Changing notions of teacher professionalism in the Further Education sector

Farzana Shain
Keele University.

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Introduction

Teacher’s work in the UK Further Education (FE) sector is undergoing reconstruction through processes of marketisation and managerial control. With reductions in public funding to FE and increased competition between institutions for students, many lecturers have experienced reductions in their pay, security, academic freedom and job satisfaction accompanied by an increase in their workload - this coupled with widespread college insolvency and sporadic strike action and financial mismanagement has in a short period turned FE into an industrial relations battlefield. A reported 15,000 lecturers (a fifth of the entire workforce) have been made redundant or retired early since colleges left local Authority control (TES 12/09/98); yet, FE remains unexplored terrain (though see Ainley and Bailey 1997; Randle and Brady 1997; Elliot 1996) when compared with empirical research on schools. This is despite the fact that it may exhibit in heightened and dramatic form, the processes of redefinition or re-ordering of professional work that have attracted the researchers in schools (Mac An Ghaill 1992; Busher and Saran 1995; Nixon 1995; Ball 1994; Hargreaves 1994; Ozga 1995; Lawn 1996; Troman 1997; Menter et al 1997).

This paper focuses specifically on FE to examine the impact of changing conditions of academic work for teachers in this sector. It draws on preliminary analysis of data from the ESRC funded Changing Teaching and Managerial Cultures in FE (CTMC) project at keele. This project investigates at the impact of the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act (FHE) on teaching and managerial cultures in the FE sector through a local study of four colleges and seeks to understand the how the changes taking place in the structure and funding of FE impact on teachers work and their professional work identities. This paper seeks to understand how teachers make sense of the changing conditions of work in their various institutions and in doing so explores the usefulness of professionalism as a conceptual tool for understanding contemporary educational change.

School based research on changing teachers work has so far revealed ambiguous and contradictory conclusions with assertions that professionalism under managerial conditions is redefined in ways that work for teachers (TTA) or that that we are entering a ‘new age’ of professionalism in a post-modern world (Hargreaves 1994). Other researchers discuss the complexity of change that simultaneously changes teachers identities (Lawn 1996; Mac An Ghaill 1992; Menter et al 1997). Though limited in scope, the available FE research also draws on different conceptualisations of professionalism. Randle and Brady (1997) argue that although teaching in FE is being deskilled and deprofessionalised, teachers retain a commitment to ‘public service’ values of altruism and teacher autonomy that are
fundamentally opposed to managerialism. Elliott (1996) on the other hand rejects professionalism in favour of a concept of the ‘reflective practitioner’ for understanding teachers work, while Hodkinson (1995) argues for the retention of professionalism without accepting the exclusivity of a profession. He explores the uses and limitations of competence attributes towards a redefinition of professionalism based on notions of ‘personal effectiveness’, ‘critical autonomy’ and community.

Drawing on research from both schools and TAFE in Australia, Terri Seddon (1997) has developed a complex analytical framework for understanding the changing conditions of teaching work in managerial contexts that draws on a conceptualisation of professionalism as a constitutive and regulatory discourse, or a culture and a social practice of organising individuals and institution. This analysis reveals that ‘public sector’ notions of teacher professionalism committed to notions of service to community and teacher autonomy are challenged by market liberal reform committed to privatisation and deregulation in ways that suggest deprofessionalisation proceeds alongside reprofessionalisation as part of an ongoing politics of knowledge, power and social organisation. Seddon encourages researchers to consider the character and parameters of preferred reprofessionalisations that might be pursued through contemporary processes of educational change.

Through a focus on FE this paper therefore seeks to provide a clearer picture of the trends towards reprofessionalisation/deprofessionalisation in highly managerial and competitive contexts. It is informed by recent work that has explored the relationship between work and the re-definition of professionalism in the managerial state (Clarke and Newman 1997; Seddon 1997). The paper is divided into three sections. The first outlines the policy context of Further Education that provides the backdrop for the changes in teachers work. The next section draws on ongoing research from the CTMC project to assess the impact of this shifting policy framework on teacher reactions to change at the local level. The final section discusses briefly the implications of teacher responses to change in the context of the debate about teachers work and professionalism.

**Background: The changing context of Further Education**

The 1992 Further and Higher Education (FHE) Act granted FE institutions their independent corporate status. Colleges are now corporations governed by non-elected boards drawn mainly from business and industry. The FEFC was set up by Government with the task of ensuring the ‘adequacy’ and ‘sufficiency’ of provision in the sector. It assumed responsibility for Inspections previously performed by HMI, and for the funding and strategic control (though not curriculum) of colleges, previously the domain of the LEA (McFarlane 1992). Despite an increase in autonomy, FE colleges are in reality controlled by central government principally through the FEFC’s funding mechanism (Randle and Brady 1997). The new funding formula, based on the principle of ‘more for less’, means that funds may be ‘clawed back’, if colleges fail to meet targets, retain students or if students fail to successfully complete courses. The FEFC is therefore a crucial agency in the new management of FE in terms of funding, inspection and quality control.

