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**‘Organizational’ professional learning for performance in primary Initial Teacher Training**

**Abstract:** Building upon a definition of organizational professionalism (Evetts, 2009), this paper explores trainee teachers’ conceptions of professionalism and performance at the end of their Initial Teacher Training. In addition to trainees on traditional university-led programmes, the research sample includes School Direct trainees, whose voices have yet to be reported widely within empirical studies. Findings derive from a mixed-methods study, involving the use of a questionnaire with 143 trainees, but focusing on 13 qualitative interviews with trainee teachers. It is found that trainees become socialized into cultures of performativity, and are observers of such practices in school, making sense of what they witness by comparing it with their own idealized beliefs about teaching. Whilst many trainees would like to reject an emphasis on standards and performance in school, they also recognize that such emphasis is a reality in the teaching profession today.

***Organizational professionalism and performance***

Organizational professionalism is a term offered by Evetts (2009) as an ideal-type underpinning much of what constitutes New Public Management in sectors of society such as education. Organizational professionalism includes, amongst other attributes, ‘accountability and externalized forms of regulation, target setting and performance review' (Evetts, 2009, p263). Whilst a professional association for teachers in England is in the early stages of establishment (College of Teachers, 2015), for decades, the regulation of teaching has been overseen by those external to the profession. A New Right agenda has persuaded professionals to accept accountability ‘*to* some combination of government, management and consumers… [and] *for* achieving standards, targets and other performance criteria imposed by government agencies’ (Beck, 2008: 127). Organizational professionalism therefore emerges as teachers strive to conform to the expectations set from above, as opposed to, from within the teaching profession. A relentless focus on professionals’ performance in ways that can be measured can be seen as integral to this process.

Organizational professionalism is dependent on structures (Evetts, 2009). Structures of accountability, such as inspections, national testing and governance become focused on performance, giving rise to cultures of performativity:

Performativity is enacted through measures and targets against which we are expected to position ourselves, but often in ways that also produce uncertainties about how we should organise ourselves within our work. (Ball, 2008, p.51).

Ball indicates the destabilising effect that performativity can have on teachers’ identity, and so here we see the consequences of organizational professionalism. In theory, the mechanisms of accountability and performance management are designed to raise standards, with the ‘informed professional’ accepting this aspect of their work (Barber, 2004, p.30). However, Evetts (2009, p. 260) suggests that targets have ‘“unintended” consequences on the prioritization and ordering of work activities’, and others see performance management as merely another ‘hoop to jump through’ (Mahony, Menter and Hextall, 2004, p.443).

Teachers working with organizational professionalism are subject to hierarchies of decision making. Within the school, head teachers and managers are integral to enforcing policies that are perceived to contribute to the success of the school as an organisation. This can lead to 'impression management' (Cribb, 2009, p. 33) which becomes an ethical concern; people must believe that professionals are doing a good job, and these expectations must be managed. The impression of performance set against the authenticity of practice, can result in a 'values schizophrenia' (Ball, 2003, p.221) as individuals grapple with competing beliefs about teaching. The solution for some has been to adopt performativity policies pragmatically whilst retaining other personal beliefs about teaching, for example balancing performativity with for creativity (Troman, Jeffrey and Ragl, 2007). As Wilkins et al. (2012, p.68) argues 'teachers are not merely passive conduits of policy; they mediate, interpret, resist and subvert policy imperatives, bringing their own values to bear on the implementation of performative objectives' (Wilkins et al. 2012, p.68).

Responses to the demands of organizational professionalism are varied. For example, Newly Qualified Teachers' views are found to be 'sanguine' (Wilkins, 2011, p.400), perceiving the bureaucratic aspects of the role as a 'necessary evil' (p.401). They continue to derive satisfaction from working with children but view performativity as being a necessary part of teaching. However, the negative consequences of accountability are also felt most in schools that need to raise their Ofsted (the school inspectorate in England) grading or in schools that have lower attainment results (Hutchings, 2015).

