
Re-modelling as De-professionalisation

MERYL THOMPSON

ABSTRACT The article sets out the consequences of the British Government's remodelling agenda and its emphasis on less demarcation, for the professional status of teachers in England. It describes how the *National Agreement on Raising Standards and Tackling Workload*, reached between five of the six trade unions for teachers and headteachers paves the way for teaching assistants, without Qualified Teacher Status, to take over teaching activities and explores why teachers' trade unions have accepted a position which arguably reduces the professionalism of their members. It argues that remodelling has led to de-professionalisation and that this should be rectified by re-asserting the case that the formal knowledge of teachers justifies a distinct professional status.

Flexibility and Demarcation

Government education policies at the turn of the twenty-first century should attract social historians of teachers' trade unions and teacher professionalism because of their impact on union relationships with Government, the culture and practices of the public services, and for their conception of teacher professionalism. The *National Agreement on Raising Standards and Tackling Workload* (DfES, 2003a) ('the Agreement') reached on January 15th 2003, between five of the six unions representing teachers and headteachers, unions representing support staff and the organization representing teachers' employers, but which excluded what is still the largest trade union of teachers, the National Union of Teachers (NUT), will, I would argue, feature largely in all such accounts.

Three of the four principles set out in the Agreement, which incidentally states that the signatories 'note' (DfES, 2003a), namely standards and accountability, devolution and delegation, and expanding choice eerily reflect a cross-party consensus with the five great themes which the 1992 Conservative White Paper *Choice and Diversity: a new framework for schools* (DFE, 1992) says have run through the story of educational change since 1979, namely quality,

diversity, increasing parental choice, greater autonomy for schools and greater accountability. The fourth principle, 'flexibility and incentives – the role of greater flexibility and less demarcation' is starkly different and appears to have received too little public discussion of its potential relationship to the other themes of quality and accountability and, most particularly, for its impact on the concept of teacher professionalism. Patrick Yarker's article in a recent volume of *FORUM*, both trenchant and moving, is exceptional in exploring the personal and professional costs of recognizing that re-modelling means that it is no longer necessary to obtain Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) to teach in State schools in England (Yarker, 2005).

Demarcation and Professionalism

The concept of 'demarcation' is central to establishing discrete professional groupings. It is also central to the concept of professionalism. It is therefore highly significant to the cultures and practices of all public service professionals. Such 'demarcation', represented by assessed pre-service training and a recognized professional qualification, QTS, has for some thirty years in England represented a level of professional accountability the public could expect. Formal training and qualifying credentials constitute one of the interdependent elements that Freidson argues go to make up the ideal type of professionalism which are:

- specialized work in the officially recognized economy that is believed to be grounded in a body of theoretically based, discretionary knowledge and skill and that is accordingly given special status in the labor force;
- exclusive jurisdiction in a particular division of labor created and controlled by occupational negotiation;
- a sheltered position in both external and internal labor markets that is based on qualifying credentials created by the occupation;
- a formal training program lying outside the labor market that produces the qualifying credentials, which is controlled by the occupation and associated with higher education; and
- an ideology that asserts greater commitment to doing good work than to economic gain and to the quality rather than the economic efficiency of work. (Freidson, 2001)

This ideal type professionalism, as Freidson makes explicit, is not a portrayal of any real occupation, but it is an intellectual construct, which can serve as a stable standard to appraise and analyze the level of professionalism of any occupation. Freidson defends the boundaries of professional demarcation because the:

formation of boundaries or exclusive jurisdictions allows members to focus on a common body of formal knowledge and skill, or discipline. Without boundaries, nothing that could be appropriately called an occupation, let alone a formal discipline, could exist. Those

boundaries create a mutually reinforcing *social* shelter within which a formal body of knowledge and skills can develop, be nourished, practiced, refined, and expanded. (Freidson, 2001)

It is often argued that this form of demarcation is nothing other than professional protectionism but Freidson argues that it is:

not the *principle* of professional monopoly based on training credentials that is unjustified and exploitative, but only particular instances where it is either unnecessary or abused. The only reasonable position lies not in damning the principle but in determining where it is both appropriate and reliable, and where it is not. (Freidson, 2001)

By this analysis, challenges to the demarcation represented by compulsory professional credentials are potentially de-professionalising if it cannot be established that the elements of a professional qualification are inappropriate or unreliable.