The framework of Incorporation was laid in the 1988 Educational Reform Act (ERA) which initiated the process of removing LEAs control over School and Post Compulsory education by delegating financial and managerial control to governing bodies of colleges. It also determined the composition of FE college governing bodies with a requirement of a minimum of 50% business and industry representation, and a maximum of 20% local
authority representation. (Elliott 1996b). Moreover, The shift towards competence based assessments dates back to the establishment of the NVQ framework in 1986 (Ainley and Bailey 1997; Hodkinson 1995) Incorporation and marketisation of FE cannot be understood without reference to wider educational reforms, including the sustained attack on public sector professionalism from the late 1970s and the shift towards managerial control of teachers work.

Shifting discourses of professionalism

In the 20th century, professionalism became the basis of teacher regulation located in shifting state-teacher relations (Ozga 1995). In the immediate post war period, the shortage of qualified teachers, the public demand for increased educational opportunity and the strength of organised labour placed teachers in a strong market position and permitted teachers to defend their licensed autonomy gained earlier (Dale 1989). In the 1950s and 60s these factors combined to strengthen claims for teacher autonomy and to force the state to maintain the rhetoric of indirect rule, partnership and professionalism. However, with economic contraction and growing political instability, teachers came under increasing attack (Ozga 1995). Following Labour’s election defeat in 1979 the momentum was taken up by Thatcherism and the new right, with its emphasis on traditional values, market discipline and the doctrine of tight fiscal controls of public expenditure. It was also during this period that a new discourse of education workers had been constructed, sparked by the Ruskin speech of 1976. In this speech, the then Labour Prime Minister, James Callaghan, identified the teaching profession as complacent and as one that was not paying enough attention to skills and attitudes required to regain Britain’s declining prosperity (Esland 1996). Thus, by the time Margaret Thatcher’s new right government had been elected, images of teachers as self serving and monopolistic were already being reworked in common sense, to justify greater state control and regulation of education (Ozga 1995); and to remove barriers to consumer choice and corporate interest.

Over the past two decades, in a period of recession and unemployment (Friend and Metcalf 1982), this reassertion of control has been achieved through direct state intervention in education, while ‘paradoxically’ leaving education to market forces. This ‘free market/strong state’ approach to crisis management (Gamble 1988) can be seen in the 1988 ERA and the 1992 FHE Act. ERA introduced a series of measures which ‘marketised’ Education while simultaneously reclaiming central control through the National Curriculum and Assessment, thereby marking the end of teachers’ curricular autonomy (Dale 1989). The Act introduced formula funding, Local management of schools (LMS) and encouraged schools to obtain Grant maintained Status (GMS), by ‘opting out’ of Local authority control. This was further encouraged in the 1992 FHE Act, granting incorporated status to the FE sector. Education and training reforms enacted by successive governments since 1979, have thus had two different but related objectives (Esland 1996). The first is economic in attempting to meet the demands from employers for a more vocationally relevant curriculum and assessment system, as part of the task of preparing young people for the flexible workforce of the 1980s and 1990s. The second, politically connected with the ambitions of the new Right, is concerned with the necessity to attack and replace the cultural and ideological basis of education, to destroy its potential for undermining the free-market economic. Successive education reform in both schools and FHE has ‘…substantially redrawn the lines of responsibility and accountability which have led to greatly increased regulation of professional workers and intensification of work loads (ibid:48).
Central to the processes of regulation and intensification is the discourse of managerialism that has pervaded the new management of FE in an attempt to elicit the compliance of workers in new modes of control over their work. Ostensibly, managerialism has been introduced into Education and the public sector as a rational process, linked with new principles of funding, efficiency and professionalism. A number of features of managerialism have been outlined in recent research (Pollit 1993, Fergusson 1994; Clarke & Newman 1997) which associate its economic rationalism with ulterior motives. These include on the one hand, its control over professionals, by reasserting ‘management’s right to manage’. On the other, it conveys the notion that good management resides only in the private sector and by implication, that the public sector is characterised by liberalism, and dogged sloth. This ‘economising of education’ brings with it the discipline of the market into the workplace, and the legitimising language that goes with it (Kenway 1994). Through its discourse of Human Resources Management (HRM) and Total Quality Management (TQM) such ‘economising’ represents a powerful mechanism for both the internalisation of control, and surveillance of workers. Another controlling feature is the way in which managerialism turns senior professionals, who might be resistant to loss of professional autonomy, into managers, ‘by giving them budgets or by setting them adrift as quasi-autonomous business units’ (Hoggett, cited in Avis 1996:109). This led to a shift in the locus of control from the centre to the local college site with power invested in the Principal as manager for the state in face to face relations (Ozga 1995).

The next section explores the impact of this shifting policy framework for the local context of FE through the accounts of staff in the CMTC project. Fieldwork was conducted over a 15 month period from January 1997- March 1998 in four colleges. The colleges varied in terms of size and provision internal structures and management styles. In each institution, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a cross-section of 20-25 individuals including principals, governors, ‘middle’ managers teachers and support staff on a range of issues relating to their work in the college (this paper draws mainly though not exclusively on teacher interviews). In addition, documentary data from the colleges was analysed and observations were made where possible, of key strategic meetings, sector meetings.

