

## **Professionalism in Vocational Education: International Perspectives**

### **Abstract**

This paper explores notions of professionalism amongst vocational teachers in the UK and Australia, through an analysis of voluntarism/regulatory frameworks and professional body frameworks. In terms of empirical evidence, the paper reports on data drawn from a documentary analysis of government policy documents, standards for the education of teachers, and regulatory frameworks in both countries. It is located within a broad range of literature exploring contemporary concepts of professionalism amongst vocational teachers.

Documentary analysis implies that whilst there is an expectation and assumption that vocational teachers are, and should be, professional, this is not necessarily translated through Initial Teacher Training requirements, some of which fail to address concepts of professionalism at all. Further, it offers evidence to suggest that where notions of professionalism are addressed, the concept is described in largely reductive and utilitarian terms, and that this is the case in both countries. The paper considers the implications of this for teachers, students, and wider practice within the sector, arguing that meaningful understandings of the notion of professional, which are effectively applied in practice, are fundamental to broader understandings of key issues in further education, such as those associated with in/equalities and in/exclusion in education contexts. The paper concludes that such understandings are unlikely to be drawn from utilitarian, CBT based teacher-training programmes.

**Keywords:** curriculum; vocational education; further education; professionalism; professional knowledge; professional standards.

### **Exploring discourses of professionalism**

Professionalism can be understood as a fluid concept with a range of different meanings and interpretations, changing over time and according to context. Eraut (1994) for example, describes professionalism as an ideology characterized by specialist knowledge, autonomy and service, whilst Winch (2014) defines professionalism through an exploration of the relationship of agency to

professional capacity. Other interpretations refer to knowledge, power, and relationships with society (see Evetts, 2013, for an extended discussion).

Much of the literature uses the so-called elite professions of law and medicine as exemplars, and draws on conceptions of 'professional' which are juxtaposed with historical constructions of 'vocational': an occupational role such as teaching or nursing, defined in terms of calling or service. The focus on law and medicine can be dated back to landmark studies in professionalism such as that of Millerson (1964), who explored these two professions through the construction of a five-part framework for defining a profession as any occupation which required: use of skills based on theoretical knowledge; receipt of education or training in those skills; accredited and examined certificates to practice; a code of professional conduct; and a commitment to the 'public good'. It is important to note that in an earlier study of FE professionalism in England, Clow (2001) argued that, following a strict application of the Millerson model of professionalism, teaching in FE could not be classed as a profession.

In the context of further education, the meanings and interpretations most commonly used fall within two opposing paradigms, which are framed within different types of discourse (Gee, 1996; Lemke, 1995). These discourses may be understood in one of three ways: as being positioned within a managerialist paradigm, an emancipatory paradigm, or a utilitarian paradigm (Avis, 2007; Kennedy, 2007; Tummons, 2014a). Here, we define the managerialist paradigm of professionalism as emphasising audit and performativity through the application of 'professional' standards (Shore and Wright, 2000). According to this discourse, professional standards, and any related regulatory frameworks such as inspection regimes or quality assurance processes, are positioned as forms of social control imposed upon teachers, masked behind a discourse of 'improving standards' which serves instead to control teachers' labour and impose a model of professionalism from above or outside the profession itself. In contrast to this, an emancipatory model of professionalism is positioned as one in which professional standards and associated regulatory frameworks come under the purview of the members of the profession, which espouses more democratic, emancipatory notions of professionalism (Gleeson, Davies, and Wheeler 2005; Evetts, 2013, Petrie, 2015, p.6). Distinct from both of these is the utilitarian paradigm. This discourse of professionalism can be understood as being a product of new managerialism (Randle and Brady, 1997a; 1997b; Shain and Gleeson, 1999), resting on a simultaneous de-skilling and intensification of labour amongst the FE teaching workforce. Within this discourse, professionalism is positioned entirely in terms of acceptance of and adherence to working practices that position the FE teacher as a technician, ignoring the importance or value of subject expertise and instead focusing on generic teaching skills.

