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## Professional Development And Practices In Classroom

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### Abstract:

*The new Ofsted Framework is one sign that teachers professionalism is being revived, in a sense. The idea that teachers should just deliver curricula has made them sound more like workers than professionals and this de-motivating terminology as, to some extent, been recognized as such by government and other bodies. This potential improvement can be coupled with the increasing evidence that many teachers are leaving after only a few years, literally because they find much of the current accountability framework to be oppressive. This is where the establishment of the GTC may lead to greater self-regulation and a return to a more trusted and autonomous teaching profession.*

*Overall, then, teachers work over the last decade has been made increasingly accountable but also more controlled and restricted. More recently, the damaging effect of this oppressive framework has been recognized and a number of measures suggest a return to more teacher autonomy and professional integrity. This will be discussed further below in relation to the role of teaching assistants.*

### KEYWORDS:

Professionals, subject pedagogical knowledge, pupils, English, trainees.

### INTRODUCTION:

#### Teacher's specialized knowledge

But what of the specialized body of knowledge that teachers possess? Can it really be compared to medical or legal knowledge? The answer is 'yes and no' what is consistent about professionals is that they develop an expertise, something that they can continually improve, which comes about through a combination of experience and reflection, often aided by further training. There is much debate about what teachers actually know about teaching and learning, but it seems more accurate to consider that this knowledge is closer to the understanding of the artist rather than the scientist. In many ways, being a teacher has comparisons with other performance professions such as actors, dancers and musicians, in that the majority of their effective work happens in real time with the equivalent of an audience. Doctors and lawyers typically work one-to-one, although some forms of law do involve courtroom performance. A good metaphor for the teacher may be the conductor. The teacher has a plan and finite resources but cannot ultimately predict every note that each musician (pupil) will produce. A good teacher knows the subject they are teaching, but, even more importantly, knows how to teach it. This can be called 'subject pedagogical knowledge'. This, it is argued, is what makes teaching a distinct profession.

Where is this body of distinctive knowledge? Some of it has been described in ways that mean it can be written down (such as this book) and to some extent learnt, so it is in books and articles from the purely practical to the highly theoretical. But a great deal of knowledge exists in teachers' heads and one reason why teachers so often seem to emphasize the practical is that they feel that is how they have learnt their craft. This can lead them to be dismissive of theory and new fangled ideas. For the beginning teacher,

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this is not very helpful. How can you learn about teaching if the only real way is through 'doing it'? Also, how can you claim to be a professional if you cannot helpfully describe what you do? Again, it is important to think of how highly developed professional language is in some domains. This language may be off-putting to the non specialist, but it allows the professionals to communicate in an exact and powerful way. Teaching has very little specialized vocabulary and in this sense it can be argued that teaching remains only a semi-profession.

Teachers, when considering these issues, are likely to argue that their expertise is very real indeed and beginning teachers, struggling to learn their craft, are going to agree. Donald Schon famously characterized the best professionals, including teachers, as 'reflective'. This conceptualization has been hugely influential. He argues that real expertise is demonstrated in the way that the true professional continually learns from experience, and adapts techniques and methods to improve practice. This is a very attractive notion. However, another mark of the best professional development. It is still the case that very few teachers undertake long-term professional development beyond their initial training, and the profession does not require it. Perhaps the introduction of new roles such as the Advanced Skills teacher hint at other ways to identify and promote professional expertise by generating role models within the teaching force. The introduction of the Fast Track may also add prestige and status to the Profession overall.

Ultimately, a teacher's professionalism is based much more on knowledge than on some woolly notion of being nice. Having both sympathy and empathy for pupils is important, But it must be a means to insight. This is especially important in a subject like English which is a domain where the personal and issues of identity are in the foreground. English teachers, compared to most subject teachers, have a considerable amount of time with each of their classes. Their pupils regularly talk and write about their actual experiences and English teachers are genuinely interested in their personal reading and viewing habits. In this sense, English teachers can be considered especially close to their pupils. Trainees and NQTs find this proximity part of the excitement of becoming a teacher, but it should come with a health warning. A professional must have high expectations of all pupils equally and needs to preserve a degree of detachment or distance as part of their mode of working. An element in this does relate to health and well-being. In order to give your best, you really need to conserve energy and emotional integrity; being overly vulnerable is not in your own or your pupils' best interests, especially because a teacher has so many roles to operate in any day.