The problem for trainee teachers is that they come to their Initial Teacher Training with a strong desire to work with young people (Hobson et al., 2009), yet organizational professionalism emphasises structures over relationships, becoming more concerned with organizational success (Evetts, 2009). The structures of Initial Teacher Training can be viewed as preparing trainees to focus on educational outcomes that are externally defined in order to measure organizational effectiveness. As Furlong (2013, p.40) notes teacher educators are ‘required to deliver teachers willing and able to embrace this centrally defined, target-driven culture’. It is therefore necessary to examine trainee teachers’ experiences of being inducted into practices of organizational professionalism and their responses.

Method

The findings reported within this paper are part of a wider study that examines how trainee teachers experience organizational professionalism as part of their Initial Teacher Training. The data presented in the present article derive from interviews and questionnaires completed by trainee teachers at the end of their Initial Teacher Training, prior to beginning what is commonly known in England as an induction year. As Pierce (2007) argues, ‘beginning teaching involves the suspension, even temporary loss, of professional identity’ (p.31) when experiencing the ‘cultural cold shoulder inside schools’ (p.32). Therefore, by conducting interviews with trainees at the end of their training, but prior to induction, it was possible to gain an understanding of how Initial Teacher Training prepares teachers before they become influenced by their new organizational settings.

The interview sample included 13 trainee teachers on three different teacher training programmes being offered by one university in England. Two of the teacher training routes, an undergraduate Initial Teacher Training degree leading to Qualified Teacher Status, and a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), are classified as university-led provision. School Direct trainees were also included as a school-led route, although these participants were affiliated to the same university.

As part of the interview technique, a vignette scenario was presented. This was necessary as the trainee teachers were unlikely to have experienced accountability in the context of education and so the scenario illustrates this real-world phenomenon. However, through the vignette, the participants are able to make connections to their observations and experiences that may be similar. The use of vignettes are not without their limitations and the main challenge in using them is that participants could explain them as they ‘think they should’ (Renold, 2002, p.3).

The inclusion of questionnaires was based on the research design of Swann et al. (2010) that looked into teachers’ conceptions of professionalism. In their study, questionnaires were analysed to identify latent constructs of professionalism in order to validate the responses from the interviews. The research reported here has adopted a similar process, including some of the original questions from Swann et al.’s questionnaire, additional questions focused on organizational professionalism and use of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). Williams, Brown and Onsman suggest that there is much debate amongst statisticians and researchers about suitable sample sizes for EFA with some insisting on a sample greater than 300 and others with samples as low as 50. A Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy, along with Bartlett’s test of sphericity were used to check that factor analysis was suitable for the questionnaire used and data gathered from 143 respondents across the three Initial Teacher Training programmes.

**Learning about performance through organizational professionalism**

Inductive analysis of the interviews revealed how trainee teachers are socialised into practices of organizational professionalism. For the purposes of this paper, connected with a conference theme on Professional Learning for Performance, findings related to trainees’ socialisation into performative practices are reported.

It was evident that the trainee teachers considered impact on pupil progress when making decisions about their teaching, and this is a result of the way in which they were socialised into this aspect of organizational professionalism. Mentors, overseeing the training within the school setting, were quick to foreground pupil progress as essential when making pedagogic choices. As one School Direct trainee commented: “In terms of progress, he [the mentor] didn't think that children would progress as much with the activities that I planned. His activities would help them make more progress than mine which may have just been fun.” The trainee teachers understood the importance of pupil progress and whilst for many interview participants it is desirable to deliver 'fun' or engaging, often creative lessons, pupil progress became the forefront of lesson planning.  This was particularly the necessary when working with lower-attaining pupils whose progress was of greater concern, as observed by a postgraduate trainee: “In the lower groups, they were never really allowed to read just for the sake of reading or enjoying a book. They spent more time working on books that they had to learn to read because of progress”. It was found that many trainee teachers observed that qualified teachers justified decisions by focusing on pupils’ performance.

Part of the vignette scenario invited trainees to consider how the use of prescriptive lesson planning could be used to raise reading standards in a primary school. Trainee teachers responded by providing a rationale that was founded on ideas about pupil performance, suggesting that they would “follow them if they [the children] made progress” (postgraduate trainee). Others suggested that they would like to adapt the lesson planning, personalising the learning in order to raise standards further. A prescriptive scheme may be able to guarantee good progress for the majority, but ideally, the trainees believed that all children can make better than average progress and it is their job to ensure this.

