THE PROFESSIONALISATION OF TEACHING AND ITS FRUSTRATION

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SYNOPSIS
This article seeks to provide a portrayal of teaching as a professional activity in the light of the demands placed on teachers in the contemporary educational context. While recognising that that model of extended professionality must constantly be open to criticism, it is maintained that there are four features of the current scene which endanger that model. These are: the explicit attack on teacher education; centralist curriculum development; the persistence of restricted professionalism; and the managerialist trend in education. These developments, far from enhancing the professionalisation of teaching, actually frustrate it.

INTRODUCTION
In the literature on teacher education and professional development, not least in the copious documentation which external validation has entailed, there is a widespread acceptance of a particular model of teaching. That model derives from Hoyle's 'extended professional' and Stenhouse's 'teacher as researcher': it characterises the teacher as the reflective practitioner, committed to the critical scrutiny of practice and the context in which it takes place, and dedicated to the enhancement of professional performance. That conception of teaching fuels much of the current discussion about teacher education, professional development and the involvement of teachers in current educational developments. At the same time, there are certain features of the contemporary educational context which seem antithetical to that conception of teaching. Of course, any model of teaching must be continuously open to critical scrutiny, the more especially when it appears to represent a professional consensus, since it is only through public analysis of this kind that our understanding of teaching can be refined and educational policy and practice improved. However, far from leading to an enhanced understanding and appreciation of teaching, the developments to be highlighted are unmistakably retrogressive and are in danger of undermining the significant advances that are taking place in teacher education and of frustrating the full professionalisation of teaching in Scotland. In elaboration of that thesis, this article will offer a brief portrayal of teaching as a professional activity and of the ways in which that model of teaching is being currently developed. It will then examine four features of the current educational scene which are hostile to that model of teaching and to the developments in teacher education and professional development which derive from it. These are the explicit attack on teacher education; centralist trends in curriculum development in schools and colleges of education; the persistence of restricted professionalism; and the managerialist trend in education.

TEACHING AS A PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY
The conception of teaching as a professional activity that attracts widespread support in educational circles and perhaps beyond can be
summarised in five propositions. Firstly, teaching is a multi-faceted activity involving a wide range of classroom and extra-classroom roles, the most obvious of which are the planning and evaluation of learning and its context. Secondly, teaching rests on an extensive range of theoretical insights and understandings: it is not reducible to a set of practical manoeuvres. Nor, on the other hand, is it reducible to a purely cerebral undertaking: it requires conceptualisations that issue in action. Thirdly, teaching is controversial or ‘contested’: there are widely differing views on the aims it is concerned to achieve and the means by which these aims might be realised. In view of the uncertainties surrounding it, teaching is best envisaged as an exploratory and hypothetical activity continuously open to criticism. Fourthly, teaching involves a commitment to self-evaluation. In recognition of the inexact state of the art its practitioners should surely be tentative in their approach to their work, constantly checking its effectiveness. Indeed, since teaching can never be mastered in the sense that there are no more generative or enterprising strategies to be found, self-scrutiny becomes the key to the search for improved performance. Finally, teaching involves a commitment to professional development: changes in educational philosophy, in society, in technology, and in the expectations of learners, are likely to create significantly new demands and to call on teachers to make quite substantial changes in their approach to their work.

If that portrayal of teaching is valid, teacher education may be seen as the means of initiating students into a professional way of life and of equipping them with the skills and dispositions necessary to engage in it and to sustain the range of commitments that way of life entails. In recent years, determined efforts have been made to improve programmes of teacher education to render them more systematic and effective initiations into professional life. Programmes have been completely restructured and reconceptualised from first principles; selection procedures have been improved; more effective collaboration with the teaching profession has been achieved; the assessment of teaching has been placed on an altogether more systematic and professionally acceptable footing; the link between college-based and placement-based activities and studies has been decisively strengthened; the theoretical and practical dimensions, which were structurally and institutionally separated in traditional programmes, have been integrated in course design; all programmes have been externally validated; and, finally, programmes are offered in institutions which have in the past ten years or so transformed themselves to become major centres of educational research and innovation with staff who are in the front line of educational developments.

The revitalisation of courses of initial teacher education has taken place alongside a dramatic increase in the range of inservice programmes intended to engage teachers in the critical examination of their own professional circumstances. That increased professionalisation of courses of initial training and of inservice courses is paralleled by the enhancement of the role played by teachers in matters relating to the conduct of education. Teachers now play an important role in the selection of students for training, and in the planning and delivery of college courses; they are involved in national and local working parties on practically every aspect of educational development; through the General Teaching Council for Scotland they control entry to the profession; and, through the Forum for Educational Research in Scotland and in other ways, they are becoming more involved in research activities of various kinds and in the public discussion of
educational research policy. In all of these ways, the extended professionalism of teachers is increasingly recognised, and courses of teacher education both reflect and reinforce that extended professionalism. At the same time, there are certain features of the contemporary educational context which threaten to undermine the extended professionalism of teachers. Four of these will be considered in the remainder of this article.

