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Teacher Education

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Implications on Teacher Professionalism When Cross Sector Working

Theresa Marriott – 1898 words total

Introduction

The trouble is... Professionalism... 'is whatever people think it is at any particular time' (Whitty, 2008: 32) – it is entirely subjective and 'to people outside education, FE [Further Education] teachers appear as an anomalous group, with an ambivalent status and unclear identity' (Hall and Marsh, 2000: 11). Literature states: 'professional standards for FE and HE [Higher Education] teachers...is like trying to bottle moonshine' (Hall and Marsh, 2000: 5).

And herein lies the problem; literature either specifies what teacher professionalism is in a prescriptive manner, almost checklist in style, or has multiple and additional terms included which cause the term/s to overlap and become all encompassing. Therefore, making it difficult to extrapolate a definitive term for teacher professionalism. This is particularly pertinent for individuals similar to myself who are working across two sectors simultaneously: operating as an FE and HE professional.

As part of doctoral studies, specialising in Further Education (FE) teacher professionalism, this article seeks to:

- Explore notions of professionalism
- Explore definitions of teacher professionalism
- Discuss professionalism for cross sector working

Definitions of a profession

So, to set the scene let us orientate definitions of a profession and professionalism. The Oxford Dictionary (2016) states a profession is: 'a paid occupation, especially one that involves prolonged training and a formal qualification: *his chosen profession of teaching a barrister by profession*' (np). Greenwood (1957) states that a profession is 'division of labor [sic] based upon technical specialization [sic] ...systematic theory...authority...community sanction...ethical codes...culture' (p 45)

Hoyle's (1975) Criteria of a profession states that:

- A profession provides an essential social service
- A profession is founded upon a systematic body of knowledge
- A profession requires a lengthy period of academic and practical training
- A profession has a high degree of autonomy
- A profession has a code of ethics
- A profession generates in-service growth

Definitions of professionalism

If we move onto professionalism and how this links to a profession, again, if we use the standard dictionary definition it is: 'the combination of all the qualities that are connected with trained and skilled people' (Cambridge Dictionaries online, 2016: np), 'an organized group...interacting...creat[ing] its own subculture' (Greenwood, 1957: 45).

Freidson's (2001) professionalism model: The Third Logic states that professionalism is; The concept of specialised knowledge > the provision of important services > power and control in own work.

Freidson's (2001) model argues that this level of professionalism affords high status and controls its own work and the work of others within the group – an ideal type where the professionalism is signified through altruism rather than for financial gain.

These definitions are in some respects representative of education in some areas but the concepts have aspects which for many teachers may be tenuous, again, particularly if staff are working across multiple sectors. Support for this can be seen in the work of Freidson (1994) who argued that 'the many perspectives from which it [professionalism] can be legitimately be viewed, and from which sense can be made of it, preclude the hope of any widely accepted definition of general analytical value' (p 27).

Traditionalist views of professionalism have formed into ideals (norms) and are recognised as an important factor for teachers to contextualise and frame their work as part of a recognised group, but what has to be considered is how this is applied to teaching professionals who are cross sector working. This 'grey area' is an issue because it is recognised that teachers draw professional constructs from sectors which are already 'well defined' such as law and medicine (Hoyle, 1975), yet operate in a highly diverse environment which may not provide a comfortable fit for professionalism when working between two sectors.

For teachers, the importance of identity and belonging cannot be underestimated; being a professional creates a culture that individuals want to be part of, giving a comforting and recognisable point of reference and associated status (Hoyle, 2001: Little and McGlaughlin, 1993: Walker and Ryan, 1999: Hoyle, 1975).

Professional frameworks

So what can teachers turn to in terms of professional frameworks? For FE teachers there are the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) professional standards (2014), the ETF replaced the Institute for Learning (IfL) after the Lingfield report on teacher professionalism in the lifelong learning sector (DBIS, 2012). This is important as the government's acceptance of Lingfield's (DBIS, 2012) deregulation for teachers in FE (DBIS, 2012), was a move which has been

compared to de-professionalisation by many (Beighton, 2014: Gleeson, 2014: The Policy Consortium, 2014: Norman, 2013). This is due to the reduction in qualifications and experience required to enter the profession since 2012, with standards of professionalism being an 'opt in' approach.

For HE teachers there is the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) (HEA, 2011), which again is opt in despite many of the features of the standards and frameworks for FE and HE being embedded into inspection frameworks and job roles/appraisals. So, how does this affect teachers who work cross sector?

Implications for cross sector teachers – Imposter Syndrome

During the pilot study and data collection for Doctoral research, the data collected indicates that FE teachers are suffering from 'imposter syndrome' (Barcan, 2014: Clance, 2013: Jaruwat Sakulku and Alexander, 2011: Byrnes and Lester, 1995: Gediman, 1985: Topping and Kimmel, 1985: Clance and Imes, 1978). In drawing the threads of what has already surfaced in the literature regarding FE teacher identity this seems plausible due to there been no clear definition of what an FE teacher professional is after the implementation of Lingfield's Report (2012).

Pilot studies, data collection and literature tell us that FE teachers in general suffer from;

- internalised feelings of low self worth and inadequacy
- have high and unrealistic expectations of themselves
- have a fear of failure
- compare themselves to others
- and have a fear of being discovered as a 'fake' (Crawford et al., 2016: Sherman, 2013: Bernard et al. 2002).

This could be further exacerbated when working as an FE and HE teacher, where the lines of professionalism are blurred (Shah, 2014: The Policy Consortium, 2014: Lucas, 2013: Norton, 2012: Wolf, 2011: Apple, 2010: Hoyle, 2001).

Themes of 'intellectual fraud' (Crawford et al., 2016: 376) and 'inauthenticity' (Sherman, 2013: 57) relate well to the opt in professional standards/frameworks, where cross sector teachers may be suffering from an identity crisis; they may be comparing themselves to other professionals who have an accountable professional framework such as doctors and lawyers. This provides a tangible link to imposter syndrome and how it affects cross working teachers, through an ambiguous professional identity and the fear of being viewed as a fake or fear of being viewed as one in their multiple roles.

Conclusion

Despite this Doctoral research being focused upon FE teachers, the qualitative data has identified other strands for further research, particularly for teachers who work across two differing sectors often on the same campus.

How these teachers shape their professional identities and what they use to do this is of great interest as roles are now merging, yet professionalism in teaching is becoming more and more subjective. The 'opt in' approach to professional standards only further impounds the difficulties FE and HE teachers face when forming a professional identity and working within its boundaries. It is worth repeating this salient point in light of this research; 'professional standards for FE and HE teachers...is like trying to bottle moonshine' (Hall and Marsh, 2000: 5).

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