

The National Association for Primary Education

Professionalism in education

Introduction

Four decades ago, government was keen to promote teaching as a well-qualified activity and made it mandatory for teachers to have degrees. Politicians thought by doing so the public would hold the profession in higher esteem.

Since the shift towards greater centralisation and accountability in the profession and the level of prescription at the primary phase in the core subjects the extent to which teachers can genuinely operate at a professional as opposed to a technical level is questionable. This tight prescription has been implemented through a variety of means, with the combination of the National Curriculum, the National Strategies, Standard Assessment Tests (SATs), Phonics Screening and OfSTED inspection schedules all having a restricting impact on the teacher's capacity to shape their priorities and pedagogy to match their understanding of the children's needs.

NAPE recognises the importance of central imperatives in relation to children's entitlements and especially the articulation of a broad and balanced curriculum which applies to all children across the age phases. The pressures on schools to narrow the curriculum and to follow particular modes of teaching, which may be favoured by the politicians in power, but which are divorced from the outcomes of educational research is regrettable. The obsessive cultivation of phonetic approaches to the teaching of early reading is a potent example of the dangers of central intervention at its crudest. There are some welcome signs from OfSTED that they are looking for more evidence of teacher creativity in their latest round of revisions to inspection methodology, but only time will tell whether this is a new dawn or leading to greater prescription.

How a professional educator acts in relation to pupils/students

NAPE sees the following elements as the basis of the teacher professionalism:

The interests and care of the pupils/students are paramount; this means that:

- i) the individuality of each pupil/student is respected with regard to race, religion, class, sex or cultural group
- ii) educators refrain from acts that might adversely affect their well being
- iii) educators do not abuse their authority for personal or even political purposes
- iv) all pupils/students are treated impartially
- v) educators maintain confidentiality of information about individuals they teach (*except in situations where the child's welfare may be at risk*)
- vi) educators pay attention to the wishes of parents of pupils of compulsory age
- vii) educators do all in their power to fulfil the potential of individual pupils

How a professional educator acts in relation to the profession of teaching

This is done in a way that maintains the highest standards of personal and professional conduct, so that educators:

- i) respect the knowledge and skills gained in education and training, and the experience of professional work
- ii) develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes of self-management
- iii) accept responsibility for their own quality, examining strengths and weaknesses, and striving to improve
- iv) keep knowledge and skills up to date and develop competence
- v) place knowledge, skill and experience at the service of pupils and students
- vi) accept co-operative responsibility for the effective performance of an institution and the well-being of the individuals within it
- vii) exercise individual judgement in the solution of educational problems
- viii) act in accordance with a professional code of conduct
- ix) Avoid membership of organisations which might introduce conflict of loyalty of interest
- x) Maintain competence in the organisation and management of a groups of learners

The above comes from work done in the 1990s by the Education Council under the chairmanship of Professor Tyrrell Burgess as part of one of several attempts to set up a professional body for teachers run by teachers. The Education Council helped in the promotion and early work of the *General Teaching Council* which was then *axed* by the Cameron administration. Fortunately, the idea was resurrected, and now The Chartered College of Teaching is in the process of building a membership and has cross party support. *We are committed to supporting the Chartered College and will want to work closely with it in the promotion of teacher professionalism.*

The concept of teacher professionalism is as critical as it has always been. The expertise underpinning it has become increasingly complex over the last few decades. In this digital age, teachers are required to develop greater sensitivity to the intercultural dimensions of teaching; and greater importance is placed on schools' collaboration not only with other schools (in federations, academy trusts etc.) but also with other agencies (to do with childcare, legal services etc.).

Teachers deserve the utmost respect for the way in which they take on this burgeoning set of responsibilities and what they deserve is support and not the imposition of restrictions which get in the way of the exercise of professional responsibility and judgement.

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