It is important to note that these discourses do not necessarily exist in isolation or apart from each other. By this we mean to stress that it is possible to find traces of all three of these discourses at work at the same time, during the last twenty years (the timespan for the current investigation). It is worth noting that before the UK Coalition government's de-regulation of the FE sector in 2010, the prevailing professionalization agenda was narrow, instrumental and controlling (for example, by requiring teachers to join the now-defunct Institute for Learning), but at the same time offered meaningful opportunities for funded professional training such as PGCE/Cert Ed for all full-time FE teachers, which offered the opportunity to debate issues around professionalism beyond the narrow interpretations imposed by the sector and reflected in both the Further Education National Training Organisation (FEnto) and Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) professional standards. The return to voluntary professional qualifications in the FE sector was positioned by the Coalition government within a discourse of flexibility and responsiveness to employers: simply put, it was argued that college principals would know better than government departments what their workforces required in terms of professional training and development. And yet standards and regulation remained in place: indeed, a new set of standards – the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) standards – was published. But what was now lacking was the funding for teachers to undertake advanced forms of training (such as that offered in Universities) and CPD beyond that deemed appropriate by their employing institution.

### **Contrasting national systems: The UK and Australia**

For the purpose of this discussion, we draw on the various iterations of UK Professional Standards for FE practitioners, the requirements of a range of qualifications and the policy and regulatory frameworks and contexts in which they sit. We refer to the UK where frameworks relate to all countries in the union, and England where policy or frameworks are specific to that country. We contrast these with the Australian nationally mandated Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (Cert IV TAE), federal and state regulatory frameworks and the draft standards for Further Education and Training (FET) teachers proposed by the Queensland College of Teachers. Across all documents, we utilise the nomenclature of those documents: this means that the terms vocational education, VET, and FE are used interchangeably. The first set of professional standards for further education teachers in the UK was published in 1999 after a consultation period of several years, followed two years later by statutory reform that made the acquisition of appropriate initial teaching qualifications based on the standards compulsory for new teachers in the sector (Nasta, 2007). The standards were published by FEnto: one of a larger number of National Training Organisations

(NTOs) introduced by the UK Conservative government of 1979-1997 to specify and implement relevant education and training programmes for the sector in question. The FEnto standards were criticised by some university-based researchers for being overly instrumental, technicist, and undervaluing wider professional development (Elliott, 2000). They were also criticised by Ofsted, in their 2003 report on *The Initial Training of Further Education Teachers* (HMI 1762: Ofsted, 2003). According to this report, teacher education in the sector was seen as being too variable and too inconsistent despite the introduction of new standards and new qualifications and as lacking subject-specialist pedagogy (Lucas, 2004).

In the following year, the then Department for Education and Skills published a new working paper, *Equipping Our Teachers for the Future*, which promised reform of LLS teacher education as part of a wider change in workforce education and training. NTOs were gradually replaced by new organisations – Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) – and FEnto was subsequently replaced by LLUK, who published a new set of standards in 2006, after another period of consultation. These standards were accompanied by a further element: a new process of professional formation that required teachers in the LLS sector to achieve a new professional status – Qualified Teacher, Learning and Skills (QTLS) – following a compulsory period of continuing professional development (CPD). Criticism remained: from university researchers, who argued that the new standards were still mechanistic, overly prescriptive and narrowed the content of teacher education curricula (Lucas et al., 2012), and from policy makers who allowed the standards to ossify firstly by abolishing LLUK and secondly by removing financial support from the Institute for Learning (the professional body for LLS teachers that, amongst other things, was responsible for auditing teachers' CPD and QTLS endorsement) which ceased operations at the end of 2014. The QTLS process of professional formation has survived, but the management of the process has been passed from the IfL (ostensibly a member-led organisation) to the Education and Training Foundation (very much an employer-led organisation).