Teachers work and ‘new management’ cultures in FE

Changing conditions of work

Marketisation has reconstituted colleges as autonomous training enterprises. Independence from local authority control has intensified competition between colleges and other providers including schools and universities encouraging college management teams towards a variety of measures to give them competitive advantage. Effective facilities management (FEFC 1997) has been one such area. In addition to marketing campaigns college budgets were spent on improving the physical or corporate appeal of colleges to attract new clients. The physical appearance of many colleges changed radically in the immediate post incorporation period. One of the case study colleges in the project, Oldhill college spent vast sums of money on refurbishing the college, investing in new desks, chairs and uniforms for support staff in corporate colours. There had been reports that uniforms were planned for lecturing staff but following the then Principals departure, this policy was not pursued. The other case study colleges, too spent sums of money though with less impetuosity on facilities management. According to one manager in Westgate College who was an advocate of the reforms, this had given the college a ‘new professional air’:
This college has had to wake up. It has had to realise that nobody will bail it out if it goes under. It has had to develop a professional air which in some areas the teachers still don’t have. They still have the view that, ‘I’m the teacher and the student must put up with it’. In the main there is a growing feeling of professionalism. Now we are front of house. We look as smart as we can. We attempt to be as professional to our public as we can; we have a frontage…We have set up new personnel office and new finance office, whereas we relied on the LEA before. (Monica, manager, Westgate college)

In such accounts ‘professional’ is used as a noun or adjective that is uncoupled semantically from professional to connote the business of FE on terms of efficiency and reliability, and a no nonsense anti-intellectualism. In this new discourse of professionalism, skill is given priority over knowledge and compliance over judgement (Hoyle 1995); essentially, being a professional is associated more with a pre-determined product and brand image than with pedagogy. Teachers are expected to be competent (Hodkinson 1995) and above all ‘flexible’:

The curriculum changes quite a lot and I am sure will continue to change even more. …. If you are a teacher, part of being a teacher needs you to be flexible. You have got to be flexible and you have got to respond to your pupil/student demands. You have got to be student led haven’t you. I do think Incorporation has brought some good things like being customer led. You do what the student wants. In the past the student had to sit there and take what you as a college where prepared to do for them. I think it has given far more flexibility to, particularly adults wanting to go into higher education. (Harvey: lecturer, Oldhill)

Critics argue that this dominant discourse of professionalism in the FE sector distracts attention from poor working conditions for lecturers that also lead to greater work intensification (Randle and Brady 1997; Elliott 1996; Ainley and Bailey 1997). This new discourse of professionalism is used to elicit the compliance and consent of workers for reduced conditions of employment. The old Silver Book agreement in FE was dismantled in 1993 and a new flexible contract replaced in recommended by the then College Employers Forum (CEF). This agreement was regarded by many Principals as inflexible and over-generous, giving lecturers too much power. Central government via the FEFC intervened by threatening to ‘hold back’ 50 million from college funds if they failed to introduce a more flexible contracts, based on the CEF model. New contracts that included no limit on teaching hours or on the number of evenings worked replaced the Silver Book agreement condition of employment for incoming teaching staff. The new contracts were offered to existing staff with financial inducements and pressure applied through a continued pay freeze for those who elected still not to sign. Finally, they were offered with threats of dismissal to recalcitrant staff. In the current FE sector, colleges operate with varying pay and conditions and where budgets are devolved to sector level, there can be differences within colleges and even within sectors. There have been steps towards re-establishing national agreement this summer (TES 24/07/98 p. 34). In some colleges support staff under new arrangements can be made to teach up to eight hours. At Eastward, all staff are encouraged to teach including the principal, his secretaries and technicians. This step was viewed by many lecturers as, ‘lecturing on the cheap’ (Gloria, technician, Eastward).

In addition to new contracts, the cost driven agenda of the new FE funding councils - more training for less money - led to more colleges making economies wherever they could. In many this meant making redundancies or re-hiring part-time staff on less generous contracts. FE has a long history of employing casualised labour on termly or yearly contracts but casualisation was institutionalised in a new company, Education Lecturing Services in
September 1995 that offered colleges a sub-contracted lecturing service. ELS was recognised as the approved supplier by the CEF and AoC. Lecturers are technically self employed although ELS deducts tax, and National Insurance. They do not receive rights of employment that FEFC paid colleges 11 million to implement. Today ELS services 200 FE colleges (TES ref). In a recent report by the TUC, FE was highlighted to be the employer of one of most casualised workforces in Britain with more than half of FE lecturers employed on some form of casual contract (FENOW, 02/98 p, 3). Although none of the colleges employed through ELS or other similar agencies, Westgate had recently reduced its part-time rates to the same as ELS. Incoming, lecturers were appointed on a four point scale starting at between 11,000 and 13,000 and ending on 14,000 -16,000.

The effects of this growing casualisation and reduced conditions of work were felt across all the colleges, where reorganisation and the threat of redundancy were becoming integral features of college life. At Oldhill over 200 redundancy notices had been issued due to financial problems encountered by the college. This had a significant impact on the culture of the organisation. Increasingly as staff left they were not replaced, resulting in increased workloads for remaining staff. With the threat of further redundancies, may staff felt they were not in a position to argue for improved conditions of work. Ingrid for example in her mid twenties, and ‘chronically underpaid’ to use her words, was already the third most experienced member of staff in her section due to a rapid turnover of staff. She explains here that despite taking on an extra group, her fear of potential redundancy discouraged her from seeking help:

We have all been very stressed; really it has been incredible the amount of stress we have been under. I have personally felt very stressed because I have had twice the number of second year groups I should have. The way the course works is that each student produces sixty five pieces of course work over the two years and these pieces of course work have to be marked so each group has a tutor who marks their work.... Come last September, the person who had the group opposite mine left which meant that this group was without a tutor and I was asked if I would step in as a stop gap, which I did. It was muttered that there would be help with the marking and help with the marking never appeared and a replacement tutor never appeared so I have ended up with two groups. With everything else that has gone on again it is something you don’t really feel you can make too much of a fuss about because they might decide to get rid of you altogether. (Ingrid: lecturer, Oldhill)

Her account reveals the potential abuse of staff as one consequence of the new management culture of FE. At Northway too, redundancies had been announced, but only a third were carried out. For Wendy this situation produced a mixture of relief and growing realisation of disciplinary power of the new ‘macho’ management culture in the college.. In her account she talks of the impact this experience has had on her own practice:

The stress and the unnecessary....... it is the unnecessary aspect of it that I think is most distressing; that management have made this decision and caused people that suffering and then in the end it was all for nothing and you do being to, you do actually start to get paranoid and you think is this a deliberate strategy. Is it deliberate power assertive techniques. Are they succinctly saying ”We can do this. We can do this to you” and you know people begin to think like that. It seems like it is [...] very macho......yes, for the sake of it. Using power for the sake of it to keep people in their place and it works; it works because people have been terrified these last few weeks that they are going to lose their jobs and even people in my team and in [my department], we are safe…… but even so you don’t just think to yourself -
well I am all right; phew, I am all right. I don’t have to worry. You don’t actually think like that; you know that it could easily have been you and it does have the effect that the next time a memo comes asking you to do something you make damned sure you do it by the deadline if not before. It is not a very nice atmosphere (Wendy: lecturer, Northway.)

Teachers work and working practices were also being restructured in other ways under managerial control. A number of features of teachers work have been highlighted by critics of reform as posing a threat to teachers autonomy and control of the teaching process (Randle and Brady 1997; Elliott 1996). These include:

- Competence based assessment that reconstructs the lecturer as trainer or assessor. Its over prescriptive nature has been argued to introduce new forms of control over teacher (Hodkinson 1995; Randle and Brady 1997);
- the shift to flexible IT based learning when delivered by instructor or technicians rather than threatens the expertise of the FE teacher and raises questions about the ownership of intellectual property;
- the re-definition of quality from one based on process to outcome, measured by performance indicators or outcomes such as retention rates and exam results;
- Increased monitoring and surveillance of teachers through internal and external control mechanisms including FEFC inspections, self assessment, teacher appraisal, observation, increasingly through student evaluation forms- this has a greater impact on FE than schools because FE lecturers were much more autonomous than teachers in schools;
- the reconstruction of student as customer - last year a media studies lecturer who was accused of gender bias in a student evaluation form was investigated by the college and her lectures observed by another member of staff for evidence of such bias.

FE teachers are particularly vulnerable to a public loss of confidence in their expertise since more than a third do not have a recognised teaching qualification (Young 1995). Randle and Brady argue that the above features contribute further to the deskilling, degradation and deprofessionalisation of FE lecturers work. Basing their argument on a conflict of paradigms between public sector professionalism that guides the practice of lecturers and managerialism that guides the work of managers. They report a growing polarisation between teachers and managers and predict proletarianisation as a likely outcome:

The deprofessionalisation of the lecturer is a direct outcome of government strategy within the FE sector……Lecturers continue to fight to maintain control over their labour process, to counter both deskilling and the degradation of work a radical deterioration in their conditions of employment. Together these can be seen to represent the deprofessionalisation and the consequent ‘proletarianisation’ of this occupation group. That the traditional weapon of proletarians, the strike, has been employed with increasing regularity serves to both underline the degree to which lecturers are coming to terms with their changing status and the limitations of traditional forms of professional control within the sector.(Randle and Brady 1997,p136)

Although the CTMC project produced evidence of growing work dissatisfaction and even demoralisation among some lecturers, I want to suggest that that are problems with Randle and Brady’s analysis and that talk of proletarianisation is premature. Their analysis is based
on the assumption that lecturers share a set of values (based on public sector professionalism) that are opposed to managers values (based on managerialism). The problem with this assertion is that lecturers in FE have historically been internally stratified according to divisions of skill, age, gender, ethnicity, expertise, class. The new management culture is able to exploit these existing divisions. Unity therefore must be created, not assumed as an automatic consequence of deskilling or strike action. Further, Randle and Brady’s assumption that ‘newer’ managers share the goals and values of managerialism can also be subjected to criticism. A recent paper from CMTC project (Gleeson and Shain, 1998) showed that some of these ‘newer’ managers (previously lecturers) retained commitments to educational values that drew on public sector professionalism and operated strategically to ensure their staff were protected within the new management culture of FE. As the next section shows, teachers position themselves towards, and respond differentially to new management cultures - some comply willingly others unwillingly, others are more strategic in their approach rejecting some aspects of the reform agenda and accepting others in informing their practice. This suggests that a more complex reading of their accounts is needed as Seddon and Brown in their study of TAFE in Australia have argued:

Despite reform advocates’ glowing pictures and critics bleak assessments, there are no simple relationships between contemporary reform and teachers work. Rather, decentralisation and marketisation drive diverse responses, shifting the patterns of educational provision and practice in ways that are, in most cases, extraordinarily double-edged. Neither advocates nor critics of reform capture this complexity sufficiently. Each group is too quick to flag either the good or bad, the black or white, in reform without acknowledging that the contemporary changes in education bring both good and bad together in uncomfortable, and often confusing ways. Exciting developments in the application of technology in pedagogy and innovative assessment practices exist alongside and because of huge work intensification, casualisation and the erosion of teachers working conditions (Seddon and Brown 1997, p6).