The vignette scenario focused on reading standards, a core skill that is measured by national testing. When asked if prescriptive lesson planning could be used for all subjects, the trainees expressed a desire to inject their own personality and ideas into their teaching. This was presented as being more easily achievable in lessons such as History and Geography because these subjects are not measured through national testing and unlikely to be indicative of teachers’ effectiveness. Therefore, the trainees seemed hesitant to stray too much from what Evetts (2009) terms ‘standardised procedures’ when pupil progress, as an organizational objective, is under the microscope.

Organizational objectives for primary schools in England are most noticeable where statutory testing, commonly known as SATs, take place. The trainees referred to a “SATs pedagogy” that they observed in school and this was discordant with their own beliefs about teaching. Commenting on the way in which children are prepared to sit these tests, a postgraduate trainee suggested: “If it wasn't about passing the SATs we didn't do it”, going on to describe the limited experiences that children receive when schools are focused on achieving higher standards. An undergraduate trainee also observed practice that she deemed to be “boring. It was just repetitive and every lesson was the same… the children would work through a practice paper and they would just work in silence”. When asked why the teachers taught in this way, it was partly due to the pressure of national testing and partly due to the impact of managerialism (another attribute of organizational professionalism); the head teacher endorsed and actively reinforced the need for pedagogies that he deemed would raise standards. The undergraduate trainee attempted to adopt what she considered to be a constructivist approach to teaching but was met with animosity: “He [the head teacher] came in and basically told me off in front of the class. It was humiliating”. For the remainder of her time in this school, the trainee teacher resorted to the didactic methods endorsed by the head. A SATs pedagogy, along with the prevailing standards agenda, socialised the trainees into the pressure that teachers face; 'pressure to hit objectives and to progress children on’ *(*undergraduate trainee*).* However, perceptions of how teachers are put under pressure did not exist solely in Year 6 where the statutory tests take place:  “I can see it building and building. It is no longer pressure just in Year 6; I think that everyone feels it, even a lot further down” (undergraduate trainee). Therefore, through observing and conforming to the expectations set in school, trainee teachers were conceptualising pupil performance in a narrow way, defined by an expectation that pupils will succeed in national tests. This in turn shaped their understanding of professionalism.

Analysis of questionnaires add to the complexity of trainees’ beliefs about organizational professionalism. The Exploratory Factor Analysis produced a latent component ‘Emphasis on English and Maths’. There was high correlation between two items within this component, and the respondents tended to disagree that Initial Teacher Training should emphasise the curriculum subjects of English and Maths. This seems to contradict their experiences in school where they spent much of their time observing and teaching core subjects, often as detailed above, using pedagogic strategies that are deemed to be performance-focused. Another component emerged that linked performance, pedagogy and pay. Within this component the pedagogic choices teachers make were connected with the performance and pay of the teacher. Further descriptive statistics for the individual items within this component show that whilst trainees are likely to disagree that performance related pay motivates and improves standards, they do believe in teachers being financially rewarded for demonstrated expertise. Expertise can be demonstrated through the performance of children in national tests and so it is pertinent that trainees across all training programmes believe that it is a necessary part of teachers’ work to prepare children for these national tests. Yet, aspects of the interview analysis reveal that trainees are critical of a SATs pedagogy, suggesting that whilst they recognise the need for such tests as part of organizational professionalism, there is a scepticism over the means to achieve high outcomes. Nevertheless, the factor analysis indicates that those entering the profession may be linking performance with pedagogy as part of conceptualising professionalism.

A focus on performance through externally designed measures does not negate trainees’ idealised beliefs about teaching. One of the most frequently inducted codes from interviews indicated that trainees idealised child-centred practice. Trainees repeatedly conceptualised teaching by considering the impact on the child. As such, their preferred pedagogy was enquiry-based, personalised and incited children’s enthusiasm for learning: “*I think it is still too much of the teacher standing at the front of the classroom and too much input”;* “Good practice is teaching that engages, inspires and motivates”. However, as the trainees are socialised into aspects of organizational professionalism, they have to shift, adapt and negotiate these personal beliefs about teaching.