The impact of this has been that whilst some universities have closed their provision, others still continue to offer Higher Education teaching qualifications at a number of levels –Certificate in Education (Cert. Ed. level 5), sometimes Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (ProfGCE, level 6) or Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE, level 7). Awarding Bodies have developed qualifications based on the most recent standards, which retain the nomenclature of those under the 2007 standards. The Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (popularly known as D[e]TLLS), is a competency based credential of seven core and four optional units, offered at level 5.

Whilst one of these is ‘continuing personal and professional development’, the competencies do not engage with understandings of what it means to be a professional. There are a range of other credentials offered, which are shorter/lower in level. Of these, the Preparing to Teach in Lifelong Learning (PTLLS) level 4 credential bears the closest similarity to the Australian Cert IV. Notions of professionalism are absent from the competencies forming this credential, as they are from the more extended Level 4 Certificate in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector, and, indeed, the Cert IV itself.

The Australian vocational education and training system, formed by a combination of Technical and Further Education Colleges (TAFEs) and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), broadly equivalent to UK private training providers, has significant similarities to the English and Welsh systems, although there is less broad vocational education and a higher proportion of training that takes place in the work place. Regulatory Frameworks also have striking similarities to those in the UK, but are complicated by the fact that some aspects of the sector (regulatory frameworks for providers for example) are within the remit of national government, whilst funding and related aspects of policy are the responsibility of the autonomous State governments. This can lead to variations between States even where a policy is nationally implemented. For example, the Diploma in Vocational Education and Training (VET) teaching, an optional qualification which also consists of centrally defined standards and achievement of which moves the holder to an identified upper point on the national pay scales, requires students to undertake 200 hours classroom practice in Victoria but in neighbouring New South Wales, no classroom practice is necessary.

As in the UK, there is no financial incentive for teachers in Australia who work in the VET sector to undertake study at degree or masters level. This is despite the fact that, originally, there was a consensus that VET teachers should hold teaching qualifications with graduate status, equivalent to those held by school teachers – an equivalence echoed in the short-lived LLUK framework that sought to create equivalence between school teachers and college lecturers through the Qualified Teacher, Learning and Skills (QTLS) status which would be akin to QTS for school teachers. Instead, the 1990s saw a move in Australia from a higher level of mandated qualification to a minimalist one (Guthrie, 2010). Guthrie proposes a range of reasons for this, key amongst which are the cost of higher education programmes to the funders, casualization of the VET workforce, concomitant with limited access to training and CPD, and a greater focus on the workplace, rather than the classroom, as a site of learning – all issues which are familiar to those involved with the UK system.

Consequent to this de-regulation, the Cert IV became the only nationally mandated credential required for teachers working in the VET sector in Australia. The qualification is offered by Universities, TAFEs and RTOs, and is generally acknowledged as being of variable quality. It is a 30 hour programme broadly similar in size, content and level to the now defunct PTLLS award in the UK, but significant in its lack of coverage of assessment within the syllabus, something which has led to a number of arguments within and beyond the sector that assessment practices are weak and inconsistent. The inadequacy of the Certificate IV as a minimum credential is also acknowledged in the draft version of the *Professional Standards for Vocational Education and Training Practitioners (PSVETP)* (Queensland College of Teachers, 2014: 2), originally planned for implementation in Queensland in 2016, in part as a response to perceived weaknesses in the Certificate IV. Notwithstanding concerns over the syllabus, the Certificate IV still has advocates. For example, Clayton (2009) cites NAWT (2001), who argued that the Certificate IV was critical to the VET sector in two ways: firstly, in providing standards for trainers and assessors to adhere to; and secondly, in providing structural support for the quality assurance arrangements of RTOs.

