

TEACHER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT IN ELT: A PROFESSIONAL APPROACH

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Abstract

English Language Teaching (ELT) has no professional body controlling entry to the profession, and there is a lack of clarity in the literature on the role and content of both pre-service teacher education and in-service teacher development. This paper builds on socioeconomic models of professionalism in an attempt to develop valid criteria for both. Professionalism as a system of rewarding and controlling expert labour is defined and the legitimacy of forming professional bodies is discussed. The criteria are then applied to ELT as a critique of existing pre-service and in-service teacher education, and suggestions are made for the professionalization of ELT.

Keywords: professionalism, pre-service education, in-service education, ELT.

INTRODUCTION

The teaching of English as a foreign or second language has experienced a period of rapid growth, and looks likely to grow further. Key trends noted by Graddol (2006, pp. 98-99) include a projected increase in numbers of learners to 2 billion, perhaps as soon as the year 2010, with those learners displaying marked differences in age and language proficiency. This is approximately double the number of learners in 2000.

Graddol (2006, p. 15) also notes that English as a medium of international communication in the future will depend more on what happens in Asia than on any influence native speakers might have. English, he notes may be one of a number of alternative languages for global communication, and there is no reason why the teaching of English should be dominated by native speakers. Graddol calls this 'the end of EFL' (English as a Foreign Language).

These developments suggest that it is more important than ever to reappraise what it is we want English teachers to be able to do, the

conditions in which they do it, and how they are evaluated. The purpose of this article is to consider a professional approach to redefining the objectives of initial pre-service teacher education as well as in-service development.

PROFESSIONALISM

Goode (1969) makes a list of the requirements for professionalism under the general headings of Professional knowledge and the Service ideal, and includes extended descriptions of all the usually accepted requirements of knowledge, skills and attitudes as well as the professional organizations needed to define and enforce standards. Goode holds that these are 'generating traits'; that is, if a group of workers acquires these characteristics, it becomes professional. However, the direction of causality in this view is not proven. Perhaps professional approaches to the delivery of expert services in fact generate the observable attributes of professionalism.

Dingwall and Fenn (1987) show how professionalism may work as a socio economic system for the accountable delivery of expert services. The fundamental problem with expert services is that at first glance the expert holds all the cards. They claim to have the knowledge skills and attitudes to solve the client's problem, but the client has no way of knowing whether the service could have been better, or just as good but cheaper, or whether undesirable outcomes could have been avoided. The client is vulnerable because of the difficult nature of the problems that are brought before professional advisers and the practical, emotional and financial consequences of failure to solve them. Each client's problem is unique, and there is no book or web page that the client can consult to challenge professional advice. Dingwall and Fenn (1987, p. 61) point out that 'the judgement of the professional stabilizes the unpredictable into a basis sufficiently reliable for human action'. That is their job.

These professional activities are controlled by society in two main ways. The most fundamental is the law suit for negligence or incompetence. Because professionals have to diagnose clients' problems as well as frame them in a way that makes them soluble, they cannot resort to 'small print' to limit their responsibility. The problem with the law suit is that it only applies after something has gone wrong, and in any case needs the testimony of the professional peers of the accused expert to give evidence. Society's second defence, then, is some kind of official recognition of the qualifications required for practice. But, this, too, has problems. Charlatans can be well meaning as well as fraudulent, and the claims of any group of workers to be the only people able to solve difficult problems need to be examined very closely. Monopoly of practice can only be granted

reluctantly and provisionally, and not to protect practitioners but to protect vulnerable clients.

This view proposes a strong position for professional bodies. A professional body is needed to make the argument in the first place for monopoly of practice to protect a vulnerable public. It is needed to act as gatekeeper so that only competent persons enter the profession, and to act as policeman against members who fail to uphold the standards of the profession. The professional body will be unable to defend its competent members if it does not cooperate fully in the discipline of incompetent members. Failure to do so would result in the loss of monopoly of practice. The Architects Registration Board (undated), for instance, gives its mission statement as 'protecting the consumer and safeguarding the reputation of architects'. Contrary to popular belief, there is no conflict of interest in serving this dual function.

Professionalization as a process has been described in two very different ways by Wilensky (1964) and Abbott (1991). Wilensky, examining evidence from a range of professions, sees it as a bottom up process in which practitioners sharing appropriate skills, knowledge and attitudes establish their competence in the eyes of the public, start a university level training programme, and finally apply for full professional status and monopoly of practice. Abbott cites evidence from the development of the medical profession in the USA to suggest that the whole apparatus of professional organization and education resulted from the imposition of mandatory regulation by the government as a top down process. However these opposing views come closer together if we accept that at the beginning of the process Abbott describes the distinction between real medical doctors and quacks was already clear, so that government would be negligent in not acting quickly to protect the public.

PROFESSIONALISM IN ELT

The issue, as has been shown, is not the protection of 'qualified' practitioners from losing their jobs to the unqualified, but rather the protection of vulnerable clients. The first question, then, is whether our clients are practically, emotionally and financially vulnerable. Perhaps a case can be made for all three, as the consequences of failure to learn English do indeed have an impact in all of these in many parts of the world. Graddol (2006, p. 15) suggests that speaking English may no longer be an advantage in a globalized world where everyone speaks it. It follows that those who do not speak it are disadvantaged. The second question is more difficult. Who are the 'qualified' ELT practitioners and can they show that only they can do the job? One way of thinking about this may be to consider

different routes towards qualified ELT practitioner status and to see where the locus of control in gatekeeper and police functions may lie.