Teacher reactions/shifting work identities

A range of research studies suggest that teachers do not simply receive policy as empty vessels; rather they filter policies of reform through their existing professional ideologies and perspectives. This produces a different strategies or adaptations in the teacher workforce that range from willing compliance with new policy to resistance and rejection (Troman 1996; Gewirtz 1997; Mac An Ghaill 1992). In presenting these teacher reactions, it is not our intention to suggest that they are fixed, static or in any way exhaustive; rather, we wish to illuminate how different responses (in this case resistance and rejection; compliance and strategic compliance) arise from ambiguities and contradictions in the FE workplace.

Rejection and resistance

A small but core group of lecturers were extremely critical of the new reforms in FE. They found it difficult to identify any positive aspect of Incorporation. Rejecting markets and competition they expressed a wish to return to the old days of FE. They were predominantly old contract staff who had been in service for 10-20 years. Refusal to abandon the Silver book agreement was their main way of expressing this resistance. Change was filtered through an existing commitment to ‘old’ public sector professionalism. This discourse
enabled them draw on key values (reward for expertise; FE as a public service, adequately resourced; professional autonomy) as a defence against changed rules of the organisation. Their anger and frustration was sometimes vented against managers who can be viewed as buffer between the state and FE teachers. In the following account, it is the Principal who is identified as refusing to offer David a pay rise:

It is about this stupid image [colleges] have of themselves [laughter] that they think they are a company making a profit instead of to sell their goods and compete for the markets and it is about Incorporation really and we, the fact that we have now got a Governing Body made up of more than 50% of industrialists who think that Further Education is a business, but it is not. It is a public service and it just has to be paid for in the proper way so I would like to get back to the old days. I don’t mind working harder but I must be paid for it. ……… We have got to get rid of the markets. We have got to stop competing with other colleges. That is extremely inefficient. We have got to dispose of some of the wasteful, I regard it as wasteful anyway, employment of managers who look after marketing and things like that you know in an educational establishment……..if the Principal left tomorrow I would probably wave a big flag because that is one of our problems. He himself is one problem ….. even though this is ….. he claims that it is not his fault that some commi

Potential new recruits were actively discouraged from entering FE:

Oh, forget it. Don’t; and that is a shame. There is a lot of good people being lost to Further Education and schools. It is not just in Further Education that it is happening but at the moment don’t go into it, definitely not. Wait and see what happens in the future. (Martin: Lecturer, Eastward)

Those who had recently been forced to sign over to the new contract the threat of dismissal were considering new ways of expressing their resistance. In doing so they were actively playing a role in recreating their identities as FE teachers:

I think you do feel a certain loyalty towards the students which maybe was lost towards the college. I am sure that, I do think I try and do a decent weeks work but I think I have caught myself thinking things like “They are going to insist that I am on the premises for thirty seven hours. Well I have done an extra week, an extra night invigilation this week, I am having an extra afternoon off” but I would want to stick to the letter of my contract in a way that I wouldn’t have done or didn’t do in the first two or three years of service. Anna: lecturer, Oldhill)

The old contract staff were criticised by newer lecturers who had entered into FE post-incorporation. The criticisms expressed in the following two accounts are suggestive of an internalisation of the dominant discourse of pre-Incorporation FE teachers, as ‘lazy’ and ‘complacent’. They also indicate that lecturers do not share a set of values and managerial reform is able to exploit the divisions exist between, in this case, newer lecturers on flexible contracts and lecturers on old contracts of employment.

I think the members of staff that have been here for a long time are reasonably unhappy and disgruntled and cynical unhappy with a lot of things .. but some new members of staff have come in I mean this is sort of like my first, real permanent job and I get paid very well for
what I do….. the things that people moan about are really going back something like ten years when we used not to work on a Monday morning and a Friday afternoon; and we just did twelve hours teaching and there was no preparation and all that sort of stuff. Well those days have gone unfortunately but if you don’t like it then well go and get a job in industry and they are not really rushing to do that. (Alan: lecturer, Eastward)

……..The people who moan generally a lot about their lot are the old contract people who up until now had a very ‘cushy number’. Most of them finished on June 30 and they only came back yesterday [September 1]. They have been off for three months. Three months holiday. .... I suppose it could just be my perception of FE coming into from the school sector. I can see that, even the people who are there now who complain say that "Yes before Incorporation it was a cushy number". FE was always very well paid. The working conditions were very good. The hours that you actually taught were much shorter than they are now and the holidays they had were much greater than they are now. [...] They see that as this wonderful golden period that they should go back to. I can’t see that they can ever go back to it. I don’t think that they should go back to it. I think some of the criticisms of the general public of teachers unfortunately has been aimed at people like that. (Harvey: lecturer, Oldhill)

Both Alan and Harvey were not only critical of ‘old contract’ staff, they also were more willing to comply than other lecturers with new managerial reform agenda.

