

## **'New professionalism,' workforce remodeling and the restructuring of teachers' work**

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### **Changes in teachers' work and the challenges facing teacher unions**

Howard Stevenson, Guest Editor

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**ABSTRACT:** Since its election in 1997 the Labour government's policy has sought to promote a 'new professionalism' amongst teachers. First mooted at the time when new performance management arrangements were introduced, the discourse of new professionalism has now become closely associated with the 'workforce remodeling' agenda in which teachers' work is being reconfigured and increased use is being made of support staff to undertake work previously performed by teachers. Promotion of the new professionalism agenda derives in large part from an alliance between the state and some teacher unions under the banner of a social partnership.

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This paper draws on key policy texts to trace and analyze the new professionalism discourse, and links this with wider objectives to "transform the school workforce" (DfES, 2002) through implementation of the National Workforce Agreement (DfES, 2003) in England and Wales and subsequent reforms. We argue that the notion of 'new professionalism' has considerable surface attraction, not least the claimed aspiration to strip away unnecessary bureaucracy from teachers' work thereby allowing teachers to focus on "the core task of improving teaching and learning" (RIG, 2005). However, the rhetoric of new professionalism is also being used to justify ever more accountability and a much narrower and restricted vision of teachers' professional role, which may diminish, rather than enhance, claims to 'professionalism.'

Following implementation of the 1988 Education Reform Act the teaching profession in England and Wales has been subjected to an almost continual process of reorganisation as market discipline, parental choice, and new forms of accountability have been introduced into the education system (Ball, 2003). Deep-seated reforms of this nature tend to be controversial, and much of the restructuring over the past twenty years has been seen as instrumental in

teachers' de-professionalization (Helsby & Saunders, 1993; Helsby, 1999; Sachs, 2001, 2003; Mahony & Hextall, 2001), in which the autonomy and judgement of those in the teaching profession has been restricted (Beck, 1999; Pring, 2001). Many of these developments mirror those found elsewhere as teachers face up to globalized problems and policies (Smyth, Dow, Hattan, Reid, & Shacklock, 2000). More recently, however, the Labour administration has sought to promote a "new professionalism" (DfEE, 1998, p.13) that is currently being established through the medium of workforce remodeling.

The central feature of workforce remodeling is a reconfiguration of teachers' work that makes increased use of a range of different support staff, although it extends into other areas of accountability and control. New forms of performance management, different demands on teachers' time and differing forms of classroom organization are all contributing to a radical re-thinking of the teachers' role and are challenging established ways of working. In this article we seek to map the development of the discourse relating to new professionalism through an analysis of key policy texts. We examine the links between conceptions of new professionalism and the workforce remodeling agenda, and then present a critique of some recent policy developments. The paper is part of an ESRC funded research project Workforce remodelling, teacher trade unions and school-based industrial relations (Project code RS14 G0001).

### **New Professionalism-The Development of a Discourse**

Concepts of professionalism have long proved problematic and this is particularly the case in occupations such as teaching, where claims to professional status are considered to be less clear cut than the claims to 'classical professionalism' of law and medicine (Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996). McCulloch, Helsby, and Knight (2000) recognize that the "notion of professionalism is beset with conceptual difficulties and ambiguities, to such an extent as even to raise questions over its value as a tool of analysis" (p. 14). However, discourses of 'professionalism' have long had a strong resonance in relation to teachers as an occupational group and are frequently invoked to support, or resist, fundamental changes to the ways in which they work. They are in essence debates about the content and, critically, the control of work; technical knowledge, job design, autonomy, accountability, and management are all central aspects of these debates (Sachs, 2003). However, the suggestion that professional traits can be defined, abstracted, and readily conceptualized, and that teachers' claim to professionalism can be judged against any such model, seems both erroneous and unhelpful. We believe it is more useful to approach professionalism as an ideological construct that is neither static nor universal, but located in a particular socio-historical context and fashioned to represent and mobilize particular interests. This perspective recognizes that notions of professionalism change over time and can be a source of conflict, reflecting Ozga and Lawn's (1981) assertion that professionalism can simultaneously be invoked by the state, as a strategy of teacher control, and by teachers, as a means of resisting dilution and substitution. As a consequence "the fact that both the state and the teachers make use of the same term does not mean that they are essentially in harmony" (p. vii). Professionalism therefore can be seen as a discourse that is appropriated by groups with differing levels of power and influence to legitimate particular interests and to promote associated policy agendas.