### **Models of professionalism across national contexts**

In comparison to a relatively lively, as well as long-standing, body of literature discussing professionalism in vocational education and training in England and Wales, there is a paucity of literature exploring how professionalism is understood in the context of VET teaching in Australia. Nonetheless, some authors (e.g. see Robertson 2008), have raised concerns that the Certificate IV TAE requirements are not consistent with the development of 'expert' and 'professional' teachers, but only with those for novice or beginning teachers. That is to say, the Certificate IV requirements are seen as being appropriate only at entry to the profession, a critique that resonates with similar earlier criticisms of the English FE standards and the qualifications that were mapped onto these (Lucas, 2004). However, whereas subsequent series of professional standards in the UK have made sincere, if contested, attempts to establish consensual models of professionalism within the sector, in Australia there has been a failure to define professionalism, except insofar as it is conflated with notions of the 'expert' teacher, and the literature tends to focus on the lack of content within the Cert IV. For example, Simons et al (2006) criticised the absence of any reference to learning theory, as well as the uncritical application of concepts such as learning styles, whilst Robertson (2008) argued that (in a previous incarnation) the Certificate IV programme had no evidence of critique or conceptual foundations, also noting a complete absence of critique of CBT: indeed, he goes further,

arguing that the Cert IV was mandated as the minimum qualification for VET teachers in Australia as part of an attempt to deprofessionalize teachers and create technician trainers.

More recently, work by Williams (2010) provides a snapshot of different debates around actions which might improve VET Teacher Education. As with some of the debates discussed earlier in this paper, she acknowledges the absence of knowledge in the Cert. IV, and goes on to consider changes to teacher education could improve the professional knowledge base. However, notions of professionalism are not interrogated, but the concept of being a 'professional' teacher is conflated with the acquisition of particular teaching qualifications. Similarly, Smith *et al* (2015: 421) identify the AQF outcomes for different levels of training, in which level 4 is identified as equating to 'skilled work' but 'level 7 to 'professional work', again implying a qualification led, instrumental definition of professionalism. Participants in their study reported that their teacher education programmes were making a very positive contribution to personal and professional development. However, this raises questions about how the notion of professional development is being constructed by the participants, and by those who are preparing them for entry into teaching. Weaknesses in the preparation of teachers to work in the Australian VET sector have also been acknowledged by Moodie and Wheelahan (2012), who have questioned understandings of subject appropriate pedagogies in different occupational fields. Like Williams they consider possible changes to VET teacher preparation, and argue that the development of a model for improvement would require the support of institutions and processes which should include a professional association, standards for teaching, and accreditation of teaching qualifications. Such processes, if adopted in Australia, would be broadly comparable to those which have taken place in England as part of ongoing attempts to 're-professionalize' the sector by governments with a diversity of ideological approaches. Notably, the development of the Queensland Standards implies that these processes are beginning, albeit on a State, rather than national scale.

### **Professionalism, curriculum and professional standards**

It is quite common for professional bodies to endorse specific qualifications that are designed to provide students with the required practical and/or theoretical competence, knowledge and experience, at a threshold level, to allow them entry to the profession in question. Through aligning professional curricula with professional standards, the qualifications in question can then be benchmarked in terms of delivery, performance and assessment, all in such a way as to meet the requirements of the relevant professional body (Katz, 2000; Taylor, 1997). It follows, then, that if a qualification such as a Certificate in Education or a Diploma in Teaching and Learning in the Lifelong

Learning Sector has been endorsed by one of the three professional bodies that have since 1999 had purview of the sector (FEnto, LLUK or ETF), and then also been mapped onto the appropriate professional framework or set of standards, aspects of those standards would be found embedded in the curriculum being followed. These have been explored in detail elsewhere (Tummons 2014a, 2014b). At the same time, we might expect similar processes to take place within equivalent curricula in Australia, a theme to which we now turn.

The TAE programme in Australia consists of 10 Units, seven core and three optional, all described and assessed within the context of a CBT framework that includes performance criteria, range statements and knowledge criteria. Across all seven core units there just one single reference to professionalism, in a single criterion which requires the candidate to be able to:

Use appropriate communication and interpersonal skills to develop **a professional relationship** with the candidate that reflects sensitivity to individual differences and enables two-way feedback (TAEASS402B) (emphasis added).