Even social workers and nurses, who are comparable in other ways to teachers, do not operate with such large numbers of clients or have anything like the diversity of roles that the teacher employs on a daily basis. The teacher, for example, has pastoral duties, is in loco parents to all pupils in the school and has a highly specialist function to perform with a range of sets of pupils. It is in the way the teacher carries out these diverse roles that their true professionalism can be demonstrated. This diversity and complexity is unquestionably part of what makes learning to teach so demanding.

### **Developing a professional approach.**

There is no question that trainees are constantly evaluated for their professionalism and that these judgments go beyond the specific statements in the standards. As mentioned earlier, this relates essentially to how each trainee conducts their work in and out of school, with pupils, parents and colleagues.

As teaching is such a public activity, it is inevitable that appearance is a factor. The great majority of schools place insistent demands on pupils to follow a strict dress code. For teachers, there may be nothing written down but this does not reduce the association between professional appearance and professional conduct. Beginning teachers can only help the way they make a positive impression by being scrupulous about fitting in with the school's expectations about dress. If this sounds like a kind of conformity, it is because that is exactly what it is; trainees' individualism is best defined through the excellence of their ideas about teaching.

It is also true to say that no two schools are exactly alike and that each one has a culture of its own. Trainees need to be sensitive to this culture which will include, for example, non-explicit rules about the exact degree of formality in teachers dress and in the way staff and pupils address each other.

### **Working relationships**

A trainee's first impression is likely to be that getting the right relationship with her or his classes is the absolute key to a successful bid to reach the standards. However, a careful read of those very standards will reveal that this is one major domain but not the only one. Paradoxically, teachers spend a great deal of their professional time in front of many pupils but curiously on their own, although this isolationist role is rapidly changing especially with the increase in Tas (see below). This paradox actually highlights how vital

professional time is when spent with other Teachers, whether formally or informally. It is worth nothing here that the combination in the past of teacher isolationism in their own classrooms and the little time devoted by schools to bringing teachers into productive working groups has been one hindrance to making teachers specialist knowledge explicit and available to others; this is changing but has a long way to go.

One key relationship is thus with the subject mentor in each school. This mentor will be a member of various in school teams, as will the trainee. It is vital for the trainee to belong to the appropriate school groups and to recognize that they can learn an enormous amount from their membership, and also that they can contribute. Effective teams value new and fresh perspectives. The trainee can act initially as a kind of intelligent stranger by asking the kinds of questions that help the group members to reflect on their thinking and their ways of doing things. As the trainees really come part of a team, they can demonstrate their professionalism by volunteering to go beyond just being there and by seeking to assist the busy team in positive ways.

Trainees need to develop insights into how schools establish and maintain their various groupings. Typically, there will be academic and pastoral groupings, as well as meetings of whole-schools staff, senior management, governors and so on, and then more specific working groups perhaps charged with a particular development, such as whole-school literacy or improving target setting etc. In consultation with their mentors, trainees need to identify which groups they belong to and must work with, and which other might be of benefit to their development.

### Teaching Assistants

As mentioned above, teaching used to be a relatively isolated activity, but one reason why it is increasingly less so is the rapid increase in the number of teaching assistants. Before discussing the practical implications of this change, it is important to consider some matters of principle.

Primary schools, in particular, have a long tradition of having helpers in the classroom. Typically, these were simply parents willing to muck in and help at a fairly menial level. Since the changes occurred to legislation concerning special needs pupils, a number of individual pupils with statements became entitled to adult support. This change led to the evolution of paid specialist assistants who were also trained to varying levels of expertise. Essentially, then, these assistants can be described as 'Para-professionals', they are not trained to teach, but they are developing specialist professional knowledge. Over the last few years a new, more general role of Teaching Assistant has become popular and government policy will lead to a very considerable expansion of this workforce, including, as it will, different levels of Tas such as Higher Level Teaching Assistants. Various professional bodies, and notably the teacher unions, have mixed feelings about this development. They recognize the support that such skilled adults can bring to the teacher's aid, but have some suspicions that this is the government's way of getting extra teachers on the cheap and threatening the very status of the profession as a whole. How do these Tas fit the criteria or a true professional? Trainees need to be aware that the rapid expansion of the TA workforce has implications for the professionalism of teachers in general and that there is a degree of controversy attached.