The term 'new professionalism' was first used in relation to schoolteachers in the early 1990s by academics associated with the school improvement movement (e.g. Fullan, 1993; Hargreaves, 1994), and it has subsequently been presented and labeled in a number of different forms including 'creative' professionalism (Hargreaves, 1998), 'informed' professionalism (Barber, 2005) and 'managed' professionalism (Furlong, 2005). The term first appeared in policy documentation in the Green Paper Teachers: meeting the challenge of change in which there was an explicit call for a 'new professionalism' (DfEE 1998, p. 14) within the context of a 'modernised' teaching profession. The objective was "a new and positive culture of excellence and improvement" (p. 6) in which the key features of professional teachers were accepting accountability, taking responsibility for improving skills and subject knowledge, working in partnership with other staff in schools, anticipating change and promoting innovation (p. 14). Teachers would have incentives to perform well: "good performance is not sufficiently rewarded ... because such recognition is not part of the culture" (p. 15), and they would spend less time on administrative tasks (p. 16). Potential opposition to reform was positioned as cowardly-"teachers too often seem to be afraid of change and therefore to resist it" (p. 16)-and the whole was presented as a process that would benefit teachers, who would have better working conditions, status and pay, and pupils, who would be able to access a "world-class education service" (p. 12).

These proposals were consistent with New Labour's commitment to the standards agenda expressed in the White Paper Excellence in Schools (DfEE, 1997), and their intention to ensure that all teachers perform to specified standards can be seen as integral to the emphasis on improvement through target-setting (Bell, 1999; Bell & Stevenson, 2006). However, the introduction of associated performance management and performance-related pay systems was highly controversial. Research showed that both Headteachers (Wragg, Haynes, Chamberlin, & Wragg, 2003) and teachers (Haynes, Chamberlin, Wragg, & Wragg, 2003) were critical of its implementation, believing that it made little difference to classroom practice, and that teachers were dissatisfied with the increase in bureaucracy needed to provide evidence of performance (Mahony, Menter, & Hextall, 2002). Escalating tensions within the wider school system became apparent when teacher unions undertook industrial action in response to mounting administrative pressures (Barnard & Dean, 2001) and were compounded by significant problems with teacher and Headteacher recruitment and retention (Shaw, 2002).

Against this backdrop of systemic difficulties the then Secretary of State for Education, Estelle Morris, spelled out an agenda for further reform in an address to the Social Market Foundation. One of the expressed intentions was to tackle the problems of teacher recruitment, retention, and motivation, but she further developed the theme of new professionalism from the 1998 document, setting out six characteristics that should be present in a 'modern profession:'

- \* high standards at key levels of the profession, including entry and leadership, set nationally and regulated by a strong professional body;
- \* a body of knowledge about what works best and why, with regular training and development opportunities so that members of the profession are always up to date;
- \* efficient organization and management of complementary staff to support best professional practice;
- \* effective use of leading edge technology to support best professional practice;
- \* incentives and rewards for excellence, including through pay structures;
- \* a relentless focus on what is in the best interests of those who use the service-in education, pupils and parents-backed by clear and effective arrangements for accountability and for measuring performance and outcomes (Morris, 2001, p.19).

Although softer, there were renewed claims that teachers were opposed to change-"No matter how well intentioned some opposition to reform may have been, it has sometimes ended up damaging the cause it was intended to serve" (Morris, 2001, p. 9)-but there was a clearer vision of how teachers' work may be restructured and how teacher's professionalism might be supported and enhanced. Classrooms would be "rich in the number of trained adults available to support learning to new high standards" (p. 19) and teachers would be "spending more of their time on teaching, lesson preparation, assessing individual pupil progress and updating their professional skills" (p. 19). Accountability was to be handled through "rigorous performance management arrangements" (p. 25) in which Headteachers would be able to "recognise and reward excellence" (p. 25) and have to make "tough decisions" (p. 19) regarding teacher skill and performance. While none of these themes was new, they were presented in such a way that they suggested a radical workforce remodeling, and it is to this that we now turn.

