

## FIVE PERSPECTIVES ON PROFESSIONALISM

Five perspectives on professionalism that have been found in the literature will be elaborated.

### **Analysing professionalism of teachers**

The study of professions and professionalism has a long standing tradition in sociological research from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Evetts 2006, Crook, 2008). Sociologists have tried to identify the specific values that are connected to professions and at the same time tried to identify criteria to separate professions from other types of occupations.

As in most debates on professions and on professionalism the characteristics of professions are connected to positive and prestigious elements, many occupations have tried to identify their professionalism, thus trying to become part of the elite.

This applies also to teachers. In many publications that are focused on teachers, the use of the term educational professional is used deliberately to indicate and emphasize the prestige and status of the teacher. Teacher policies are full of ‘professional standards’, ‘professional development’, ‘professional communities’, etc.

In many of those publications it is unclear whether the concept of teacher professionalism is considered as an indication of the status quo or as an ideal concept that is worthwhile to strive for. As a result the concepts of profession and professionalism have become diffuse and lack conceptual clarity.

In this paper we will use the following definitions (Evetts 2009, Koster 2002, Hargreaves 2000):

- Profession: a distinct category of occupational work
- Professionalisation: a process in which a professional group pursues, develops, acquires and maintains more characteristics of a profession
- Professionalism: the conduct, demeanour and standards which guide the work of professionals.

In the past century, the sociological discourse on professions and on the professionalism of teachers has used different and shifting perspectives, emphasizing different aspects of professionalism (Evetts 2006).

In our study of relevant literature on professions, we have identified five different perspectives on professionalism:

#### Archetypes and attributes

One way of looking at the professionalism of teachers is by comparing them to classical professions like doctors or lawyers and to identify similarities and differences. Using these classical professions as ideal examples, typical characteristics were derived which could be used to separate between professions and non-professions and to identify similarities or differences with other occupations. In this approach, the focus is on identifying categories for occupational classification (Gewirtz et al 2009), where the classical professions are considered as archetypes of ‘true professions’.

Typical attributes are (Snoek, Swennen and Van der Klink 2009):

- Professional autonomy, through professional monopoly of the members of the profession who have control over their own work
- Control over entry requirements to the profession and the further professional development of the individual members. Professions also have the power to judge, and subsequently even to exclude, members who do not keep to the professional standards and ethical code of that profession.

- An ethical code as a means to win the trust of the public and public bodies (often governments) that have the power to license the profession and its members; and to serve as a guideline for good conduct of the members of that particular profession.
- A strong academic knowledge base (Abbott 1988), consisting of formal or technical knowledge (Goodson and Hargreaves 1996). “*Academic knowledge legitimises professional work by clarifying its foundations and tracing them to major cultural*

*values. In most modern professions, these have been the values of rationality, logic, and science. Academic professionals demonstrate the rigor, the clarity, and the scientifically logical character of professional work”* (Abbott 1988: 54).

- Freedom of establishment. Members do not have a job contract but are independent and self employed.

When the teaching profession is held against the framework of characteristics of the classical professions, the conclusion is clear: teaching can not be regarded as a true profession. Teachers do not control the entrance to their occupation, they have no freedom of establishment, but are employed by schools. As a result teachers have only limited autonomy over their work. In many countries there is no ethical code for teachers. Also the academic level of the teaching profession is considered by many authors as limited (Verbiest 2007). It is still relatively rare for teachers to be research trained and to have carried out post-graduate studies (Erixon, Frånberg and Kallós 2001). As a result, teaching, like nursing, social work and librarianship, is often called a semi-profession (Etzioni 1969). Although the fact that the comparison with classical professions is widely used in debates on professionalism, this approach is also criticized. Professionalism defined in this way is seen as an artificial construct with always contested definitions (Crook 2008), a shifting phenomenon reflecting whatever people think it is at a particular time (Hanlon 1998). It seems more useful to explore the characteristics to the teaching profession today, than comparing it to some proposed ideal (Whitty 2008).

#### The professionalisation project

A second way of looking at professionalism is by strengthening the ‘professionalisation project’ (Larson 1977) with the emphasis on the development of a professional body that restricts the entrance to the profession, thus creating and maintaining a monopoly position from which the profession can safeguard its quality and be involved in debates about power, influence, status and bargains about working conditions and professional autonomy.

