Beck & Young, 2005; Hargreaves, 2000; Howsam et al., 1976; Kerchner & Kaufman, 1995; Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Young & Muller, 2014). Some commentators also suggest government intervention that limits teacher autonomy e.g. national curriculum, inspections and teachers' standards can have conversely encourage deprofessionalism (Bourke, 2011; Evetts, 2011). Etzioni (1969) claimed less autonomy and more societal control was one factor leading to his conclusion teaching was a semi-profession. Thankfully, in comparison to school teaching, teaching EAP has more autonomy. There is no national curriculum to adhere to for EAP. Maintaining Teachers' Standards is mandatory for school teachers (Department of Education, 2011). In comparison, the UK Professional Standards Framework from the Higher Education Academy is encouraged, for university teachers, but remains voluntary (HEA, n.d.). In addition, while the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills 'inspect and regulate' (Ofsted, n.d.) the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 'checks, reviews and audits' (QAA, n.d.). However, my professional practice is subject to inspection by BALEAP ('the global forum [community] for EAP professionals').

## Profession Identified by Community of Professionals

'A characteristic of a profession is that of community.' (Goode, 1957)

Community members are brought together through shared values, and through socialisation, further enhancing these shared values and creating a professional habitus (Beck & Young, 2005; Goode, 1957; Swales, 2017). Becher's (1994) interesting work on academic tribes describes the significance of disciplinary differences [particularly when teaching EAP] and explains disciplinary cultures [communities] transcend institutional barriers exemplified by professional mobility to other institutions, shared readership e.g. journals and international conferences. Abbott (1988) suggested a series of events professions experience when becoming a profession, starting with the formation of first national organisation, moving on to first national level journal, code of ethics and ending with accredited courses through professional organisation (not necessarily always in the same order). EAP's first professional organisation was established in 1972 and was at first named Special English Language Materials for Overseas University Students (SELMOUS) and held the first conference in 1975. IATEFL has a longer history, but the English for Special Purposes [including English for Academic Purposes] Special Interest Group was not established until the 1990s (Gillett, 2017; Rixon & Smith, 2017). SELMOUS was renamed British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP) in 1989, but is now known only as BALEAP. BALEAP established its first code of practice in 1989 and its accreditation scheme in 1991. The next step for the EAP community was the 'first national level journal' first established by IATEFL ESP SIG with this journal: 'IATEFL ESPSIG journal: Professional and Academic English' in 1994 (Gillett, 2017). Many years later, the Journal for English for Academic Purposes (JEAP) was launched in 2002, with free access to BALEAP members. Finally, the Teaching EAP Competency framework (CFTEAP) was introduced in 2008 (BALEAP, 2018a; Jordan, 2002). Followed by the TEAP accreditation scheme.

## Community of Professionals Define Own Professional Standards

"no professional activity can be without its own ethics". [emphasis added] Durkheim (2013)

A shared code of ethics/conduct, standards of practice is a ubiquitous characteristic in definitions of a profession (Beck & Young, 2005; Cullen, 1983; Hargreaves, 2000; Howsam et al., 1976; Kerchner & Kaufman, 1995; Millerson, 1998). Macdonald (1995) goes further and claims there are just two essential criteria for a profession: a code of ethics and knowledge. BALEAP's Competency Framework for Teachers of English for

Academic Purposes (CFTEAP) brings together a 'description of professional knowledge, competencies and activities undertaken by EAP practitioners' (Ó'Súilleabháin, 2014). The CFTEAP and TEAP accreditation scheme act as the EAP community's shared code of ethics/conduct. CFTEAP was developed by a BALEAP working party in an 18-month consultation period with the professional community via email, conferences and Professional Issues Meetings (PIMs). The working party also studied 'parallel schemes such as the UKPSF' from the HEA (Ó'Súilleabháin, 2014). CFTEAP and TEAP accreditation scheme is not only designed for professionals in my community, but also designed [defined and shared] by the community, leaving professionalism models from outside of the profession (e.g. UKPSF and QAA) appear more generic and less relevant.