### **Workforce Remodeling and the Restructuring of Teachers' Work**

The policy aspirations outlined above were given structure and organization through the National Workload Agreement (NWA) (DfES, 2003) and the monitoring bodies that were subsequently established to support it. The agreement was entitled Raising Standards and Tackling Workload, and was reached between government, employers, and trade unions that represented both teaching and support staff. Of the six teacher trade unions, the National Union of Teachers (NUT) never signed the agreement and the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) withdrew from the agreement in 2005 and rejoined early in 2007. The other four unions, the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT), and the Professional Association of Teachers (PAT) have consistently remained as signatories. While the relationships between the different organizations within the agreement-known as the social partnership-are beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth noting the existence of both agreement and division between teacher organizations with consequential effects on their ability to affect policy generation and implementation. The agreement itself, as the title suggests, had an explicit objective of addressing problems of excessive workload by achieving "progressive reductions in teachers' overall [working] hours over the next four years" (DfES, 2003, p. 2). The reforms that were implemented from September 2003 included the removal

of a range of administrative tasks from teachers' workload (building directly on the teachers' earlier industrial action that had boycotted these tasks), a maximum limit on the hours spent covering for absent colleagues and a statutory entitlement to 10% non-contact time for the purposes of planning, preparation, and assessment (a key issue in primary schools where such time has traditionally not been available). This, in turn, was argued would create sufficient "time for standards" (p. 2) as teachers would be able to focus on their "core task" (RIG, 2005, section 2.7) of improving teaching and learning.

Clearly if teachers were to do fewer so-called 'non-essential' tasks, the role of the "complementary staff" referred to by Morris (2001, p. 19) would change to accommodate this. Accordingly the NWA carried the expectation that support staff would undertake work previously performed by teachers in four key areas: administration, student support, management, and teaching and learning (Miliband, 2003). With regard to teaching and learning it was agreed that regulations requiring qualified teachers to have responsibility for whole classes would be amended (HMSO, 2003). The role of Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) was introduced, with national professional standards determined by the Teacher Training Agency, which has now been significantly re-branded as the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) to include support staff and to reflect the new 'school workforce' culture. Guidance from the national Workload Agreement Monitoring Group (WAMG, n.d.), a sub-group of social partnership members that oversees implementation of the NWA, noted that:

HLTAs may undertake the more demanding elements of 'specified work' under the direction and supervision of a teacher. This may involve working with individual pupils as well as with groups and with whole classes.

However, HLTA status is not a requirement to undertake this type of work, as Headteachers need only 'have regard' to HLTA national professional standards when deciding if any non-teacher performs these duties. In addition to teaching responsibilities, the agreement carried the expectation that support staff would undertake more responsibility for pupils' pastoral welfare which, within the UK, is a well-established area of teachers' responsibility (e.g. Power, 1996). This role has been confirmed in a subsequent government document which then suggests that this division of labor should increase in the future (DfES, 2004).

Underpinning these changes within the classroom has been an increased emphasis on accountability through pay restructuring. The Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners (DfES, 2004) expanded the link of so-called new professionalism with pay, by asserting that "career progression and financial rewards will go to those who are making the biggest contributions to improving pupil attainment, those who are continually developing their own expertise, and those who help to develop expertise in other teachers" (DfES, 2004, p. 69). As a result, recommendations from the Rewards and Incentive Group (RIG)-a sub-group of the social partnership that advises on pay and performance management provisions-led to each school in England and Wales undertaking a complex and time-consuming pay restructuring (RIG, 2005). Teachers' management allowances, that gave extra payments for added responsibilities, such as being in charge of a curriculum area, were replaced by teaching and learning responsibility points (TLRs), which were intended to have a sharper focus on the core task of teaching and learning and the raising of standards. TLRs have two payment ranges, and payment on the higher range can only be awarded to teachers who have a significant 'line management' responsibility for overseeing the work of colleagues. The agreement stipulated that any teacher downgraded as a result of the restructuring would be eligible for three years' salary protection but thereafter pay, and pension entitlements, would be cut.

