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Health, Well-Being and Society HE Education and Social Science

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Provide short biographical notes on all contributors here:

Kirsty Capes has worked for the Grimsby Institute for two years. She is currently the curriculum manager for Education and Social Science, but has also been the programme leader for the Foundation Degree in Early Childhood Studies. She has completed her PGCE and Higher Education Academy Fellowship.

In order to truly analyse professionalism within the teaching sector it is firstly important to understand what the term means. According to the Oxford Dictionary (NP, ND) it states that professionalism is, 'the competence or skill expected of a professional.' The statement above would suggest that professionalism is about a person demonstrating certain qualities and attributes which align to their own sector. However, the above is a very simplistic idea of what professionalism entails and some would argue that it is much more than someone being trained or skilled in a particular field.

Professionalism in its entirety has evolved and changed positions; some would argue that this has been attributable to the changing Government position or the changes to societal views on education in the Life Long Learning sector (Johnson and Maclean, 2008). Whichever stance is followed, it could be argued, that this upheaval has caused confusion amongst those working in the sector and as such, societal culture has impacted upon teaching in this workforce. Hoyle and Wallace (2005; 100) argue that this has created a culture whereby 'autonomy has given way to accountability'. This change in approach could be attributed to the marketisation of education and rather than increase status and professionalism, it has had the opposite effect. The concept of professionalism has been a topic for debate and will continue to do so, there are many definitions of what professionalism is, but one that seems to truly identify what it is, is by Fox (1992), who states that the term is too individualistic to truly attempt to define it and therefore it becomes a subjective term that people try and interpret. Yet the concept of professionalism is often discussed in the context of Higher Education. Hoyle (1975, cited in Evans, 2008) attempts to provide a definite definition of professionalism, but quickly links this to policy makers' choices over their

interpretation and concept of what professionalism entails. These two stances demonstrate a clear divide in how professionalism is viewed and points to the clear indication that the government are the ones influencing this concept.

The concept of professionalism has become a key focus across many sectors within education, particularly policy makers and even more so in an ever changing, dynamic market, such as Higher Education. Jones and O'Brien (2014) indicate that if those working in the sector do not take the lead on enhancing professionalism then policy makers will take the lead and construct the concept themselves. This could suggest that professionalism within the sector would be shaped by those that lead rather that by those that deliver. Societal views on what constitutes professionalism within education have evolved and in a time where the student is the customer, it has become even more imperative to ensure that high standards of teaching are achieved. With this in mind, quality systems have been introduced in to HE such as scholarly activity, continuous professional development and observation on teaching and learning. Professional development is reliant upon those working in the sector to critically reflect on experiences, knowledge and skills in order to transform practice, personal and professional performance. Bruner (1996, cited in Light et al., 2009) argues that individuals learn through a variety of forms and tend to construct their own knowledge, this theory is referred to as the constructivist theory and can be used in explaining how a community of practice, particularly in education is vital in improving performance in teaching, learning and assessments. More often those academics working in the HE sector are experiencing a wide and ever changing range of influences, from scholarly activity, to practical knowledge, to quality assurance and teaching expectations and therefore the challenge for

professionals is to critically engage with and reflect on all of these influences and then integrate them in to their own practice (Light et al., 2009). This challenge becomes key, when analysing the relationship that the teacher and / or researcher has with the student and how these influences are portrayed when defining professionalism within the sector.

Professionalism across all sectors is somewhat determined by many contributing factors, some would argue that this view of professionalism is individualistic and yet professionalism within education is criticised heavily and judged depending on meeting certain standards (Fry et al., 2015). The concept of teachers across all sectors of education has changed drastically and yet the belief of what a teacher is still resembles the traditional approaches to education (Noel, 2013). Tummons (2010) argues that the concept of professionalism amongst the role of teachers is ever changing and yet the debate about whether teachers are professionals continues, however it cannot be overlooked that what constitutes a professional in one sector, may be very different to the concept of a professional in another.