However, the criterion is not underpinned by a requirement to understand concepts of professionalism at any level. Without such foundations, therefore, how can the VET practitioner be conceptualised as a professional? What meanings can legitimately be applied to the term 'professional relationship'? The inclusion of even this minor reference to a 'professional relationship' implies an assumption that teachers will be able to conceptualise the nature of a 'professional relationship' and enact that in their day to day working lives. However, any reference to these conceptual foundations is absent from the TAE requirements which fail to address even the most instrumental analyses of what it means to be professional.

In stark contrast to the TAE requirements, the newly published Queensland College of Teachers (QCT) Standards (2015) are structured around three domains of *Professional Knowledge*, *Professional Practice* and *Professional Learning and Engagement*, suggesting that those responsible for the development of the standards have concerns about the way in which VET teachers enact their role, and the extent to which this might be described as professional. Similarly, the revised frameworks for training providers introduced as part of the ongoing Australian Federal VET Reform policy make only passing reference to the term professional, and then in the context of 'professional development', which is defined as maintaining the 'knowledge and practice of vocational training, learning and assessment...' (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015, para 1.16). However, whilst the QCT draft standards mention 'professionalism' with considerable frequency, it is, perhaps unsurprisingly, not explicitly defined. Moreover, despite the frequency with which the word is reiterated, there is no

change to the meaning of the text if Kennedy's (2007) test of removing the word 'professional' is applied. For example, Domain 3, **Professional Learning and Engagement** includes standard 6 *Engage in Professional Learning in your vocational area and in adult education theories and practices*, the criteria for which are:

6.1 *Participate in ongoing professional learning to maintain and update subject area and/or vocational knowledge and skills.*

6.2 *Undertake ongoing professional learning in contemporary principles and practices of teaching/training, learning and assessment.*

6.3 *Engage in professional dialogue as part of a process of personal continuous improvement and professional growth.*

(QCT, 2015, p.4, our emphasis)

Removal of the word professional makes no difference to what is expected of those teachers to whom the standards apply. This would seem to suggest that utilitarian, rather than emancipatory understandings and discourses of professionalism are embedded within these standards even though they imply a degree of agency and autonomy which is considerably broader than that conferred by the Cert IV. Beyond the standards themselves, the QCT provides a glossary of terms (ibid, p. 5), where, for example, the 'domains of teaching' are described as 'professional knowledge, professional practice and professional engagement'. In this context, the word *pedagogic* might be more descriptive of what teaching actually involves.

The construction of the 'professional' is similarly problematic within both the current UK standards (Education and Training Foundation, 2014) as well as the previous two iterations (LLUK, 2007; FEnto, 1999). That is to say, the ways in which what it means to be a 'professional' teacher in further education are constructed in terms of occupational performativity rather than an ethic or philosophy of professionalism. Arguably, it is hardly surprising that any rich or nuanced understanding of professionalism is absent in a document consisting of just 346 words. More extensive guidance is provided in an accompanying document, *Initial Guidance For Users of the Professional Standards*. This document provides an extensive discussion of how the standards might be used in practice. Alongside a strong focus on professional learning and continuing professional development (which are, arguably, operating as tropes within the document as a whole) can be found references to professional knowledge, professional development, professional behaviour, professional conduct, and so forth. But none of these are clearly defined or pinned to an ethos or philosophy. The document posits itself as providing a series of guidelines that can be applied or enacted within individual organisations but fails to acknowledge the politics of such an implementation. Teachers in

FE are encouraged to take responsibility for their own professional learning (whatever that might mean), but are not encouraged to take responsibility for the discursive constructions of professionalism within which they are enrolled as social actors (Gee,1996).