The Relationship of the State to Professionalism

Furthermore, it is not as if Labour administrations have not emphasized demarcations based on quality-controlled accredited training. Successive governments, including Labour ones, have insisted on strengthening the rigour of QTS. Indeed Robin Alexander cites a Policy Network Paper in which Lord Adonis, then merely Tony Blair's adviser on education states:

We have *imposed* a new national curriculum for initial teacher training, setting out the standards and content of training courses, which all providers must follow. (Alexander, 2003)

In addition, the Labour Government introduced an assessed induction year and the requirement that each teacher must meet Induction standards in order to confirm their status as qualified teachers. As Freidson makes clear, any level of professionalism is contingent upon the State and its policies. Certainly no ideal-type profession can exist without the support of the State to officially define and classify particular kinds of work in the labour force, to legitimate the links between its professional training and higher education and to accept and support its professional qualifications. Yet, as a result of the Agreement, the Labour Government has moved on the axis towards de-professionalisation by withdrawing its unequivocal support for compulsory professional qualifications.

The Agreement offers less demarcation because cover for absent teachers no longer has to be provided by qualified teachers and the introduction of a contractual right for teachers of 10 per cent of their time for Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) from September 2005 is accompanied by new Regulations which will allow whole class groups to be taken by persons without QTS. The key question, in the light of Freidson's analysis, is whether

this demarcation is appropriate. If it is not, then re-modelling the teaching workforce is, in the longer term, its de-professionalisation. Furthermore, the direct impact is largely on teachers in the primary sector, overwhelmingly women, since it is there that providing 10 per cent PPA time and the cover for absent staff will result in classes being taken by teaching assistants, potentially down-grading a highly feminised sector of the teaching profession.

The Background to the Workload Agreement

Undeniably the de-motivating reality of teachers' workload and its effect on recruitment and retention in the profession had to be taken seriously, and was comprehensively outlined in the PriceWaterhouseCoopers' *Teacher Workload Study: Final Report* (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2001). The report also set out possible solutions for providing non-contact time, specifically in the primary sector where it was being introduced for the first time, as reducing pupil taught-time; increasing pupil-teacher ratios and/or new approaches to timetabling; recruiting additional teachers; or supporting learning through staff other than teachers. Having rejected the first two, and after admitting that the 'most obvious way of creating more teaching time is to recruit more teachers', the Report rejects this solution arguing that to provide 10 per cent non-contact time would require 30-40,000 additional full-time equivalent teachers. However, since the impact would have been largely on the primary sector it is unlikely that there would have been an issue of supply as there has never been a shortage of applicants for primary teacher training. The Report instead chose supporting learning through staff other than teachers as the solution – a conclusion helpfully in line with the Government's stated intentions to reduce demarcation.

Clearly this implied that people without QTS would undertake activities at that time confined only to qualified teachers. As Annex 5 of the Report states:

While recognizing and reinforcing the value of such a role, there are safeguards that would need to be implemented that ensured that there was not a diminution in the overall quality of teaching or of the status of teachers. (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2001)

This goes to the heart of professionalism. My contention is that these safeguards are not securely present in the provisions of the Agreement and that the concept of remodelling the teaching workforce, by Freidson's analysis, is de-professionalising. So far re-modelling offers no vision for a profession, except in relation to work/life balance and workload. Important as these may be in relation to recruitment, they do very little to offer a respected and professional future for today's teachers.

Time for Standards

There were key paragraphs in the consultation paper which followed, *Time for Standards: reforming the school workforce* (DfES, 2002). It states:

We want:

- teachers to drive forward new, more flexible models of teaching and learning: exercising their informed professional judgement in leading a range of colleagues to enrich provision and raise standards for each and every pupil, and accountable for learning outcomes rather than for every step of the journey.
- teachers to be freed from more routine tasks to concentrate on the most demanding teaching roles, with time for high quality preparation, planning and assessment, raising their status and enhancing their professionalism. We shall not achieve higher standards for pupils, or the changes we are discussing with national partners to ease teachers' workloads, without the reforms discussed in this paper.
- a system confident to sweep away old demarcations and assumptions and committed to good quality induction, training and management for all staff which allows them to play their full part.
- headteachers and governors to think radically about how they spend their budgets and deploy their staff to deliver this vision.
- support staff to be available in sufficient numbers, and with the right skills and knowledge ... some, with appropriate leadership and supervision, ready and able to lead some teaching and learning in their own right ... (DfES, 2002)

Paragraph 12 of the consultation paper is uncompromising and makes clear how individual schools will be enmeshed in the system and differentially affected by financial restraints. It states:

Much will depend on the decisions made by individual schools, taking into account their current position and development objectives, the resources available to them, and LEA policies. Governors and headteachers will need to decide the right balance between teacher, support staff and other costs: the range and level of support staff roles and the training and other support they will need; and when to employ new staff ... and when to invite staff to step up to higher-level responsibilities. But the challenge is not whether these changes can happen; it is how we make the most of them together. (DfES, 2002)

However, exactly what was meant by a 'flexible' model of teaching and learning, exactly why the newly-coined concept of 'informed professional judgement', arising as Robin Alexander argues, from 'as distorted and partisan an account of recent educational history as one is likely to find' and which he suggests means 'to know and acquiesce in what is provided, expected and/or

required by government and its agencies' (Alexander, 2003), was relevant to leading colleagues; exactly what constituted the old demarcations; and what such radicalism was and what it would lead to, have seemingly never been explained by the signatories to the Agreement.

An Analogy with Brain Surgery?

David Miliband, then Minister of State for School Standards, was forthright, if no less obscure. At the North of England Conference, 8 January 2003, immediately before the Agreement was signed, his written speech states, under the heading, *The Radical Reform of the Teaching Workforce*:

I am committed to an expanding, better paid, and better supported teaching force. It is right for the nation's children. But I also know that it makes no sense for the teaching profession to be untouched by the breakdown in demarcations, and by the development of front-line flexibility, that is the basis of effective service across the public and private sectors ... The key is to make much more use of a wider range of adult expertise, from the learning mentor to the lab technician to the language specialist. It is said that we should never ask the nurse to do brain surgery. Fair enough. But which surgeon operates without a well-equipped and well-trained nursing team?

This analogy with brain surgery, presumably assumed to be persuasive and convincing, is one that appears again and again, although it is seriously flawed in a classroom context and when applied to the conditions of the Agreement.

The Workload Agreement

The Agreement, too, is clear that contractual changes will not be delivered 'unless schools deploy more support staff in extended roles, as a means of releasing the extra time for teachers and reducing their workload'. This will be possible, it asserts, because high level teaching assistants (HLTAs) will be able to cover classes, and 'should be able to ensure that pupils can progress with their learning, based on their knowledge of the learning outcomes planned by the classroom/subject teacher' and because there will be a 'new cadre of cover supervisors', with appropriate training, to relieve the pressure on qualified teachers to cover (DfES, 2003a).

Yet at the same time the Agreement is ambivalent, since there is a constant theme that teachers and HLTAs, to be assessed against a newly-created set of Standards, are not inter-changeable. But even this reassurance is a distracting irrelevance since covering both for teacher absence and for teachers' PPA is *not* legally limited to teaching assistants who are HLTAs. Perhaps to maintain the fiction, the Agreement says:

... qualified teachers make the leading contribution to teaching and learning, reflecting their training and experience. Each class/group

for timetabled core/foundation subjects must be assigned a qualified teacher to teach them. Accountability for the overall learning outcomes of particular pupils must rest with that pupil's qualified classroom/subject teacher.

It also adds perplexity, since it asserts that the fact that HLTAs will be working with whole classes

... does not make them substitutes for when pupils need a qualified teacher, bringing the extra range, experience and complexity of understanding reflected in their higher qualifications' (DfES, 2003a).

It is to be hoped that headteachers and parents of primary pupils can understand this distinction, for as the *Times Educational Supplement's* (TES) Editorial for December 3, 2004, said 'Assistants are invaluable, but handing over a class to one for half a day a week is not improving children's education. Primary children cannot simply do set work for an afternoon a week.' Sooner or later the question must be asked as to exactly what aspects of a child's learning do need the complexity of understanding of a qualified teacher and which do not. Also, as Wilkinson says:

One finds oneself wanting to ask what precisely 'teaching' means. Is teaching the delivery of lessons through interaction with pupils in the classroom or does it boil down to authoring 'learning outcomes' for others to deliver. (Wilkinson, 2005)

Regulating 'Specified Activities'

It has been argued that the new Regulations under the 2002 Education Act related to the use of staff other than teachers actually strengthens the position of qualified teachers. This is unconvincing. Certainly these do regulate the activities support staff are allowed to carry out. But the 'specified activities', namely:

- planning and preparing lessons and courses for pupils
- delivering lessons to pupils, including via distance learning or computer aided techniques
- assessing the development, progress and attainment of pupils, and
- reporting on the development, progress and attainment of pupils

are totally undifferentiated from the same activities which are clearly the skills we expect of qualified teachers. Furthermore, the only constraints on these 'specified activities' are that the work is 'in order to assist or support the work of a qualified teacher in the school; subject to the direction and supervision of a qualified teacher in accordance with arrangements made by the headteacher'; and that 'the headteacher must be satisfied that the support staff member has the skills, expertise and experience required to carry out the specified work'. The

guidance describes this as a 'key responsibility' for the headteacher and it is strongly *recommended* (my emphasis) that where the 'specified work' is more demanding and particularly where they are working with whole classes the headteacher should 'have regard to the standards for HLTAs in determining whether those staff have the necessary skills and expertise' (DfES, 2003b). This is notwithstanding that it must be some time before headteachers have any moderated understanding of exactly what the HLTA Standards mean in practice and that, unlike the introduction of the Performance Threshold Standards, there was no national training programme to explain the HLTA Standards to headteachers.