### **Profession Defined by Profession's Knowledge Base**

"Professions themselves largely define their own knowledge base" (Beck & Young, 2005)

The EAP community's knowledge base forms part of codes of practice e.g. CFTEAP and is also formalised into learning programmes. Stapleton and Shao (2016) found EAP was either a compulsory or elective unit on almost all MA TESOL programmes surveyed in 2014. The BALEAP website currently advertises 6 short courses in teaching EAP, 4 at Postgraduate Certificate level and 3 courses at MA level (BALEAP, 2018b). 'A long period of training...with specialist postgraduate training' is one of Eraut's (1994) three characteristics of a professional knowledge base.

### **Profession's knowledge base: esoteric**

'Specialised knowledge is at the core of what distinguishes professions from other occupations' (Young & Muller, 2014)

Another of Eraut's characteristics of a professional knowledge base is that it is different to that of other occupations. Therefore, the profession's knowledge is esoteric (Hughes, 1963), specialised (Hargreaves, 2000; Parsons, 1937; Young & Muller, 2014), unique (Grace, 1984) i.e. not known to other professions/occupations nor the public (Howsam et al., 1976). This leaves the knowledge of teachers in a difficult position, as Freidson (2004) explains 'formal knowledge' taught at schools is based on theories and concepts specific to the profession, but then, through virtue of teaching, can become 'everyday knowledge' for the public. This can also be the case for some formal knowledge taught at university which can become 'everyday knowledge' for graduates. However, the knowledge transferred may only be a small proportion of the profession's knowledge base and this transfer into everyday knowledge of the public is not complete nor instantaneous.

Eraut's final characteristic of a professional knowledge base is 'association with established scientific disciplines' (Eraut, 1994). This characteristic is also shared by Flexner i.e. 'derived from science and learning' or 'applied science' (McDonough & McDonough, 2014) and also mentioned by Howsam et al. (1976) and Macdonald (1995) and emphasised by Kuh and Whitt (1988) who calls for 'scrutiny of this accepted wisdom'. This may seem incongruous: knowledge beginning in another professional area, yet the profession's knowledge belonging solely to that profession. Some commentators have argued that because some knowledge of the teaching profession began in other professions, thus should instead be viewed as a semi-profession (Etzioni, 1969; Howsam et al., 1976). Howsam et al., writing in 1976, suggested a profession's knowledge was 'based on one or more undergirding disciplines from which it draws basic insights and upon which it builds its own applied knowledge'. They further argue teaching (specifically teaching in schools) instead relies heavily on a number of disciplines: psychology, sociology, anthropology and philosophy much of which teachers were not given opportunity to study in detail (Howsam et al., 1976). It is no coincidence these criticisms were published around the time teaching was to become a graduate profession, after the publication of the James Report (James, 1972). These comments also predate the introduction of professional educational doctorates, which allow teachers to contribute to [and develop] the applied knowledge of their profession (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). Howsam et al.'s claims also feel very outdated in comparison to recent emphasis from many universities on transdisciplinary approaches and more recent claims from Canagarajah (2016) that suggest that earlier specificity and 'narrowing of enquiry' of the profession's academic knowledge "has now turned out to be a limitation, stifling the ability to explain the messy intersections of social domains, identities, and communicative needs [emphasis added]". He also goes further to recommend encouraging diversity in the professional knowledge base and more engagement with [and study of] other disciplines (Canagarajah, 2016), something I hope to achieve through my own future doctoral study of EAP in a specific academic discipline/community.