In this perspective, the focus is not on an idealized concept that acts as a frame of reference to judge all occupations that want to call themselves profession, but on the process of growing self-awareness of an occupational group, on professionalism as an aspirational target (Power 2008).

In this process the focus can be on the development of the knowledge base of a profession, on the improvement of standards for professional performance, on restricting the unlicensed entrance into the profession, the development of mechanisms for self-control and self-accountability and on defining ethical codes to emphasize explicit professional virtues.

Examples of such professionalisation projects can be seen in several professions who have developed their own societies, professional journals and ethical codes like journalists (Crook 2008), teacher educators in The Netherlands (Koster 2002) and in the present development of a professional register for teachers in The Netherlands.

In this approach the characteristics of classical professions are used as a frame of reference for development instead of judgement.

In discussions on the professionalisation projects, two different perspectives are used, one focussing on idealistic conceptions emphasising specialist and ethical virtues (like trustworthiness, collegiality, service), and another focussing on exclusionary and self-interested aspects focussed on market

closure, status and power (Larson 1977), leading to negotiations and bargains with governments over professional mandates, influence, jurisdictional competitions and working conditions. (Gewirtz et al 2009).

The idealistic conception can contribute to the increase of societal trust in a profession, while the critical conceptions can easily lead to the reduction of societal trust in a profession.

#### High expectations in modern society

A third way of looking at professionalism of teachers is by focusing on expectations in the present day competitive society. Present day post-modern and neo-liberal society can be characterized by a strong emphasis on economic and technological changes. Economic changes have led to a stronger globalized, market oriented and competitive perspective with stronger central regulations (Gewirtz et al 2009). This changing market oriented context for society and schools has resulted in changes in the expectations not only towards school leaders, but also towards teachers, emphasizing accountability, rationality, competitiveness and control. (Evans 2008; Goodson and Hargreaves 1996; Robertson 1996).

*'Schools (like many other public institutions) have been rationalized, cut-back, made more economically efficient, less of a tax burden and set in competition against one another for 'clients'.'* (Hargreaves 2000: 168).

In this approach the term 'new professionalism' is often used, indicating that the changing context of schools asks for a change in qualities expected from professionals, with a focus on effectivity, accountability, national safeguarding and control:

- A strong focus on the quality of work and a stronger emphasis on output requirements.
- Public accountability, where teachers have to explicate how their teaching contributes to achieving the intended learning outcomes.
- Implementation of standards describing competences and qualifications of beginners and expert members of professions. For the OECD, the development of such standards has a high priority: *'The overarching priority is for countries to have in place a clear and concise statement or profile of what teachers are expected to know and be able to do. This is necessary to provide the framework to guide initial teacher education, teacher certification, teachers' ongoing professional development and career advancement, and to assess the extent to which these different elements are being effective.'* (OECD 2005: 131) Most of these standards have been developed by national governments with limited or no involvement of teachers (Snoek et al 2009).

Especially in England it has been argued that these features of new professionalism lead to a de-professionalisation of teachers and an over-emphasis on the role of managers (Whitty 2008, Hargreaves 2000).

At the same time, the knowledge society and technological changes with its 'instantaneous, globalized availability of information and entertainment' (Hargreaves 2000) ask for other qualities of modern professions:

- Increased attention to the life-long professional development of professionals throughout their careers. It is generally accepted that in our knowledge intensive society, lifelong learning becomes essential for career-long professional development (European Council 2009; ETUCE 2008).
- A focus on new forms of relationships and collaboration with colleagues, students and their parents (Hargreaves 1994: 424). Whitty (2008) not only emphasizes collaborative professionalism between colleagues in the school in professional learning communities, but

also ‘democratic professionalism’ including collaboration with stakeholders outside the school.

- Emphasis on improvement and innovation. Teaching is seen as a dynamic and innovative profession, where teachers will need to reflect on their own practice and contribute to the improvement and innovation of the profession.
- A knowledge base that is the result of research, experience and reflection. This feature of professionalism leads to appeals to involve teachers in action research, self-study and practitioner inquiry (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009, Loughran et al 2004 , Ponte & Smeets 2009, Stenhouse 1975)

Those seven features characterize the role of professions in a competitive knowledge society with on the one hand collaborative lifelong learning and innovations and on the other hand a focus on accountability with respect to outcomes and control of the quality of professionals through standards.