The guidance document presents itself as being “research based” (Education and Training Foundation, 2014: 5): a position that is to be welcomed alongside 2014 professional standard number 8, that asks practitioners to “maintain and update your knowledge of educational research to develop evidence-based practice.” But how rigorous is this research? The research base for both the standards and for the guidance document is to be found in an earlier document, commissioned by the Education and Training Foundation, and conducted by RCU, a research and consultancy company (Fletcher et al, 2013). Within the standards, one of the constructs used is that of *dual professionalism*, an important as well as complex issue that has been the subject of serious academic research and critique (Gleeson et al., 2005; Orr and Simmons, 2010; Plowright and Barr, 2012). But there is no mention of any such research within the RCU document. This is a document which is based on 66 sources, but only two of these can be seen as being examples of serious and rigorous academic work and only one of these takes professionalism in further education as its subject, albeit written before the introduction of the *first* set of professional standards by FEto (Robson, 1998). For a mature profession that seeks to situate itself within a serious research-informed and evidence-led approach to pedagogy, surely a more critical and thorough exploration of dual professionalism is needed?

It is not necessary, however, for professional standards – either in Australia or in the UK – to provide an explicit definition of any or all of the terms or constructs that they draw upon: professional standards do lots of things, but they do not provide glossaries; nor are they expected to. But the dominant discourses (Gee, 1996) within which they are located will construct ‘professionalism’ in particular ways. We suggest, therefore, that it is through the textual analysis of the standards that latent constructs of professionalism can be made visible.

QCT standard 1.1 is the only one of the proposed Queensland standards which explicitly requires theoretical knowledge, and then only in relation to the underpinning of ‘effective practice’ in teaching and assessment. In the UK, whilst Professional Standards 8 & 9 require practitioners to ‘maintain and update your knowledge of educational research to develop evidence based practice’ and ‘apply theoretical understanding of effective practice in teaching, learning and assessment drawing on research and other evidence’ these criteria too imply that theoretical underpinnings of teaching as practice are all that is necessary for teachers to understand, a position which may be

argued to privilege 'knowing how' over 'knowing that' (Winch, 2015, after Ryle, 1949) , as well as reflecting a failure to acknowledge the symbiotic relationship between the two types of knowledge .

### **Knowledge and Professionalism**

The lack of acknowledgement of a meaningful base of propositional knowledge for teachers (Shulman, 1986, and see also Eraut, 1994) across both national contexts at best marginalises, and at worst dismisses the foundational subjects which underpin the study of education: the history, philosophy, sociology and psychology of education – implying that somehow, they are of no particular relevance to the workshop or classroom as these are currently positioned by policy makers, reflecting the use of a instrumental CBT approach to teacher education. Teacher education thus becomes a form of 'pseudo-apprenticeship' which de-professionalises the intending teacher as they do not require mastery of inbuilt theory (Broudy, 1972), in stark contrast to the concept of professional education as being based around the provision of a threshold body of knowledge as well as competence and ethical practice, appropriate for new entrants to the profession in question (Taylor, 1997).

In the context of the body of knowledge required for new entrants to teaching in the FE sector in both England and Australia, a number of observations might be made in relation to both the content of the minimum credentials as well as the construction of the curriculum itself, and the implications this has for the way in which FE teachers construct notions of professionalism. In terms of the competency based approach, a number of criticisms might be made. Firstly, as Bathmaker (2013, p.91) has argued, a key issue in debates about knowledge in vocational education is the tension between conceptualisations of knowledge and conceptualisations of skill. This observation is also clearly relatable to (vocationally orientated and competency based) teacher training for the sector. Further, as Bathmaker also argues, in the context of the FE sector conceptions of skill are fluid, but currently understood in terms of (neo-liberal) discourses around attitudes and dispositions, as well as employability.

A number of authors have explored the nature of knowledge, and have found it to be incompatible with the instrumental conceptualisations of skill implied by the discourses Bathmaker refers to. For example, Wheelahan, in her (2007) Bernsteinian analysis of knowledge and vocational education, argued that VET students should be able to access disciplinary boundaries and have the capacity to negotiate those boundaries in their practice. CBT, she argues, renders those boundaries invisible, and denies VET students access to forms of knowledge conferred on 'those students studying elite