### **Profession's Knowledge Base: Academic Knowledge (theoretical)**

"EAP is a research-informed academic field of study" (Ding & Bruce, 2017)

Eraut (1994) suggests most associate knowledge only with what he calls 'book knowledge' which others refers to as 'theoretical knowledge' (Hughes, 1963; Millerson, 1998) or 'received knowledge' (Mann, 2010; Wallace, 1991). I will begin by exploring the theories [academic knowledge] utilised by the EAP profession as reported by the profession's individuals and by the community e.g. CFTEAP. Ferguson (1997, p. 85) suggested three



related elements of specialised [professional] knowledge for EAP: (again associated with book/theoretical knowledge)

a knowledge of disciplinary cultures and values	essentially sociological or anthropological
a knowledge of the epistemological basis of different disciplines	philosophical in nature
a knowledge of genre and discourse	mainly linguistic in character

Knowledge from sociology is an important part of the EAP profession's knowledge base. Goode (1957) took a sociological approach when defining a profession as a community and provided characteristics including: 'within the areas of communal action there is a common language, which is understood only partially by outsiders'. When students begin undergraduate courses, they are not yet part of the academic community. This can be particularly difficult for international students for whom the language of the new academic community may be challenging. As apprentices, students may develop an uneven sketch of the community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1999) and may need support and guidance with language used within that community via EAP or better still via English for Specific Academic Purposes. So far, so sociology. However, when EAP practitioners seek to investigate a community e.g. an academic department, they view it not only from a sociological perspective, but also a linguistic perspective. In keeping with the process of moving from general academic knowledge to specific academic knowledge, Swales (2017) took insights from the sociological understanding of community to build his own profession-specific definition of a 'discourse community' for the EAP profession:

A discourse community...

has a potentially discoverable set of goals

has mechanisms of intercommunication among its members

uses its participatory mechanisms to manage the operations of the DC and to promote (usually) change, growth and development or to orchestrate (rarely) retrenchment and demise

utilizes an evolving selection of genres in the furtherance of its sets of goals and as a means of instantiating its participatory mechanisms

has acquired and continues to refine DC-specific terminology has an explicit or implicit hierarchy and/or structure which, inter alia, manages the processes of entry into and advancement within the discourse community

develops a sense of "silential relations" whereby there is a sense of things that do not need to be said or do not need to be spelled out

develops horizons of expectation, defined rhythms of activity, a sense of its history, and value systems for what is good and less good work

There are two main research methods utilised by the EAP profession to enhance knowledge about a discourse community e.g. an academic department. The first is ethnography, influenced by anthropological studies, but built upon to include a sociolinguistic approach: ethnography of communication (Bruce, 2015) or linguistic ethnography (Cook, 2015) i.e. analysing language use in context, and textography: 'something more than a disembodied textual analysis, but less than a full ethnography (Swales, 1998). Swales' (1998) textography highlighted the vast range of differing texts, genres and cultures in one university building housing three distinct academic departments. The second main method often used is corpus linguistics. Corpus linguistics refers to a computerised body of written text or transcribed speech to be analysed using technology (Kennedy, 2014). Corpus techniques can include: frequency i.e. most common words in a group of texts, and concordancing i.e. words most commonly used together in a series of texts (Hyland, 2006). The most significant corpus contribution to EAP academic knowledge has been Coxhead's 1998 Academic Word List. Coxhead produced a list of 570 frequent word families based on a corpus of academic texts (Coxhead, 2011).

The first two knowledge domains, above from Ferguson have significant crossover, and as such, are reported as descriptor A3 of BALEAP's TEAP Accreditation Scheme (Academic disciplines):

'an EAP practitioner will recognize, explore and apply to their professional practice, knowledge of disciplinary differences and how they influence the way knowledge is expanded and communicated'.

The profession's knowledge of academic disciplines, and research methods are shared with profession's community via journals e.g. this journal and others including JEAP and conferences e.g. IATEFL and BALEAP conferences and via professional training courses and degree programmes. To use Cook's (2015) analogy what started with the dinosaurs of sociology and anthropology has evolved into a very different beast. Profession-specific knowledge draws basic insights from more generalised academic knowledge and builds its own body of academic knowledge (Howsam et al., 1976; Parsons, 1937)