THE EXPLICIT ATTACK ON TEACHER EDUCATION

The first of these involves direct and explicit attacks on programmes of teacher education and the work of colleges of education. It is regretfully still common to find teachers in schools registering hostile attitudes to colleges of education. Such attitudes, deriving as they almost invariably do from an unfortunate sojourn in a college of education a decade or more ago, cannot be taken to represent anything like a fair assessment of the current work of colleges and take little or no account of the substantial changes that have been effected in recent years or the transformations that are taking place in the conceptualisation and conduct of professional training. Despite these developments, the stereotyping persists and does enormous harm: it vitiates the rational analysis of the quality of work undertaken by colleges; it militates against the very partnership in training which the profession's own rhetoric espouses; it corrodes the confidence which staff work hard to establish with students in training; and it weakens the claim of teachers to professional standing by virtue of having undertaken specialist training.

One of the specific misconceptions to be encountered among certain sections of the teaching profession is that colleges of education merely peddle 'tips for teachers'. An alternative formulation of that criticism is that, in their teacher education work, colleges of education pursue a narrow vocationalism characterised by an emphasis on practical classroom skills with little or no critical analysis of the principles governing educational policy and practice. That, for example, is one of the main thrusts of the critique of colleges of education advanced by Humes in his polemical The Leadership Class in Scottish Education. Humes refers to 'the tendency inherent in the new BEd degree to accept uncritically the prevailing pattern of schooling'. Then, in a discussion of the bureaucratic controls within which colleges of education appear to operate, he implies that principals are committed to appointing staff 'because they are willing to go along with approved policies' and who, far from being able to train 'creative and stimulating teachers', offer 'an initiation into unimaginative conformist thinking, a preparation for a career as pliant functionaries'.

It is discouraging for those working in colleges of education to see all their efforts to enhance the quality of their courses and to create vigorous and self-critical academic communities dismissed in such terms. What is particularly disturbing is that criticisms such as those advanced by Humes have no empirical basis whatever. They do not rest on any kind of systematic investigation into the work of colleges of education; they do not spring from a careful study of the content of courses, of the level of students' work, of the comments of external examiners, of staff appointment procedures and criteria, or the views of heads, employers and others about the quality of college graduates. Humes is concerned to place a particularly pernicious interpretation upon the work of colleges of
education but he fails to test the validity of that interpretation against relevant empirical evidence.

Of course, had Humes taken the trouble to investigate the actual conduct of teacher education programmes he would very quickly have discovered that his fears and concerns were groundless. As has already been maintained, the model of teacher underpinning practically all programmes of teacher education in Scotland recognises the necessity of engaging would-be teachers in the analysis of a whole range of complex ideas and concepts and requiring them to adopt a critical approach to their own teaching and to the context in which that takes place. Indeed, that is an expectation of CNA validation procedures, and institutions falling short in this respect would be culpable. Colleges of education are public institutions and must operate in a climate in which their work is openly discussed and debated: they have no immunity from criticism. It is the contention of this paper that the criticisms under discussion are misplaced and unjustified and that they inhibit the professionalisation of teaching in Scotland.

CENTRALIST CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

The second major source of difficulty for the model of teaching under consideration is the emergence of centralist strategies of curriculum development, strategies which locate power and decision-making in a central body and which may therefore infringe the right of teachers and college staff to use their skills in ways that accord with their best sense of what is educationally appropriate for their students. In recent years, central control has increased over the school curriculum and the college of education curriculum.

In the course of the review of curriculum and assessment in the secondary school initiated by the Munn and Dunning Reports of 1977, one of the significant themes was the need to institutionalise school-based curriculum development. The national strategy, which commanded widespread professional support, involved the creation of a national curriculum framework and a national system of certification and assessment while, at the same time, providing schools with major responsibilities for curriculum design and assessment. Two years of industrial action by teachers, which exerted such a devastating effect on the implementation of Standard Grade, as the reforms came to be known, led to a change of strategy. The Agreement which marked the close of the dispute recognised that the preparation of teaching materials to support curriculum development had been a major burden on individual teachers and that in future curriculum change should be supported by exemplars and other teaching materials prepared by secondees, voluntary working groups of teachers, or by other appropriate means. That Agreement is in remarkably close accord with the SED’s own review of the CCC and the Scottish Curriculum Development Service, which concluded that ‘the capacity of the teaching force in Scotland to deliver (curriculum change) is limited’ and advocated that a major task for the CCC in the immediate future was the preparation of classroom materials for teachers. In the further implementation of Standard Grade each subject area has its Central Support Group, sometimes aided by local support groups, whose function is to prepare the ‘exemplar’ materials for classroom use.