Compliance

The newer lecturers were more compliant with the values of the dominant discourse of professionalism in that they were prepared to be flexible and identified real potential for ‘professionalism’ in FE. For Alan who had taken the traditional part-time route into FE, his role promised creativity, autonomy and career development:

……when I came here the PE department although it doesn’t look a great deal was worse than when I came here. There was no extra curriculum sport when I came and it was part of my job really to develop that and create that, sort of run teams and sporting activity and they just wasn’t doing that at all. When I was working in [my previous college] that was already in place. That was all well established. It was a big PE department. Very well organised in terms of putting on activities so even if I had done that it wouldn’t have made a great deal of impact there whereas coming here I could create something. I could do something. I could actually have an impact in terms of my development and career. I could say that when I came here there was nothing and now, look at what there is now. (Alan, lecturer, Eastward)

Elsewhere he compared his role as a teacher to that of a salesman, having to sell courses to people on induction evenings. A smart ‘professional’ appearance and enthusiasm were necessary for this job. For Harvey and ex primary teacher, flexibility was the key quality for teachers in Fe today:

……..I have a very mixed bag of a job. I don’t have a clear role. I have actually realised, certainly in the last twelve months that the less defined your role is it seems to be the safer you are or rather the more flexible you are. If you are prepared….. which I am flexible. I have moved around in different educational sectors quite a lot and if you are prepared to chop and change without too much fuss, if people come to you and say "Would you mind being in the resource centre, sitting there all day and being a resource?" and you want to do that and you are happy to do that that is fine. Now they have just decided that is not how they are going to
do additional support and instead will be going in doing team teaching. Now some people are up in arms about that. "I am not team teaching. I don't want to do that". My reaction is "Yes, no problem. What is the problem?" but I think that is partly because of my diverse background and that I have worked in team teaching in schools and I have had to manage my own classroom as a primary teacher and as primary teacher you are every curriculum area. (Harvey, lecturer, Oldhill)

His strategy of compliance was linked to the need for job security. In the context of the bullying of staff by the old Principal and in the wider context of unemployment, this strategy of compliance can be seen as a part of a conscious strategy of survival:

I think because I came into the college on a new contract and most of the staff that were bullied were the old contract staff. A lot of the bullying was trying to get them to move onto new contract. A lot of the bullying went on at a middle management level. The middle management were bullied. Basically if you were flexible, again coming back to flexibility, if you were flexible and did what you were told and were prepared to just go along with whatever was going on in the college and you didn’t rock the boat things were fine. (Harvey, lecturer, Oldhill)

Though they had different reasons for complying and were not fully incorporated into the new corporate culture of FE, in adopting this response they played a key role in the re-creation of the ‘official’ or dominant discourse of FE teaching in which compliance and flexibility and a smart appearance are valued over judgement and skill (Hoyle 1995). The vast majority of lecturers in the CTMC project were more selective or strategic in their compliance, and their responses are outlined in the next section.

**Strategic compliance**

The vast majority of lecturers in the CTMC project were critical of some aspects of reform but accepting of others. Flexible learning for example was viewed as a positive option as long as it was not resourced ‘on the cheap’; that is, through unqualified learning assistants in place qualified lecturers and as long it did not replace direct contact teaching. These teachers drew on residual elements of public sector professionalism which was reworked in the current context to inform their practice. Of primary importance was the need to ensure that students received a quality education within the constraints of the current system. The notion of quality was subject to competing definitions that was reflective of the tension between official managerial discourse of professionalism and ‘old’ public sector professionalism. Wendy (Northway college) outlined the differences between managerial definition and the teachers definition in her college. Her account is also suggestive of the way in which the managerial definition contributed to a climate of monitoring and surveillance of lecturers performance against narrow performance indicators:

Wendy: Quality is defined in ways by management, they are completely different from how teaching staff would define quality and there is an awful lot of resentment about this because we as teachers who are doing the teaching, dealing with the students every day, we know what constitutes quality. We know that if we spend five minutes marking an essay the student is going to get less lower quality feedback than if we spend twenty minutes marking it. We know that if our time for preparation and marking is cut then we are only going to be able to give two essays a term instead of four or five. We know that that is what constitutes quality as a part of it. There is other things as well but these are just examples and that is not being
acknowledged. We know that if we have got twenty five students in a class there is no way that we can spend the same amount of time giving each one individual...... You know what I am saying here I’m sure, but these things are just not acknowledged. There is this kind of smoke screen that we can somehow maintain quality because quality is a very high profile word in all of this.

FS So how are they defining it in your view?

Wendy Well purely statistically in terms of achievement figures. Each course team leader like myself recently had to see their Head of School individually to review our results from last year and to get an action plan to improve these results.