To define HE as a professional body as explored is a difficult concept, however it is important to recognise the roles and responsibilities of staff in relation to achieving status and as such professionalism (Tummons, 2010). Higher Education has become an ever evolving, strategic and competitive market that strives to retain its students, with retention or non-continuation of students at the focus of quality systems and management driving force. In order to do retain students, some would argue it creates a culture whereby status is power (Leavitt et al., 2017). This stance has evolved in relation to the marketisation of Higher Education, which has sought Governments to put in place, strategies that

stimulate and yet set out to monitor efficiencies, with this it has created an expectation amongst staff, that they must provide innovative and creative teaching methods. According to Swann et al. (2010) this change in position has demonstrated that education has become much more than simply educating its learners, but the driving force is to create learners that are autonomous and ensures that Higher Education becomes a competitive base, whereby institutions compete for funding and status and in effect drives out inefficiencies. It could therefore be argued, that this has created a culture whereby professionalism is much more hierarchical and is constantly changing in order to consider the needs of its learners and also to look for smarter, more efficient ways to engage potential learners and to actively engage those that already attend institutes (Walker and Ryan, 1999: Morgan, 1997). Critics of competitive models in education, state that the systems themselves create consequences for staff and students, as there are divided purposes regarding why some students enter in to the HE sector, with this in mind the focus of education become blurred, as does the outcome (Chandola and Jenkins, 2014: Patriagnani and Conlon 2011: Hall and Marsh, 2000).

Whilst it is clear that professionalism and changing the direction of education is becoming a key focus, it cannot detract from the idea that professionalism creates a culture that people want to be a part of it (Tummons, 2010; Fry et al. 2015). Creating a culture where staff feel valued and appreciated and want to be a part of it could ultimately be the motivation behind creating a sense of professionalism and helps to define the parameters of professionalism in teaching. However, due to demand pressures both internal and external, this is not always possible and

as such relies on individuals striving to achieve for themselves and the students that they teach (Simon and Pleszhova, 2013).

In order to effectively demonstrate this sense of belonging, trait theory aims to establish the characteristics of a professional. However, in reality it could be argued that traits such competencies, knowledge and expertise are very much individual, subjective and are dependent on the context in which they apply, they therefore cannot be relied upon as a true insight in to professionalism in teaching (Dent et al., 2016). An opposing argument for this, is the traditional views of what professionalism constitutes and its idealistic approach to determine what the expected skills within the teaching profession are. These teaching traits, could be argued are what enable teachers to feel valued and to understand the expectations of their role (Dent et al., 2016). However, it is important to note that professionalism therefore changes with the demands placed on teachers from social policy makers and from the economic world in relation to the skills expected of a graduate (Fry et al, 2015; Clarke and Phelan, 2017). This pressure is bi-fold, in that staff are expected to ensure that graduates are ready for the world of work, whilst students know that there are expectations of them much greater than their academic studies. Meeting these demands proves difficult to achieve and brings in to question the role of the teacher in supporting students in their studies, but also in ensuring that professionalism is at the forefront of what is taught. Therefore professional identity changes as policy makers change priorities; it could be suggested that this creates a culture of instability and therefore impacts on the professionalism within the teaching sector. Evans (2008) suggests that the control from policy makers has become the driving force for professionalism amongst academic staff in Higher Education.

It cannot be denied, that the definition of professionalism has evolved and those steering the argument over teaching as a profession, have worked hard to demonstrate teachers values, attributes and skills. Yet somehow Rogers et al. (2014) states that there is still much criticism over the sector and the notion of teaching being a profession is often ignored, but rather it focuses on being a vocation, due to its direct nature within HE and across the education sector as a whole. In order to explain this further Kreber (2013) states that people's perceptions over what constitutes a teacher evoke from varying perspectives and much of this has been shaped by a person's own experiences or their own ideology over what attributes a teacher should hold, particularly when teaching in HE. However, Kreber (2013) explores this further and states that this means that the teachers themselves create a culture whereby students' needs are being consistently and constantly met, which can become detrimental to their level of autonomous learning and in turn impacts on teacher professionalism. According to Hargreaves et al. (2007) this extends further in to the profession, as teachers themselves, are often unclear as to what roles they play, as most feel that the pastoral side to teaching becomes their focus, this could indicate that the profession is deemed a vocation. Furthermore when teaching in HE, there is a clear focus on embedding practical skills, in relation to their chosen career pathway and the academic side to the journey becomes misplaced and finding the balance between theoretical perspectives and embedding this in to practice is seen a skill to teaching in this this sector in order to engage students in their learning (Clouder et al., 2012).

In parallel to the teaching role perceived as being a vocation rather than a profession, teaching in higher education is therefore disjointed. Teaching in

Higher Education has become a multitude of expectations, Locke (2012) argues that teaching focusses on facilitating learning, such as curriculum design, planning and preparing lessons, whilst at the same time raising standards across the entire sector through evidence based research. The impact this has on those working in the sector is that there are no clearly defined roles and as such educational pedagogy within Higher Education has come in to question (Gibbs, 2010).

