

Expert opinion

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Sir, – Joe Humphreys never fails to provide a thought-provoking article. The central theme of the article “[How does anyone become an expert on anything?](#)” (Unthinkable, October 10th) was the notion of “interactional expertise”, as recently proposed by the British sociologist Harry Collins: “By immersing yourself deeply in a field of study, you can gain enough “interactional expertise” to make practical judgements indistinguishable from those made by practitioners themselves”.

This proposal is surely a claim that should be evaluated carefully, rather than repeated uncritically. Indeed, it’s worth pointing out to your readers that the concept of “interactional expertise” is strongly contested by many professional scientists. For example, Joe Humphreys’s statement that “Collins himself proved the point by becoming a recognised expert in gravitational wave physics, having spent many years interviewing and talking to scientists in that field for sociological research” should not go unchallenged.

While Prof Collins is certainly recognised for provocative and thought-provoking studies in the history of science, I am not aware of any physicist who considers him an expert in gravitational wave physics (or any other field of physics). – Yours, etc,

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