What we have here is the ‘cascade’ model which, in the words of one commentator, represents ‘an unholy alliance of enthusiasts for strong management and a sufficient number of apathetic teachers’, and is in
danger of depersonalising everyone. Nor is that model confined to Standard Grade. In the consultation paper just released by SED,² what is proposed is the establishment, for each area of the curriculum for pupils 5-14, of ‘a nationally agreed set of guidelines setting out the aims of study, the content to be covered, and the objectives to be achieved’. That is seen as the ‘key task’ now facing the CCC. No doubt developments of this kind can be defended in the interests of establishing a coherent national curriculum. But the model of the teacher increasingly assumed, far from the reflective practitioner researching and improving performance, is the implementer of schemes devised and approved further up the line.

Centralist tendencies are also apparent in connection with the college of education curriculum. The Secretary of State is statutorily entitled to approve college courses and has tended to exercise that right by establishing national guidelines and ensuring that proposed courses are compatible with these guidelines. To date, the drafting of national guidelines has been undertaken in a rational and acceptable way. These have been drawn up by groups representing the various relevant interests and they have been the product of formal and informal consultation. As a result, such guidelines as have emerged have served to represent a professional consensus on the minimal expectations that all courses should meet and have allowed reasonable diversity of provision and reasonable scope for intelligent and enterprising course planning and design.

However, two recent developments give cause for concern. The first is the establishment by the Secretary of State of the Scottish Committee for Staff Development in Education (SCOSDE), a body with extremely wide-ranging powers in the field of staff development in education. Among these is the power to devise guidelines for courses and to undertake the professional accreditation of courses. These are important responsibilities to lodge with a group of 15, even if the universities, the colleges of education, the General Teaching Council and COSLA are represented. No group of that kind could claim the professional expertise necessary to devise guidelines across the whole range of inservice courses for teachers or, indeed, to undertake, in an authentic and credible way, the accreditation of such courses. It is to be hoped, therefore, that the new body will approach these two important tasks responsibly: it must seek to consult widely with all interested bodies with regard to guidelines for courses and it must be willing to involve staff in institutions throughout the country in the work of accreditation. Any suggestion that such work should be left entirely to the membership of SCOSDE would seriously undermine the professionalism of college staff and others engaged in the staff development of teachers.

The second development relates to the introduction of what are coming to be called ‘common’ courses or ‘consortium’ courses in colleges of education, courses which would be prepared by a central team drawn from two or more colleges but would be ‘locally delivered’. Such courses clearly have their attractions: they would help to eliminate unnecessary duplication of activities; they would foster collaboration; and when combined with distance learning techniques they could helpfully extend access for teachers throughout the country. They may be seen as an efficient way of exploiting the expertise available within the college system. Nevertheless, there are dangers. There is something profoundly disquieting about a centrally prepared course being mediated locally by staff who played no part in the preparation of the resource materials and who may well feel that such materials are inappropriate to the professional needs of the teachers they...
are seeking to serve. Even worse, it is possible to envisage courses of this kind devised in accordance with guidelines of SCOSDE’s own making and accredited entirely by the members of SCOSDE. Since all such courses would still require SED approval it is conceivable that ‘common’ or ‘consortium’ courses could represent SED’s means of ensuring that the work of colleges of education and others was finally in line with government policy on the school curriculum and brooked no criticism of that policy. Such an eventuality would be disastrous in a democratic society; it would seriously threaten the quality of education; it would kill the initiative and resourcefulness upon which effective programmes depend; and, finally, by so deprofessionalising college staff, it would imperil the delivery of the courses thus developed.

THE PERSISTENCE OF RESTRICTED PROFESSIONALISM

In much public discussion of educational issues there is evidence of the persistence of a restricted notion of teaching. These are particularly to be found in discussions on initiatives that offer teachers an extension of their professionalism. For example, while it is almost universally acknowledged that appraisal is a necessary prelude to any kind of professional development, it is still regarded with deep suspicion. It does not feature in the list of teachers’ responsibilities in the agreement which ended the teachers’ dispute; it does not appear to feature in the deliberations of SCOSDE; and a proposal put to the GTC in 1983, which invited a major national initiative on appraisal, has been allowed to sink into convenient oblivion.