### Informal learning and out-of-after-school activities.

Schools in Britain have a long tradition of extra-curricular activities and many teachers join the profession with fond memories of clubs, school plays and musicals, sports and trips – even foreign travel – all organized through their school when they were pupils. These fond memories are useful as long as the nostalgia does not mask the reality of actually organizing a club or a school trip. The standards expect trainees to gain some insight into and experience of these extra curricular opportunities and there should be no real shortage of opportunities to do this.

English is a subject area with its own longstanding traditions in this area. Taking pupils to the theatre or the cinema, to attend a poetry reading, or to visit a bookshop where a celebrity author is speaking are all very typical activities and enrich children's experiences of language and literature. Similarly, many of those events can be organized in school as special events highlighting pupils' own poetry or drama. English Departments are regularly involved in the school's productions, producing the school magazine and so on. Teachers will usually say that they especially enjoy the opportunity to work with pupils in a more informal way, often seeing a different side to the pupils, as indeed so do the pupils see of them. It can all be great fun, but it does carry with it extra work and responsibilities, and worst case scenarios do happen. The simple theatre trip involves the very real challenge of getting the tickets, the money from the pupils, making sure the coach turns up on time and, most challenging of all, ensuring that pupils behave and do not get lost or sick en route. It is very much to a trainee's advantage, then, to take a modest role in such activities in order



to 'learn the ropes' before assuming too much responsibility.

## CONCLUSIONS

The trainee teacher has a complex status. From the moment they begin their training period, they are expected to fit with professional norms and expectations and to be a role model in this respect, while they grapple with learning to teach and a range of highly demanding standards that they may or may not achieve. If they do not achieve these standards then, in the interests of the clients they seek to work with, they are excluded from the profession they have worked hard to join. This latter outcome occurs only rarely, but it must be there to safeguard the quality of the profession. It is useful to reflect here on the care and effort that go into the initial selection of trainees and the stress placed on candidates' need to have an understanding of the true nature of teachers' work unclouded by sentimentality or nostalgia.

Accurate selection to teacher training allows for other professionals to have high expectations of trainees from the outset. High expectations still need to be realistic. Even mature trainees with other forms of professional experience find the transition to becoming an effective teacher extremely demanding. So both the training and induction periods are characterized by high demand but clearly identified support, with an emphasis on a gradual build-up of evidence upon which sound judgments can be made, set against nationally defined standards. Many of these standards focus on being a professional and this chapter has tried to put the term 'professional' into the spotlight and to examine the range of ways in which the teacher exemplifies the true professional. Trainees should therefore be aware from the outset that they have a responsibility to learn about the particular nature of the profession of teachers and that they have a contribution to make to the maintenance and, over time, the improvement of its status.

## FURTHER READING

The standards themselves contain plenty of direction about what is required of trainees and the handbook that accompanies them offers helpful advice. Books about teacher professionalism tend to fall into two categories. Some are like this handbook for English teachers, providing a summary and overview of what is a complex issue with a considerable history. The texts recommended below come from a different category, one which addresses this complexity and draws on research to argue about issues in some depth.

- Dillon, J. and Maguire, M. (1997) *Becoming a Teacher : Issues in Secondary Teaching*, Open University Press, Buckingham.
- Eraut, M. (1994) *Developing Professional Knowledge and Competence*, Falmer Press, London.
- Goodson, I. And Hargreaves, A. (1996) *Teacher's Professional Lives*, Falmer Press, London.
- Hoyle, E. and John, P. (1995) *Professional Knowledge and Professional Practice*, Cassell, London.
- Schon, D. (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner*, Basic Books, New York.
- Tickle, L. (2000) *Teacher Induction: The way Ahead*, Open University Press, Buckingham.

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