The trainees believed that sometimes the child was not afforded optimum opportunity because of educational emphasis on academic achievement: “I think sometimes there is so much emphasis on academic side of things that the actual person behind the child is forgotten about” (School Direct trainee). This trainee drew upon his Catholic faith as a reason for believing in what he described as the “holistic side” of teaching, yet recognised the challenges of developing children holistically in the current education system. Another trainee, who was also a parent of primary-aged children, recognised the reason why you sacrifice your beliefs for the practicalities of the classroom. She commented that as a mum, she looked at education “through rose tinted glasses” but as a teacher believes “getting 30 children through the system… brings lots of pressure and you can’t always do everything that you want to”. Initial Teacher Training has therefore enabled the trainees to realise the demands of performativity.

Experiences in school are integral in challenging trainees’ beliefs about teaching. Trainees suggested in their interviews that they had to conform to the expectations of school, even where this compromised their idealised practices. In this way, school could sometimes reflect a different reality to university where many of the ideas about enquiry based, personalised and child-centred learning was endorsed. Trainees were then faced with competing expectations: ‘In university you learn how to do something, but then in schools they say “we don’t do it like that”’. University practice was referred to as ‘utopian’ and ‘a fairy tale’, not representing the real demands placed on schools emphasised by organizational professionalism. For undergraduate and postgraduate trainees, their beliefs about teaching are not only affected by being in school but are further challenged when carrying out placements in alternative schools. Their placements were linked to the university provider, but the schools themselves were not necessarily connected to each other. However, School Direct trainees benefited by the structure of their placements where schools with a similar ethos were in an alliance. One School Direct trainee commented: “The university focus is ‘you as a teacher in education.’ In school it is ‘you as a teacher in our school, within our borough’. The training is based on what the local schools have put together”. Therefore, the opportunity for university to reinforce what was perceived as a “fairy tale” was reduced for the School Direct trainees who had been introduced early to the organizational objectives of their alliance, however narrowly conceived.

**Concluding thoughts**

When considering an ideal-type of organizational professionalism as proposed by Evetts (2009), accountability, including externalised forms of regulation, target setting and performance review are all key attributes. The trainee teachers in this study acknowledge that the professional role of a teacher involves raising externally defined standards and being accountable for this. Such beliefs are commonplace amongst younger teachers (Stone-Johnson, 2014) who are likely to have spent 'their entire educational career in an increasingly performatised school (and higher education) system' (Wilkins, 2009, p.404). It is also possible that the longer the teaching profession has had performativity and accountability, the more 'acquiescent' teachers have become to this aspect of their role (Swann et al. , 2009, p.561 ) and does not necessarily suggest that all trainees see the 'virtue of accountability' (Barber, 2004, p.8). However, the extent to which trainees are prepared to pursue a target-culture becomes a challenge when reconciling their personal beliefs about teaching. A strong desire to achieve the ‘utopian’ vision for teaching and learning can be thwarted by the pressure to help the school succeed in their own organizational aims. Where mentors, head teachers and a school culture reinforce the messages of performativity, the trainee teacher is likely to become socialised into these practices, thus reinforcing an organizational professionalism as they become fixed on externally defined standards.

A recent suggestion for the reconfiguration of teacher education by Ellis and McNicholl (2015) calls for universities, schools and trainee teachers to form new relationships which co-configure new forms of professional practice and research developments. It has been shown in this paper that trainees are often socialised into organizational professionalism practices that are discordant with some of their beliefs about teaching. The organizational hierarchies mean that undesired practice goes unchallenged, resulting in the trainee conforming to expectations. Therefore, it is recommended that Initial Teacher Education programmes consider the ways in which they work with schools and trainee teachers to both deconstruct what is happening in practice and actively analyse ways in which practice can move forward. In doing this, it is hoped that professional learning for performance moves beyond performativity in an organisation towards constructively preparing teachers for their profession.

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