Whitchurch (2012) and Gornall (2014) argue that the multitude of expectations amongst academics, alleviates some of the pressures to provide excellent service, teach and research, in particularly those just starting their teacher career. There is some debate of whether those working in the Higher Education sector are teachers or academics. Rothwell and Rothwell (2014) and Gornall and Thomas (2010) argue that the role of the academic in Higher Education covers a multitude of tasks and due to constraints within each institute these tasks vary, therefore Clegg (2008) argues that professionalism amongst those working in the Higher Education relies heavily on sector experiences and policy decisions, due to this perception there may never be a unified response as to what constitutes professionalism with the Higher Education sector.

Professionalism, as already discussed has given way from creating autonomy to creating a shift in accountability and control. According to Cheng (2014) this process of accountability has been created due to quality evaluation particularly in relation to financial agenda and has created a business model of education. Kezar et al. (2005) extends this further and states that accountability has become the key focus in an environment such as Higher Education which is primarily funded by tax payers. This could suggest that academic staff, are more driven by

the end product of education, rather than the process of supporting students along their academic journey. It could also come into question the expertise of academic staff and whether this driving force dismisses the achievement and progression of its staff.

With this change in professionalism and accountability, quality standards have changed in order to account for this. With HE growing in number of students, status and the diverse range of the institutes, saw the introduction of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). The QAA monitor quality and standards to ensure that colleges and Universities across the UK uphold these standards and meet the demands of the changes put on this sector. The change in marketisation of Higher Education saw a shift in how expected standards in Higher Education are judged, with this in mind the UK Quality Code became a key focus in driving performance related standards and expectations across the sector (QAA, NP, ND; Kompf and Denicolo, 2013). This change in promotion of expected standards meant that Higher Education Institutes became accountable, more comparative and was driven by Government standards. It could therefore be argued that this created a culture that became based around standards and that the sector lost its own identity, as it became a unified service offering the customer what was needed. However Rowlands (2017) argues that the introduction of the UK Quality Code meant that the overarching disparity between the UK and other counterparts was the role that 'quality' plays in the academic sector. As a result of the QAA and the UK Quality Code the impact is immense, in that it governs every element of HE practice, from subject benchmark statements to teaching, learning and assessments and therefore places a greater emphasis on providing high standards across the sector. The identity of the sector has therefore become well

established and recognised as being a standardised sector that has to meet the standards set in order to comply during a QAA monitoring visit. Fry et al. (2014) argues that this approach to teaching in HE has enabled the sector to demonstrate its professionalism, whilst raising standard of degrees for its students. Furthermore it could be argued that improving quality guarantees that the sector evolves and drives out inefficiencies whilst creating an effective market that "sells" its products to the customers. However it cannot be ignored that by doing this, the sector has created a business out of students needs to expand their education and constantly reviewing procedures to build and become financially stable and secure.

Whilst it has been identified that professionalism is a driving force for the sector, it cannot be ignored that the ideas behind professionalism may not be fully implemented in to this sector. There are a number of reasons why this may be for example organisational culture and government ideology, yet it is still expected that those working in this sector will display the qualities of a true professional. However, identifying what these qualities are is still proving difficult to do in that these are individualistic and subjective, yet staff are expected to demonstrate skills in line with QAA standards and ensure that the students' academic journey is not impaired. It is clear from the discussion that having a set standard which firs everyone's role in HE is not the most effective way of measuring and monitoring standards, as demographics, expertise and specialism all vary as do students expectations.

In order to truly identify professionalism within the HE sector it could be suggested that senior management within their own colleges and HE institutes should set these standards rather than being reliant on a national strategy. Whereas it could

be argued that a national strategy set standards for the entire UK and assists with raising overall standards in the sector. This approach also ensures that students can cross institutes and still receive the same level of teaching.

There will continue to be debate over professionalism and standards in the HE sector and students expectations will form a key aspect of this driving force, yet it should be noted that students are unclear of these standards and they vary from student to student and from one HE institute to another. Therefore professionalism will continue to be discussed and implemented into this sector in order to demonstrate the value that is has in contributing to the economics within the UK. Professionalism is closely linked to quality assurance, yet defining quality and then identifying it is often challenging to do. It could be argued that inefficiencies and business drive create a culture whereby quality improvement should be at the forefront rather than quality accountability, alongside the support from quality funding bodies in the UK.

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