Analysis of policy documents that set out the emerging new professionalism agenda highlight three key features that might be considered its core elements:

- \* focus on the core task of teaching and learning: teaching requires a focus on the processes of learning and teachers should be unfettered by involvement in unnecessary and extraneous tasks.

- \* new accountability regimes: improved rewards are a key part of the new professionalism, but there is a recognition that pay will be increasingly linked to performance. Performance management systems, including pay, are therefore central to the new professionalism agenda.

- \* focus on continuous professional development: the acceptance that teachers have both a right, and a responsibility, to continuously engage in professional development throughout their careers.

Each of these themes is clearly central within documents relating to the development of new professionalism.

However, we would argue that this emphasis on 'product' neglects the development of policy as 'process' (Stevenson,

2007) and that the mechanism through which the new professionalism has emerged, represents a fourth, and integral, element of the new professionalism:

\* Partnership as fundamental to professionalism: 'partnership' between government and teacher unions, and a commitment to a mature and constructive relationship between parties.

Taken together, the whole presents a picture of a sleek, modernized profession that is able to deliver the Green Paper's (DfEE, 1998) so-called 'world class education service.'

### **Challenging the New Professionalism-Developing a Critique**

A particular feature of the new professionalism agenda is the way in which it has emerged through an apparent commonality of interest between the State and teachers with considerable emphasis placed on a partnership between government, local authority employers and representatives of the teaching profession. However, as we have suggested, the development of discourses around professionalism are best seen as strategies to legitimize preferred forms of behavior and organization. It would be surprising therefore if elements of such fundamental changes to teachers' work were not contested by teachers individually and collectively. Therefore, whilst there is consensus around many features of the new professionalism agenda that we have outlined, it is important to recognize that in each of the four elements of new professionalism presented there is dissension on important issues.

#### ***The focus on teaching and learning.***

At the heart of the new professionalism agenda is the focus on teaching and learning, and it is from here that a critique of the new professionalism must develop. During the industrial action in the years after the millennium protesting against excessive workload, and conducted by both NASUWT and NUT, the unions campaigned amongst their membership for 'Time to Teach.' The NWA brought in the ability to focus on teaching by stripping away unnecessary bureaucracy and administration, and this understandably receives wide support. However, it has been achieved through a de-regulation of the teaching profession that now allows staff without qualified teacher status to assume responsibility for whole class teaching, a major point of principle that the NUT has consistently opposed. Within secondary education in particular this process is now going further, and increasingly involves detaching teachers' pastoral responsibilities from their teaching role. Here a more common scenario has been for the pastoral component of teachers' work to be increasingly undertaken by support staff. Teachers with additional payments for pastoral responsibilities have sometimes found these removed in pay restructurings, while in other cases teachers' role as a pastoral tutor to students is being transferred to staff without qualified teacher status. Again the effect is to redraw the boundaries of teachers' work and to restrict its scope.

This critique of the new professionalism argues that there is a process of de-professionalization taking place as less qualified, and cheaper, labor is used to undertake the work of qualified teaching staff. Research undertaken by Bach, Kessler, and Heron (2006) rejects this argument and suggests classroom assistants are supplementing, not substituting, the work of teachers and that NUT "opposition to the workload agreement is contrary to the direct interests of their members" (p. 19). Carter and Stevenson (2006) dispute the claims made by Bach et al. and suggest that these findings arise from a failure to adequately assess the broader implications of remodeling. Part of the inadequacy of Bach and colleagues' analysis hinges on its rationale for focusing on primary schools. Bach et al. (2006) claim that "TAs [teaching assistants] form a more integral component of the workforce than in secondary schools and the boundaries between teachers and TAs are more contested than at secondary level" (p. 7). This may be the case but it fails to capture the very complex changes across both the primary and secondary sectors in which teachers' roles are being directly displaced by support staff in the ways described above. Moreover, Bach et al.'s narrow focus on teaching assistants fails to recognize the diversity of the new roles that are emerging in schools and some of which are displacing the work of teachers. These changes represent a fundamental shift in the construction and organization of teachers' work.