The final domain, suggested by Ferguson (1997), is firmly rooted in the area of linguistics; Applied Linguistics i.e. applying linguistic theory to teaching and transmitting findings to practitioners (Cook, 2015). Applied Linguistics is one area of specific knowledge the language teaching profession can claim and is 'synonymous with the study of additional (usually) English language acquisition and teaching' (Cook, 2015). Kramsch (2015) suggests applied linguistics should be called 'practical language studies'. Practical language studies could also be used to describe, not only the practice of the profession

(teachers/practitioners), but also the service-users themselves (international students for whom English is an additional language). Ferguson (1997) explicitly mentions 'knowledge of genre and discourse', which has some crossover with the previous two elements i.e. knowledge of discourse communities in academic disciplines. Ferguson's (1997) final element directly mirrors BALEAP's TEAP scheme A2 'Academic discourse':

'high level of systemic language knowledge including knowledge of discourse analysis e.g. theories of genre and text type.'

Genre analysis and genre theory, developed by Swales, investigate 'a genre' i.e. "particular type of communicative event which has a particular communicative purpose recognised by its discourse community" (Peacock & Flowerdew, 2001). Swales (2002) cites numerous influences in developing genre theory relating to language theory. Swales' "genre theory has been the most influential in informing the knowledge base of the field [and the profession] of EAP" (Ding & Bruce, 2017). Hyland (2006) provides many examples of genre theory utilised by EAP practitioners: defining specific written genres e.g. undergraduate essays, defining spoken genres e.g. lectures, and identifying 'moves' within these genres e.g. acknowledgements section structure: (1 reflecting, 2 thanking, 3 announcing).

## **Profession's Knowledge Base: Professional (Practical) Knowledge**

In addition to academic/theoretical knowledge professions also rely on professional/practical knowledge. This type of knowledge is more technical and practical and described in terms of 'skills', (Hughes, 1963; Millerson, 1998; Parsons, 1937) 'behaviours' (Howsam et al., 1976) 'expertise' (Saks, 2012) and techniques (Flexner, 2001). Eraut (1994) suggests 'professional knowledge is constructed through experience' (Mann, 2010; Wallace, 1991). This experience can be the practitioner's own experience, but can also be extended to the professional's community's experience; shared via academic research. These skills can also stem from academic/theoretical knowledge (Macdonald, 1995; Millerson, 1998) Syllabus design, course development, materials production and pedagogy implementation all draw on the profession's academic knowledge (theories) (Ding & Bruce, 2017) as well as professional knowledge (experience). For example, genre analysis of critiques used in architecture courses e.g. (Swales, Barks, Ostermann, & Simpson, 2001) could be used to develop knowledge for the TEAP scheme's B1 'understand and apply knowledge of students...personal, linguistic and academic needs...of their target academic situation'. EAP practitioners also require academic knowledge for TEAP scheme's C1 'teaching practice' which includes: 'familiar with the

approach, methods and techniques of communicative language teaching'. Communicative language teaching is the teaching of 'communicative competence' i.e. use language to participate effectively in institutional context (Ding & Bruce, 2017). Communicative language teaching is not only a profession-specific approach, but is also supported by profession-specific research and based on academic knowledge/theory from the profession i.e. 'successful Second Language Acquisition is inherently social' (Tarone, 2015).

Two other TEAP scheme descriptors (A1 and D2) appear, at first, glance to describe Eraut's (1994) professional knowledge constructed [only] from practitioner experience. However, A1's 'knowledge of practices, values and conventions of tertiary education' may also be gained through the community's experience, professional EAP courses, and the profession's e.g. Sauntson and Morrish's (2011) corpus linguistic study of university mission statements which highlighted the use of 'neo-liberal discourse' and values of 'marketisation, commodification and globalisation.' Equally, TEAP scheme descriptor D2's 'quality assurance' knowledge can be provided via the EAP community i.e. BALEAP accreditation scheme. My own pre-sessional course, for which I am course leader, is one of only 25 BALEAP accredited courses (BALEAP, 2018a) Accreditation visits involve teaching observations and scrutiny of curriculum and structure, but most importantly reviewers are part of the EAP community with EAP expertise (Blaj-Ward, 2014).