And here's the rub: the issue will be which aspects of brain surgery, presumably the less demanding ones, are done by those unqualified in brain surgery and not by the brain surgeon and without even the brain surgeon being present. The NUT rightly recognized this when it pointed out that there is now a vital need to define the core characteristics of practising qualified teachers (NUT, 2004) which should be based on the principle that teaching is a highly skilled responsibility. In effect the notion of qualified teacher status has been so impaired, so challenged by the Agreement, that it must now be re-defined.

Why Did Five Teachers' and Headteachers Trade Unions Sign the Agreement?

Part of the answer may lie in a re-conceptualisation of the role of teachers' unions faced with the attitudes of the present Labour Government. As Unions 21 say, for 'many in government, unions are seen as irritants inside the Party, obstacles to public service reform, and vested interests focused on narrow sectional objectives' (Unions 21, 2004). There is a background, too, of mainly American, literature, arguing that teachers' trade unions should forego the confrontational style of 'industrial' trade unionism and exercise instead 'professional unionism', which is collaborative, problem-solving and based on a non-threatening or non-challenging relationship and aimed at broad objectives which would be beneficial to both parties (Streshly & DeMitchell, 1994). More recently this has been described as 'new unionism' which 'sees membership protection and well-being as instrumental of broader organizational goals' and which proceeds from the assumption that collaboration between labour and management can be mutually beneficial. (Seashore Louis et al, 2000)

Modern, Progressive Trade Unionism

The Government certainly has its conception of modern, progressive trade unionism, which could not have been clearer than in the speech David Miliband, then Minister for School Standards, gave to the Association of Teachers and Lecturers' annual conference in April 2003, shortly after the Agreement was signed. He began:

Today I want to speak about how we can advance the position of the professional teacher in the 21st century, and discuss the role of modern, progressive trade unions in doing so. I want to speak about teachers who are well paid, teachers who are well trained, teachers who are well supported, teachers who are well respected. And I want to talk about trade unions that are influential, forward-thinking, constructive, and as respected as the people they represent.

He emphasized the distinctive status of teachers and the significance of professional training, saying:

First, you and we invest time and money in teacher training. That training makes you special. It must be put to good use in class, teaching pupils, and outside it, preparing, planning, enhancing your professional skills, making sure you have the time to help each pupil fulfill their potential.

But support staff were also needed because ‘the demands of young people for learning are changing and growing’, and because ‘they need and deserve more personal attention.’ Qualified teachers will always be the lead professionals, he said ‘but other staff are key to raising standards.’ This was presented as ‘a win on both sides. Teachers get time to teach. Pupils get more adult attention. Your professionalism is protected. Their learning is promoted. It is a *win-win*.’ There were also further insights into the Government’s assumptions about this new relationship with unions. The ATL Executive, he said, took a ‘bold decision’ to sign the Agreement and decided to be ‘part of the answer to teacher workload, not the problem’. This had given them ‘a voice at the table’ and so ‘your voice is heard because you are on the inside, your opinions influential, your concerns respected.’ Government, David Miliband said, has a choice, ‘whether to create the legislative framework and cultural norms that develop a role for employee representatives’ and it has chosen legislating and reaching out to create social partnership. But, he added, ‘there is also a choice too for trade unions: engage and be influential, or stand on the sidelines, enjoy shouting slogans, but be marginal.’

Reaching and delivering the Agreement was ‘modern, responsible, progressive trade unionism’.

Trade unions as the voice of their members but also spokespeople for a wider set values. Trade unions thinking about how to improve things not just defend them. Trade unions thinking about how to cooperate across traditional boundaries rather than deepen divides. Trade unions seeking a partnership with government rather than a confrontation with government. Trade unions putting parents and pupils first because they know that without taxpayers there are no teachers or support staff ... Responsible progressive trade unionism is about being part of a community and standing up for its values. It

is about rejecting the false choice between members and citizens – because your members are citizens.