The model represents a narrowing of teachers' professional concerns with a clear focus on technical questions of 'delivery' rather than wider questions of pedagogy and the curriculum. At the same time that teachers are being encouraged to focus on the 'core task' of teaching and learning, fundamental questions about the nature and purpose of the curriculum are removed yet further from their control. Teacher professionalism therefore is increasingly being conceived in terms of technical questions relating to the detail of pedagogic practice, with wider issues about

teachers' ability to design curricula, or determine appropriate forms of assessment, removed from them.

### ***Professionalism, pay and performance.***

The focus on a narrower conception of teaching has also been accompanied by a willingness to accept greater accountability for school and individual teacher performance. Performance related pay (PRP) had already been well established in the teaching profession before the emergence of workforce remodeling. This had been set in motion by the 1988 Green Paper which had introduced a clearly prescribed system of performance management (teacher appraisal), the notion of a pay threshold (which experienced teachers could only cross subject to satisfactory performance) and performance pay for an upper pay spine above the threshold. Remodeling reforms have now accelerated these processes by adding further elements of PRP and a yet more elaborate system of performance management, with increased requirements for classroom observation of teacher performance. However, since the development of remodeling and the emergence of the new professionalism agenda, what has become clearer is the linking of pay and performance issues to the narrower focus on teaching and learning. This was perhaps most clearly illustrated by the introduction of a pay restructuring process for teachers across the whole of the school system and which replaced generic 'management allowances' (extra payments for additional responsibilities) with teaching and learning responsibility points (TLRs). The rationale behind this major exercise was to focus payments only on areas that directly contributed to improvements in teaching and learning and raising 'standards.' Trade-offs have been agreed to in which improvements in pay and the removal of 'nonessential tasks' have been exchanged for increases in control systems (through PRP and appraisal) that link performance ever more closely to corresponding rewards and sanctions. The consequence for teachers is that they are now increasingly accountable for their performance, with performance being measured in terms of student improvement in standardized tests. The much narrower conception of teaching represented by the focus on teaching and learning is then enforced through increasingly managerialist forms of control that monitor and measure performance and allocate rewards correspondingly. Although the increasing significance of performance management has raised the profile of access to continuing professional development, this too can be perceived as problematic.

### ***New professionalism and continuing professional development.***

Much has been made of the emphasis placed on CPD in the emerging discourse relating to new professionalism. New performance management regulations (RIG, 2006; RIG, 2007) make CPD an integral part of the process, stating that "a key part of the planning discussion should be about the support that the reviewee may need to meet the performance criteria" (RIG 2006, p.18). This has resulted in some arguing that teachers now have an entitlement to CPD in a way that the profession has long sought, but not hitherto achieved. Teachers have for many years been critical of the lack of opportunities for good quality CPD, something tacitly acknowledged by the government strategy for CPD that was launched in 2001 (DfEE, 2001), and it is entirely appropriate that increased opportunities for relevant and supportive CPD should be welcomed. However, the location of CPD entitlements within a strict performativity regime, linked to performance management arrangements, and less directly, performance pay, inevitably raises questions about the type, nature, and purpose of the CPD that teachers will be expected to undertake. Performance management arrangements ensure that professional development priorities are management determined, whilst the use of PRP increasingly ties CPD to 'raising standards.' For example, the focus in new professionalism on the technical aspects of 'delivery' underpins the increasing priority accorded to coaching and mentoring within CPD programs with such programs potentially acting as transmission belts for the replication of competency-based approaches to teaching. A further illustration is provided by the burgeoning role of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) in providing management and leadership training. The requirement for all incoming Headteachers to hold the National Professional Qualification for Headteachers has effectively provided NCSL with a monopoly on the training of future Headteachers and has an important ideological role to play in shaping the future direction of school leadership. Alternative perspectives on leadership, such as might be promoted by institutions of higher education or other providers are marginalised as aspiring Headteachers are compelled to follow the NCSL route to leadership. These concerns add to those previously expressed by teachers that CPD is often experienced by teachers as irrelevant, and something over which they have little control, with corporate objectives over-riding teachers' priorities. This view is clearly articulated in a report by one of the teacher unions:

Government policy has attempted to standardise practice, showing a lack of trust in the profession and a denial of

complexity. It conceptualises CPD as a management tool to ensure good classroom practice and is seeking to embed it within the management tool kit, including performance management, pay progression and contract. Items of training are to be imposed on teachers according only to immediate corporate needs (Association of Teachers and Lecturers, 2005, p.3).