professions'. Whilst Wheelahan described a professional/vocational binary, it is evident that contemporary forms of teacher training, particularly for the FE sector, have far more in common with the VET programmes she discusses than with the 'elite professions' not least in terms of the curriculum which FE teachers access. More recently, Winch (2015, p.168), discussing the practical abilities of the professional, argues that attempting to classify these forms of knowledge according to contemporary narrow concepts of skill is 'hopeless'. Instead, he advocates the development of a framework which can offer 'an adequate account of practical knowledge which comprehends independence in action and judgement, as well as character elements of know-how, including the moral dimension of action, and relates these different elements', something which is consistent with the disciplinary knowledge advocated by Wheelahan, and which, as Bathmaker argues, is consistent with questions of equity and justice. The absence of powerful knowledge on which FE teachers can build their practice as teachers, also begs questions about their ability to facilitate their own students to access knowledge which will enable them to take a full role in civic society, and about ways in which they might come to develop more democratic notions of professionalism.

It is apparent that more democratic notions of professionalism, which emphasise concepts of agency and autonomy, are in tension with the notions of professionalism inscribed in the discourses of competency based frameworks of teacher training. As early as 1997 Davies and Ferguson, writing about compulsory phase ITE, raised concerns about a narrowing of the concept of professionalism where that notion was constructed within a competency based framework (see also Davies and Ferguson, 1998), arguing that this may contribute to a de-professionalization of teachers. Concerns such as those raised by Davies and Ferguson have run in parallel with critiques which argue that, in an increasingly marketized and neo-liberal sector, in which education, skills and those teaching and learning them are increasingly commodified, more traditional concepts of professional have lost much of their meaning as professional judgement has become 'subordinated to the requirements of performativity and marketing' (Ball, 2003, p.226).

Despite the reductive nature of the curriculum, and the neo-liberal ethos which permeates education in both England and Australia, it is apparent that many teachers still develop those notions of professionalism which are more in keeping with Petrie's (2015) description (e.g. Jameson and Hillier, 2008; Davies and Ferguson, 1998, see also Evetts' discussion of professionalism in relation to Foucauldian concepts of legitimacy, 2013) and which are associated with more abstract notions of what it means to be professional focussing on autonomy and responsibility. It is possible that the process of acquisition of these more critical and reflexive understandings owes less to instrumental forms of teacher training and more to engagement with communities of practice adopting particular understandings or discourses around different aspects of the teacher's role, and

which are more consistent with notions of the 'extended' rather than 'restricted' professional (e.g. see Hoyle, 1980).

However, despite concerns about both professionalism and knowledge being well articulated across international contexts, both England and Australia continue to locate teacher preparation for the sector within a Competency Based Framework (CBT) framework which fails to 'think beyond' narrow categorisations associated with prevailing concepts of 'skill' and 'knowledge' (Winch, 2015, p.166) or to acknowledge the importance of scholarship and critical reflection (Winch et al, 2015, see also Bathmaker, 2013) in the development of intending teachers. Whilst this sits uncomfortably with emancipatory notions of professionalism, it is consistent with the 'top down' managerialist and utilitarian concepts arising from the neo-liberal, performative discourses which have permeated education at all levels over the past generation (e.g see Ball, 2015, Avis, 2016) and which, over time, have become increasingly shrill.

## **Conclusion**

Such instrumental and reductive conceptualisations of what it means to be professional pose a number of wicked problems (Trowler, 2012). Firstly, they fail to acknowledge the agency of individuals who are trying to do 'a good job' (Jameson and Hillier, 2008). Secondly, they constrain practitioners to a particular set of behaviours which can be associated with neoliberal concepts of managerialism and performativity, whilst simultaneously denying practitioners the opportunities to develop and enact more democratic or emancipatory notions of professionalism, since the standards themselves lack any real conceptual underpinning. Thus, if, as Broudy (1972:12) suggests "...professional means theory-guided practice with the practitioner possessing both the how and why of the practice" and that that no single observable behaviour is likely to be proof of understanding, since understanding is essentially a state of mind, the inevitable corollary of utilitarian professional standards will be a continuing and increasing de-skilling and de-professionalisation of the FE workforce (Avis, 2007).

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