## **Professional Knowledge Beyond the Competency Framework and TEAP Accreditation Scheme**

'Critical reflection raises teaching from craft to profession' (Kerchner & Kaufman, 1995).

While reflecting on my own practice, and how it draws on and blends both academic and professional knowledge, I also reflected on my professional knowledge in relation to CFTEAP and BALEAP's TEAP accreditation scheme, only to discover a significant part of my professional knowledge, and role, to be absent. This role uses knowledge spanning both the teaching and administrative domains and was first described as 'blended professionals' (Whitchurch, 2009). Brew, Boud, Lucas, and Crawford (2017) updated this description to focus on academics (university teaching practitioners) using the term 'academic artisans'. This academic artisanry involves creatively utilising available tools and materials to keep the 'university functioning' and includes spending more time on administrative activities such as: course leadership, curriculum development and resource management, and less time, if any, on research (Brew et al., 2017). If teaching is housed front and centre 'on the dancefloor' and research is seen as observing from the VIP balcony, administration is very much a 'backstage',

often invisible (Bernstein, 1971) activity, keeping the [academic] show on the road (Boud & Brew, 2013). Hadley's grounded theory was first to investigate blended professionals and academic artisans in the EAP community: Blended EAP Professionals (BLEAPs) (Hadley, 2015; Hadley, 2012). Hadley (2012) identifies different BLEAP types and trajectories and explains the vital, but understudied, role of BLEAPs and the need for sharing this professional knowledge with the profession e.g. inclusion on MA TESOL programs.

## Conclusion: EAP as a Profession

The EAP profession has a high objectively-recognised status as perceived by students and the general public. However, EAP practitioners themselves often have a lower subjectively-recognised status and need to recognise themselves as a profession (Millerson, 1998). Schaefer, Turner and Lowe (2017), in a recent 'TEFLOLOGY' podcast, agreed that, despite being teachers themselves, they did not believe teaching English as a foreign language was a profession. Even Swales himself, at a SELMOUS event in 1984, lamented the view of EAP as a 'lunch-time profession' by some colleagues (Jordan, 2001). This may, in part, be due to comparisons to other professions and other colleagues in higher education. Agevall (2017) describes a two-tier system beginning with the introduction of adjunct teachers, without a PhD, to 'take care of undergraduates and trivial tasks' while professors [original university teachers] rose to the top. Albeit on the back of the 'donkeys in the department' (Park & Ramos, 2002). In the absence of graduate assistants described by Park and Ramos (2002), EAP practitioners, particularly BLEAPs, become the departmental donkeys with a heavy workload keeping the department moving. This metaphor personally resonates as a female donkey: a Jenny.

The EAP profession has a broad and comprehensive academic and professional knowledge base. However, Ding and Bruce (2017) also warn the knowledge base is 'contested and open' and criticise the invisibility of practitioners in research. As previously mentioned, much of the profession's academic knowledge is from Applied Linguistics. In contrast, those conducting research and disseminating findings are often not EAP practitioners, but instead linguistic researchers. The EAP community needs to move away from asking researchers to research their profession (Savignon, 1990). Instead, the community need to participate in research and set the research agenda. This remains a difficult task as EAP practitioners find themselves in a Cinderella story (Charles & Pecorari, 2015) in which the ugly sisters are 'neoliberal management practices which undermine recognition for the theory and research informed activities of EAP' (Ding & Bruce, 2017). Or worse still, management practices that prevent access to the research ball (Paterson, 2016) through teaching-

only/focussed academic contracts without research allocation. EAP practitioners need to continue the fight to be recognised as 'pracademics': practitioner-academics, rather than a 'third space' support service. Alongside fighting to carve out time, and space, to research and investigate academic genres and discourse communities, in order to add to the profession's knowledge base via journals like this one and JEAP, and enhance profession's [and own] status. Therefore blending academic knowledge and professional knowledge together into research-informed practice.

I hope my community of EAP professionals will continue to successfully achieve the above. I also really hope my own ongoing EdD research will someday add to the profession's knowledge base and result in research-informed practice.

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