It is clear that new professionalism has much to offer in terms of enhancing the role of CPD-a feature of teachers' work that has often been inadequate and neglected. However, the extent to which provision of CPD become centralized, and set within the context of target-driven performativity, highlights the extent to which CPD can be used to promote a particular notion of professionalism and becomes reinforcing of the hollowed-out conception of teaching presented by the new professionalism.

### ***Professionalism and partnership.***

The discourse relating to new professionalism has increasingly been voiced through an alliance between the state and organized teachers, in the form of a 'social partnership.' The social partnership emerged from those organizations that signed the national workload agreement, and has now become established through a number of semi-formal institutions including the Workload Agreement Monitoring Group (WAMG) and the RIG. The social partnership explicitly eschews the traditional methods of collective bargaining, which it argues are sterile and counter-productive (Stevenson & Carter, 2007). Instead it draws on traditions of 'interest-based bargaining' (NEA, 2003) in which efforts are made to find common ground between employer and employee, and to 'problem-solve' in pursuit of win-win solutions. Implicit within this approach is that means are as important as aims and that professionalism requires the dialogue that comes with partnership, rather than the confrontation that is presented as a feature of collective bargaining.

For teacher unions that have been largely frozen out of the policy debate for many years the prospect of a voice in policy has a clear attraction. Unions that have signed up to the workload agreement and subsequent remodeling reforms can point to a degree of influence with government, and corresponding results in terms of claimed improvements in pay and conditions. However, critics (NUT, 2003; Thompson, 2006) argue that a high price has been paid for this improved relationship with the government. Unions have accepted the principle of those without qualified teacher status teaching whole classes and have also found themselves having to defend proposals resulting in pay cuts for members and increasingly onerous appraisal arrangements. More significant is the extent to which this closer relationship with government may have impaired unions' ability to act independently in defense of their members' interests.

### **Conclusion**

Current educational reforms in England and Wales marks a new phase in the restructuring of state education. The labor process of teaching, that in the past has been shaped and re-shaped by reform policies focused on school organization and curriculum re-structuring, has now itself become the direct focus of change. These reforms are cast in terms of a 'new professionalism' in which teachers focus on the core task of teaching and learning in which financial rewards are closely related to teachers' ability to demonstrate their impact on pupil progress, and in which teachers have access to high quality professional development. All this is located within the context of a new and constructive relationship between 'social partners' in which the foundations of new professionalism are determined by dialogue and debate rather than conflict and strife.

We would argue that the term 'new professionalism' is being used to justify a much narrower conception of teaching in which teachers are compelled to focus on the technical delivery of content, and their success in achieving these targets is then scrutinized forensically by ever tighter forms of control over teachers' work. All of this is supported by a CPD framework that has the potential to be transformatory, but which is often used to perpetuate a 'one best way' approach to both teaching and learning and educational leadership. These reforms may produce a new kind of teacher professional, but we see it as one who is trained to deliver information to maximum effect so that pupils pass assessments dictated by government, not one who can exercise greater autonomy and judgment over his or her work in order that students might access the "broad and balanced" curriculum that should prepare them for the "opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of everyday life" (Great Britain Statutes, 1998, p. 1). The

consequences of these developments are not a new professionalism, but rather an impoverished professionalism, in which some may gain in terms of higher status and rewards, but in which many may lose out through labor substitution and de-skilling. However, what may be most significant in the longer term is the extent to which teachers' collective organization, their unions, have retained or surrendered their ability to independently assert the professional interests of their members. Teacher union willingness to accept short term solutions to deep-rooted teacher grievances about working conditions may in the longer term presage developments that pose a more significant threat to both teacher professionalism and quality of service. At stake, ultimately, are fundamental questions about the nature of the educational process and the capacity of the teaching profession to assert, independently from the state, what is in the best educational interests of students.

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