The Price of Social Partnership

So the attraction for the majority of teachers' unions may be that unions 'generally see the risks of not being involved in reform as greater than the charge of being co-opted by the employer.' (Unions 21, 2004) It remains to be seen whether this can be justified.

For, if a legitimate defence of professionalism is construed only as a defensive, adversarial position then the price may be too high for any trade union representing professionals. Indeed, under the heading 'Common Action', the Agreement suggests that partnership comes at a price, which requires not only the absence of confrontation but the absence of all public criticality, doubt and uncertainty. It states that:

Responsibility for promoting the Agreement lies with all the Signatories to it, so that:

(i) Government fulfills its responsibility for articulating the overall vision and strategy; for ensuring that sufficient resources are available to deliver reform of the school workforce, including through contractual change; and for freeing schools from bureaucracy and restraints that stifle innovation.

(ii) Headteachers and leadership teams, in partnership with their governors, feel empowered and responsible for implementing the reforms ...

(iii) The school workforce unions are committed to supporting the agreed reform process, by disseminating and promoting reform among their memberships, by celebrating achievements in schools and by working to secure the implementation of the Agreement in schools. (DfES, 2003a)

In this way headteachers become the orchestrators not the leaders of reform (Wallace, 2004) and teacher trade unionists become its advocates and champions.

Can Teachers Be Distinguished By Their Knowledge?

An alternative explanation for 'a conspicuous lack of focus' on the issue of teachers' knowledge, the justification for demarcation, in discussions of workforce remodelling is offered by Gary Wilkinson, who suggests that

teachers, their trades unions, their professional body (the General Teaching Council for England), politicians, agencies of the state and even university academics charged with providing teacher education are unclear where teachers' expertise lies, unsure that the job of

teaching rests on any body of theoretical knowledge and unagreed as to what knowledge is necessary for successful and effective teaching. (Wilkinson, 2005)

Yet, as he says, 'without an explicit articulation of teacher knowledge, stipulations about the proper role of teachers and HLTAs are unreasoned and arbitrary'. There must be a meaningful and convincing explanation justifying demarcation on the basis of the increased efficacy of formal knowledge if teaching is to maintain and enhance its professional status. Without this the 'teacher less' school and the case for reducing overall teacher numbers to pay for a better adult-pupil ratio, described as 'essential but presentationally uncomfortable' areas in a private DfES paper *Workforce Reform – Blue Skies* revealed by the *Times Educational Supplement* on 3 December 2003, becomes thinkable. The case becomes probable if Freidson's assumption 'that the aim of both state and capital, each in its own way, is to reduce the cost and the independence of professional services' and that a reasonable guess is that 'recent jurisdictional boundaries will be altered by re-assigning many more professional tasks to less qualified workers' (Freidson, 2001).

The Consequence of the Workload Agreement

Workforce remodelling has undermined the professional status of qualified teachers. It will continue to challenge both the security and the identity of teachers wherever and whenever there is pressure on resources. In particular, it has the potential to destabilize the supply of primary teachers and to demoralize primary practitioners, notwithstanding a reduction in workload, if they perceive that their skills and expertise – their investment in their pre-service training and graduate education – are under-valued and are not qualitatively differentiated from those of teaching assistants and HLTAs.

The most significant consequence of the Workload Agreement is the de-professionalisation of the teaching profession. What is needed now is to orchestrate, advocate and champion the reasoned case that a formal training programme, associated with the knowledge base and criticality under-pinned by higher education, remains the justification for defining a qualified teacher because of its relationship to high quality outcomes for children and young people. Surely this is the professionalism, old or new, which demonstrates the 'relentless focus on what is in the best interests of those who use the service' called for in *Professionalism and Trust?* (Morris, 2001) Modern, progressive trade unionism does not necessarily advance professionalism. Would we argue that anyone in the brain surgeon's team is equally able to undertake the actual brain surgery?

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MERYL THOMPSON was employed by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers for more that 20 years and retired as head of the Association's policy unit in 2004. She previously taught history at a comprehensive school and then general studies at a sixth form college. She has an interest in teacher professionalism and wrote *Professional ethics and the teacher; towards a General Teaching Council* (1997, Trentham Books) as a contribution to the work of the GTC (England and Wales) which worked towards the establishment of General Teaching Councils. She retains an active interest in teachers' professional development and education, including by serving as a school governor.
Correspondence: Meryl Thompson, Little Glebe, Ashridge Golf Club Drive, Little Gaddesden, Berkhamsted HP4 1LY, United Kingdom
(meryl.thompson@ntlworld.com).