#### The logic of professionalism

A fourth approach focuses on fundamental differences between logics in the labour market. Although this approach tries to identify professions and non-professions, it differs from the traits approach as the focus is not on studying manifestations of occupations in order to identify categories to classify occupations, but to search for the underlying and more fundamental logics that can explain the manifestation of professions and non-professions.

Important work in this area has been done by Freidson (2001). He identifies three different logics, that of the bureaucracy, that of the free market and that of professionalism. Those different logics create different qualities that workers need to operate in each of these logics:

- In the logic of the free market, everyone is free to buy or sell goods and services. Nothing is regulated and customers make their decision rationally, based on financial concerns, emotional concerns and their previous experiences with products, services and providers. Free and unregulated competition will increase innovation and keep prices down. Customer preferences, satisfaction and choice, based on transparent information about quality and costs, determine which and whose service will succeed.
- In the logic of the bureaucracy, production and distribution of goods and services is planned, controlled and regulated by the administration of a large organisation, being governments, private firms or public agencies. The main aim of bureaucracy is to guarantee a reliable and transparent society with equal rights and equal access to all. Rules and regulations must safeguard that each individual is treated in the same way and does not have to depend on personal connections. Each organization ‘is governed by an elaborate set of rules that establish the qualifications of those that can be employed to perform different jobs and that define their duties’ (p1). Planning, supervision and standardisation assure customers the access to reliable services at reasonable costs. This is ensured by managers who control those producing the product.
- In the third logic of professionalism, workers with specialized knowledge have the power to organize their own work. They are privileged and exclusive, customers or managers can not employ anyone else. This privilege implies a system of self-control between professionals which prevents abuse of those exclusive rights, so ‘customers and managers can count on work of high quality at reasonable costs’ (p2).

In Freidson’s perspective, professionalism is connected to a distinct mandate where ‘... an organized occupation gains the power to determine who is qualified to perform a defined set of tasks, to prevent all others from performing that task and to control the criteria by which to

*evaluate performance. (...) The organized occupation creates the circumstances under which its members are free of control by those who employ them.”(p12).*

The necessity for this third logic is lying in the fact that certain work is so specialized that its quality is inaccessible for those lacking the required training and experience which makes it impossible for customers to select the best services on the free market. At the same time, the application of the expertise of professions is so much depending on specific contexts that continuous judgement, adaptation and *fingerspitzengefühl* of the professionals are needed, which makes standardization and bureaucratic control unsuited. According to Freidson, the work of professionals can not be standardized, rationalized and commodified (p17).

This is supported by Furlong (2000):

*‘It is because professionals face complex and unpredictable situations that they need a specialized body of knowledge; if they are to apply that knowledge, it is argued that they need the autonomy to make their own judgements; and given that they have that autonomy, it is essential that they act with responsibility – collectively they need to develop appropriate professional values’.*(p18-19)

Neo-liberal ideologies have led to a mixing of logics where education, but also public areas like health and social care, has become a commodity where parents and students can freely choose and base their choices on leak tables.

This has led to a strong emphasis on professional quality of teachers by their employers and managers, leading to imposed professional development schemes from above. Evetts (2009) calls this ‘organizational professionalism’.

*‘The effects are not the occupational control of the work by the worker/practitioners but rather control by the organizational managers and supervisors’* (Evetts 2009: 23).

In the eyes of Evetts, the focus on the satisfaction of customers through managerial systems of accountability and audits endangers the trust of the public in professionals while it reduces the time that professionals can spend with clients. Opposite to organizational professionalism, Evetts places ‘occupational professionalism’, which is characterized by

*‘... a discourse constructed within professional groups, collegial authority, discretion and occupational control of the work, practitioner trust by both clients and employers, controls operationalized by practitioners and professional ethics monitored by institutions and associations.’* (p23)

Both Evetts, Freidson and Furlong argue that professionals need to control their own work given the ideal-typical character of the knowledge and skills they use and their right of discretion. Teaching asks for professional judgement and the use of professional intuition (Atkinson and Claxton 2000), which can not be standardized.

However, this professional control and occupational professionalism asks for a close interconnection and link between professional autonomy, competence and trust.