Strategic compliers identified much more with their sector than with the college or institution. Indeed there was strong evidence of a growing sector identity with some lecturers talking of being in ‘small pockets’ (Pam: lecturer, Oldhill). One of these reasons for the sector identity was related work intensification. Though common staff rooms still existed, there was less time for lecturers to socialise with people outside their sector during break times. Breaks were increasingly being taken in busy work rooms. This sector identity was further encouraged where devolved budgets were in operation and could lead to some conflict between sectors or schools or ‘balkanisation’ (Hargreaves 1994). Where sectors were working with devolved budgets, the need to recruit students to courses was perceived to be integral to the survival of that sector, (though in reality ‘less successful’ sectors were effectively ‘subsidised’ causing further conflict and resentment from lecturers in ‘successful’ sectors). In some instances this led to students being given inappropriate advice and being recruited onto courses they were not suited to. In this context, William an ‘newer’ lecturer in the Westgate General Education department identified this practice as morally wrong and outlined his own approach:

…..I don’t want to use the words foot soldier because it is such a clich but I see myself as a teacher in a classroom. I do know if when we have consultation days with students, open surgeries, [potential students] come in and I have talked to them about my courses and what we do and then if they have expressed "Well this isn’t it". I said "Well there is always Oldhill College". I have said "Well have you tried Oldhill" because I take the ethos that is not competition really. It is a supply of services. It depends how your strategy is isn’t it. I want that person not to waste a year ‘pratting around’ on my course if they should be doing something else and in essence I think I lost three students. In fact I never had them so I never lost them but put it this way, I directed three students to other courses because having spoken to them and looked at their grades they would have wasted their time. I think that would be morally wrong. (William: lecturer, Westgate)

Although working within a competitive framework, the above lecturer’s commitment to students and to ensuring they were not placed on inappropriate courses, made his approach strategic. His colleagues were working together in other ways to ensure a genuine commitment to widening participation in FE. Debra and her sector head, Mike had found a community need for a course that would not be considered financially viable within the FEFC framework. Accepting that they could not work outside the framework of FEFC in recording units of resource, they found alternative ways of recording courses in order to ensure genuine participation of people. In doing this they were strategically compliant:
Debra I know it is on tape but we are fiddling stuff all the time so that what look likes one thing will actually go down as another thing so that these people can have the education that they are entitled to and something will look right on an account sheet as well.

FS Right so can you give me an example of when you have had to do that?

Debra Well, yes I can [laughter]. I am teaching a course at the [****] Centre. Now these are parents who have got really difficult children who have been either, well not excluded but withdrawn from mainstream schools and at this stage in the year they are mainly new parents….. They come on this course with sort of attitude, not attitude problems but really quite angry and we are doing a course for them and the whole idea of the course is to get them talking, to make them feel more comfortable and to then start exploring ways in which they can actually help their children. There isn’t, no course that is written exists that will do that; no qualification exists that will do that and an hour a week is enough for them; an hour a week isn’t worth doing financially but anyway that is beside the point. We can make it worth doing by stretching it over two terms because you don’t pick up anything unless it is twenty hours so we will be doing that for two terms so that satisfies them....... but we have to think about that all the time. It might be that five week would suit them but five week courses just doesn’t show up as anything on the books, then what do you put the course down as. Well we are calling it Adult Basic Education which really and truly is literacy and numeracy but it is Adult Basic Education in my book because it is basic communication skills [laughter] so it all that kind of thing where you are sailing very close to the wind some times but internally you are doing the very best for the...... The greatest good for the greatest number of people kind of thing and the accountants up there just want neat rows and columns.

Mike the Sector head, was also encouraging his staff to take an active role in forums and discussion groups that involved meeting and working collaboratively with colleagues from other institutions. As a result of this there was growing culture of collaboration within an overall competitive framework provided by incorporation and the FEFC’s funding methodology. Westgate and Oldhill General Education sections were beginning to share resources and write courses together . Debra explains the significance of this initiative in the local context where Oldhill had adopted a fiercely competitive approach under its previous management regime, that had excluded the possibility of collaboration with other providers.

Debra: I went to [a family planning project meeting] one on Friday and I got chatting to the girl that does my job in Oldhill and, this sounds awful [laughter]

FS Go on.

Debra: I realised that she was a perfectly nice human being because this is the other thing. I mean Oldhill have been monsters, talk about folk demons and whatever they are called. She is a person doing the same job as me under the same constraints and perfectly prepared to share ideas and possibly resources if I get hold of her next time [laughter].

In addition to collaborating with Westgate, in some aspects Oldhill General Ed section was also beginning to collaborate with local authority who had been competitors under the previous principal’s regime. Pam explained why she thought this was a positive approach:

I think I feel quite positive about that actually. I think it makes a lot of sense. There is no point in having two sets of adult education provision in one area and it means that we get the
chance to work with an organisation which is also meeting the needs of the youth, of community development and it looks at a much more holistic view of what a community needs where as a college of course by its own nature, by its funding nature, it only looks in its own personal interests at what a community needs. It never ever can be a community educator really. It looks to see what it can make money out of. [Laughter]. (Pam: lecturer, Oldhill)

Again the lecturers were strategic in their compliance and were developing other measures to ensure quality education was provided to students. The regaining of ownership of enrolments was one area. Under the old principal’s regime this aspect of teachers work was centralised with the result that students were not always being guided onto appropriate courses. On one occasion over 100 students had failed to be invited by central services to interview from a local school. When the college got into financial difficulty, lectures saw a way of regaining this role. With the appointment of a new sector head, a School Liaison post was created. The first task of the liaison officer was to compile a report outlining the problems with adopting a centralised approach (this was couched in managerial language where appropriate i.e. loss of students). The new Principal took an active interest and allowed the sector to develop its own approach. It was also useful to them that the principal was still in his probationary period so it was a good time to initiate change