Another example is to be found in teachers’ response to the ‘Forsyth’ proposals on school boards. So withering and comprehensive has been the denunciation of these proposals that one of their central features has gone almost unnoticed. The consultative paper is interpretable as an ambitious attempt to give headteachers and, by implication, teachers, a much more influential role in educational provision and, by finally recognising the enormous management responsibilities which headship entails, to offer a substantial extension to the teacher’s professional role. Yet the teaching profession in Scotland showed no real willingness to take this possibility seriously. Indeed, the GTC actually saw the proposals as undermining the professionalism of teachers. That response is very surprising indeed since there is considerable evidence — in the work of independent schools in Scotland, and in various state schools south of the border, as the proposed legislation there fully recognises — to suggest that teachers are perfectly capable of assuming enhanced managerial roles. Is it really the case that Scottish teachers are not yet professionally able to handle such responsibilities?

The response of teachers to issues like appraisal or the role extensions implied by school boards reflects a wider concern amongst teachers to protect their professional autonomy. In recent years, as new demands have been placed on them, teachers have felt themselves under pressure to change when they did not always accept the case for change or its direction. It is understandable that in such circumstances teachers should assume an attitude of defensiveness about future innovations which inevitably complicate their task and require more from them. Frequently, teachers are less opposed to a development than concerned to urge that full account should be taken of the need for adequate resourcing of a development. Nevertheless, that defensiveness, especially when it is repeatedly in
evidence, is interpretable as a reluctance to assume the full responsibilities which teaching now entails. The apparent reluctance of teachers to accept these responsibilities weakens the claim to professional standing.

THE MANAGERIALIST TREND IN EDUCATION

The final threat to extended professionalism to be considered is represented by the current managerialist trend in education. That trend is rooted in a number of government initiatives directed towards efficiency, 'value for money', the achievement of reductions in public expenditure and the adoption of a bold managerial assertiveness. In educational circles, these initiatives have induced a preoccupation with cost-effectiveness, with unit costs, with performance indicators, with institutional target-setting, with corporate audits, with line management, with the specification of duties, and much else besides — all supposedly in the interests of making the educational service a more effective tool in the liberation of talent and in the country's economic regeneration. Much of this is clearly unexceptionable, for who is in favour of the squandering of scarce resources, and who is committed to the irresponsible stewardship of public funds? Nevertheless, if managerialism is taken as far as it is possible to be taken — and already one hears of 'the industrialisation of the campus' — it is likely to have deeply serious effects on the professional activities of school and college staff. Two of these are worth highlighting.

First, there is evidence in some official documentation (for example, the published HMI reports on Aberdeen College of Education and Jordanhill College of Education) of a lukewarm attitude to collegial values. Collegiality implies a commitment to consultation, to the sharing of perspectives on difficult problems, and to the search for consensus, rather than the imposition, from above, of lines of action. Both of the HMI reports referred to urge a reduction in committee work. One asks for the responsibilities of senior staff to be discharged 'without the need for constant reference to a committee'. The other ventures the opinion that the work of committees could now be significantly reduced 'since the main work of course reform has been accomplished', as if external validation put an end to the need for discussion. It has to be insisted that committee work, with all that it implies, is integral to the life of flourishing educational institutions. However, it does not seem to feature too prominently on the managerialist scale of values.

But there is an even more serious danger. The current managerialist thrust stresses the precise specification of duties and hours of work. In schools and colleges already a great deal of time is being devoted to such matters. It is an unhealthy development. It may be necessary to monitor staff deployment but it is counter-productive to insist on precisely delineated statements of duties or hours of work. Professional work is intrinsically engrossing and it cannot be bounded by strict time limits. All that this trend will induce is a determination to interpret duties to the letter and to devote no more time to professional activities than a contract of employment appears to require. Of course, schools and colleges would grind to a halt in these circumstances. Educational institutions worthy of the name operate, as they must, on the basis of extended professionalism, on the assumption that it is simply impossible to specify the time necessary to work to the highest professional standards.
CONCLUSION
This article has maintained that there is a model of teaching as a professional activity which commands widespread support, and which is reflected in courses of initial teacher education and programmes of staff development for teachers, as well as in a number of developments which give teachers greater control over their professional circumstances. At the same time, there are certain features of the current scene that detract from the professionalisation of teaching and which, intentionally or otherwise, frustrate its full emergence. These dangers constitute a major challenge for the teaching profession. If that profession does not respond to the challenge, will it have anything left worth defending?

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