#### The ethical and altruistic character of professions and the role of trust

To strengthen this link between professional autonomy, competence and trust, several authors emphasize the moral character of professionalism. In this fifth approach to professionalism, the fundamental ethical and altruistic character of professions is emphasized (Crook 2008, Lunt 2008). This ethical and altruistic character is connected to the power imbalance between professional and client. The role of professionals in their service to clients (like the service of teachers towards parents and pupils/students) asks for professional autonomy, which needs to be compensated by public trust based on the rigorous use of an ethical code.

Therefore the public ‘strikes a bargain’ with the professionals (Lunt 2008) in terms of a social contract negotiated by the state, *The essence of which is that professions are given*

*greater autonomy than other social groups. They set their own standards, regulate entry into their own ranks, discipline their members, and operate with fewer restraints than the arts, trades or businesses. In return they are expected to serve the public good and enforce high standards of conduct and discipline. (Skrtic 1991: 87)*

This social contract creates a professional mandate for a profession. This professional mandate is based on trust of the public and state in the professionals. This trust is grounded in the altruistic character of the professionals. For professionals, the measure of professional 'success' is not the gains they win, but the service they perform (Crook 2008). Not the height of their incomes makes the work of teachers worthwhile, but the quality of the learning of their students. This altruistic perspective explains the public criticism of high and excessive incomes and personal career ambitions of politicians, doctors, school managers, etc. The main emphasis for professionals should be on a high level of personal integrity and on service to others, ahead of personal reward. In that respect, the teaching profession could be considered as a 'calling'.

Several authors have elaborated the concept of trust, identifying different forms of trust, which vary in the way in which the risks are accepted or dealt with (Bottery 2003, Byrk & Schneider 2002, Nooteboom 2006).

The theories on trust show the importance of competence, integrity and dedication of the members of a profession to gain the trust of the public and the state and to justify the professional mandate. The members of a profession have a large responsibility to live up to those expectations with respect to competence, integrity and dedication. This is both a responsibility of individual members of the profession and of the professional community as a whole, e.g. through public accounts of professional practice and outcomes which are based on evidence and research, but also through the use of ethical codes and sanctions that are used within profession. The rigorous use of such ethical codes creates an essential safety net in the power imbalance between the public and professionals. Trust in dedication of the professional is according to Nooteboom closely connected to empathy of professionals for their clients. In the relation between the professional and the client or the society, the development of a shared understanding of professional practice is important. The professional plays a key role in creating this shared understanding.

### **Implications for the qualities of teachers and their education**

The discourse on the professionalism of teachers and the teaching profession has been dominated by complaints about teachers, as they should lack professionalism and elude governmental control, which needed to be compensated by stronger bureaucracy, government regulations and management control, and by complaints about governments as their measures should have de-professionalized the teaching profession and demoralized teachers.

At the same time, we need to be aware that this discourse is dominated by Anglo-Saxon writers and British-American perspectives. The debates and dilemmas with respect to teacher professionalism might be less heated in other cultural contexts.

Nevertheless, all over the world expectations towards teachers and their professionalism are high. Therefore it is important to reflect on the essential elements that constitute teachers' professionalism and the way in which teacher education can contribute to the development of this professionalism.

From our study of the literature on professionalism, a number of essential elements come up.

Although the five perspectives on professionalism of teachers differ, they also add to each other providing in the combination a richer and more complete picture of the essence of professionalism of teachers.

Characteristics of teacher professionalism that can be derived from the analysis of literature include:

1. Professional autonomy, through professional monopoly and control over their own work;
2. Involvement in the entrance to the profession;
3. Control over the central values and good conduct within the profession through the use of ethical codes, connected to sanctions for breaking the code;

4. Membership of professional societies that can take the responsibility for these elements;
5. A focus on integrity and dedication of the professional;
6. Public accountability for outcomes of professional performance;
7. A strong academic and practice-based knowledge base that underlies professional activities;
8. Involvement in the development of that knowledge base through involvement in academic research, action research and self-study;
9. Lifelong professional development of the members of the profession;
10. Collaboration with colleagues and stakeholders;
11. Involvement in the innovation of the profession;
12. Commitment of the teacher to support both the public and the state in their understanding of educational matters.

When these characteristics of the profession are translated to qualities of individual professionals, a frame of reference in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes can be created that can be used to analyse the contribution of teacher education curricula to the professionalism of teachers.