…..under [the previous Principal] we had a system whereby teaching staff were no longer able to interview their students. We had people who were appointed to roles as study supervisors with an administration assistant, who then interviewed our students for us. We then ended up with this group of people in our class that, I am not going to say we hadn’t hand picked but maybe in some cases the right questions hadn’t been asked... we now in General Education have gone out on a limb, what we are actually doing is we hold an information evening once a month so anybody who is interested in any of our courses can come along and as part of that information session you get a ‘one to one’ so we then don’t have anything after that as an interview and people then know a face and a name and I think that is fairly important but at one point in time we weren’t allowed to do that. (Maria: lecturer, Oldhill)

The sector also made positive use of resource based learning, where hours had been cut for teaching; teachers accepted this was non-negotiable. Where students were unable to make use of the resource centre, lecturers prepared materials for them to take away. In this way positive use of technology was being made using qualified lecturers for the benefit of students:

all of the students have an induction into that resource centre and are encouraged to use it but many of them, particularly those that come to us in the evening which I did, are people who hold down full time jobs as well and time is a problem but we do have resources that they can take away as well. I am quite happy to open up whatever I do to anything that is going to benefit the students really. (Maria: lecturer; Oldhill)

Teachers also developed schemes for sharing resources within the sector that still acknowledged individual ownership and different styles of delivery:

What happens is we each have the syllabus and we each have the scheme of work and then it is really up to individuals to deliver it how they want. We do share resources. For example I have just produced my package on transition, moving a child from to school and home to hospital, a multiple transition and I have given everybody a copy of that. If we do a handout
we think is good we give it to other people or if we have got a task that went really well, we say how about trying this. It is very much an individual thing. You do your own thing because we all teach slightly differently although it is all fairly similar but we approach things differently and were as I might do the task I mentioned before, another member of staff might decide to deliver that as a handout and then get them to do a task on it.

But what does sharing of resources and expertise around conditions for learning suggest for notions of professionalism in the current reform agenda? The final section provides a brief discussion by way of conclusion, of the implications of lecturer accounts for the notions of deprofessionalisation and reprofessionalisation.

Discussion and conclusion

The accounts presented in this paper suggest that changes are occurring in terms of what counts as ‘good teacher’ in FE through managerialist discourses that emphasise flexibility, reliability and competence. Though there is evidence of some incorporation of teachers into this discourse (Compliance), it is by no means complete nor uncontested. Rather, residual elements of ‘public sector’ or ‘old’ professionalism are drawn on and reworked through their practice by to ‘make sense of’ the changing conditions of their work in managerial and competitive contexts.

The responses across the colleges were diverse but the vast majority of teachers were strategically compliant in their approach to work. The main element of this response was a commitment to ensuring that students received a ‘quality’ education based on a definition of quality through process rather than output. This encouraged teachers in some sectors to share resources and place an emphasis on developing collaborative modes of work within highly competitive environments. This growing climate of collaboration operated across colleges though at this stage it was contained within particular sectors and not others. There existed apparent support for this growing atmosphere of collaboration at both locally and nationally. At the local level, ‘newer’ Principals proclaimed that they were working towards collaboration as far as possible within the competitive framework At the national level, this move towards partnership and collaboration has been underwritten by commitments in the Kennedy Report and more recently the Hodge report.

One way of interpreting this emphasis on collaboration within competition, is to see it as a new form of control that reflects a ‘lighter touch’ policy towards the management of education work and educational workers (FEFC 1998, p4). However, another possibility is to see it as a basis for re-thinking professionalism in the FE sector and for raising questions about the way in which professionalism can be reworked in preferred ways might be pursued (Seddon 1997).

Seddon emphasises the way that ‘market liberal reform in education is changing the dimensions of professional practice, reworking the occupational guarantees in education and reshaping the regulatory framework that orchestrates broader articulations of power, knowledge and social groups in the wider politics of civil society’,( p7). But she argues, to focus on deprofessionalisation alone without paying attention to patterns of reprofessionalisation is to be reactive and to treat lecturers as victims of managerial reform. It is important to recognise that the powerful reprofessionalising agendas that exist alongside deprofessionalising processes. In the current context the codification and authorisation of rationalist and managerialist knowledges are privileged. However,
Understanding professionalism as discourse provides a way of rethinking contemporary education change. It affirms a rich contextualisation that invites us to look beyond processes of deprofessionalisation and reprofessionalisation in education to consider how education, the organisation of educational work, and roles of educational workers in the social organisation of knowledge and power, resources and recognition, might be reworked and to what ends.

(p12)

Seddon’s work emphasises complexity, and an understanding of the framework of regulation but also pays attention to changes in the nature of work and education work relations. If trust and sharing of strategies can develop in a culture like FE then that may help ‘solve’ one of the problems of professionalism as promulgated by indirect rule, i.e. its individualism (Hodkinson 1995). It could also be argued that as teachers become aware of these processes of identity reconstruction may enable them to think reflexively (Elliot 1996) and this allows them to think about their priorities and their possibilities in new ways. From the accounts presented in this paper it does seem that education commitment to students is the main way that FE teachers are going to change the profession. The resources for professionalism seem to lie in the concern for the student and expertise about how to create conditions for learning - these remain relatively intact and may under this kind of pressure promote more solidarity around the work.

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