PRE-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION

One route towards qualified practitioner status may be through a mix of native speaker language skills, personal commitment, and in service training and development. People enter ELT for all sorts of reasons, but that does not automatically imply a lack of commitment. An example may be an educated native speaker, with a period of on the job training followed by something more formal like ICELT or DELTA. Although there may well be benefits to the practitioner in getting a qualification, it is not clear that clients benefit. After all, the practitioner entered without relevant qualifications, so that is presumably true of others in the organization too. Even the teaching practice element of these courses exposes students to as yet unqualified teachers. The employing institution is in this case acting as both gatekeeper and policeman, and the criteria applied are not those of a professional organization.

Entry through academic qualifications is no better, in professional terms. MA TESOL courses may lack an element of observed and systematic teaching practice. On the other hand, academics are supposed to be able to review the literature and contribute to it, and arguably practitioners need to be academically able to evaluate and apply theory in the practical situations that confront them. However, much research is not focused on the needs of practice (Macaro 2003, p. 3) and would require yet more research to have a proven beneficial effect on professional practice. Again, the gatekeeper and policeman is the employing institution.

IN-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION

These gatekeeper and policing activities are not necessarily misplaced in institutions that value teacherly lore and skills. The teaching and learning of languages does in fact proceed, with some degree of success. Arguably, it is through the dedication of practicing teachers engaging in their own development that the teaching of languages comes closest to being a truly professional activity.

However, Eldridge (2005, p. 9) finds that conflicts of interest are inherent in teacher development. A teacher may feel morally obliged to follow their sincerely held beliefs and opinions, in opposition to the policy of the institution where they work, while Lowe (2005) shows how unreliable sincerely held beliefs may be. Richards and Farrell (2005, p. 6-7) conceptualize teacher learning as skill learning, cognitive process, personal

construction or reflective practice, all of which reinforce a teacher centered view of teaching.

The problem with teacher craft is that it mainly serves the needs of teachers, and teacher needs are not the same as learner needs. Teachers need to be able to plan their work so that it fits into a working day, and carry out activities that make sense to them, both instinctively and in accordance with their preferred reading. Bress (2004, p. 5) takes a widely held view of teaching where he urges teachers to believe in themselves, decide on their objectives and work towards them systematically while being sensitive to the effect on learners. Perhaps the gap between teacher and learner needs in a professional sense can best be illustrated by considering a short scenario:

A learner enrolls in a school of English, is assigned to a group, attends faithfully and does all that the teacher asks, but makes poor progress and fails the final exam. Meanwhile, unknown to the teacher, the student has obtained a place in a British university and only needs an average score of 6.5 in IELTS to confirm both funding and the university place. On the strength of being enrolled in an English course in a good (and expensive) school, the student books an IELTS test but fails to achieve the required score. The teacher is in court facing charges of negligence and incompetence.

The law sets great store by the views of the reasonable person, and like everyone else, judges' images of the reasonable person are modeled on him or herself. It will therefore occur to their lordships to ask the following questions:

- What did the teacher do to discover the client's purpose for taking classes?
- What did the teacher do to ascertain whether the course offered might assist in those goals?
- What did the teacher do to discover the client's learning ability, limitations and potential?
- What did the teacher do to discover the client's starting level?
- What did the teacher do to estimate whether the client's goals could be achieved in the light of the above?
- What did the teacher do to facilitate the use of learner abilities and minimize the effect of learner limitations?
- What did the teacher do to keep progress towards the goal under review?
- What did the teacher do to communicate clearly with the client the likelihood of reaching their goal?

Arguably, this is the professional agenda, and neither academic courses nor practical experience prepare teachers to deliver this service.

IN THE CASE FOR PROFESSIONALIZING ELT

The scenario above gives a context for what we really do know how to do. Managing classroom or self access or ESP situations, organizing activities for meaningful communication, conceptualizing language and language learning, and writing objectives in such a way that their achievement can be verified are really difficult activities and properly educated teachers are good at them. There is also a well developed literature on evaluation and testing. The rest is just administration, and practitioners can be educated to be both willing and able to do it. So perhaps it can be accepted the professionalism is achievable and that our teacher, with suitable education, could give their lordships rational answers and expect colleagues to confirm them.

A professional approach to ELT would also allow us to think about our outstanding practitioners. Professionals must all attend to the points noted in the scenario, but beyond that we know that there are really marvelous teachers who have acquired their skills as much through reflective practice and have won personal insight as through innate ability. What are we to do with them? In architecture, for instance, we know who they are and what they are for. They are for designing Reichstag's and Millennium bridges. In ELT we do not know who they are, nor do we know what they are for, and until we do know both reflective practice and other forms of personal teacher development remain rather purposeless.

The research agenda, too, would benefit from a professional approach. The purpose of research is to establish and test knowledge, and Pratte (1981) offers a useful tripartite view of knowledge for the present purposes. He proposes Propositional knowledge (knowing something), Performative knowledge (knowing how to do something) and Dispositional knowledge (knowing to do something). The relative independence of these types of knowledge may be demonstrated by an example. Suppose, for instance, we wish to persuade children to wash their hands before eating. We may tell them about germs (propositional knowledge) and show them how to use soap and water to get rid of them (performative knowledge). But how much do they really have to know about microbiology or the best way of washing their hands to make the washing of hands (dispositional knowledge) a good idea? Surely it is a good idea anyway, even without microbiology or a study of hand washing techniques. The area of dispositional professional knowledge has been largely ignored by the research community, and performative knowledge, too, has been abandoned to hearsay and teacher lore. Professionals may or may not find themselves attracted to a particular theory of learning, but what they really need are good accounts of what works. They need to know who may be helped and

who may be harmed by any procedure, how much, and under what circumstances, whether or not there is a satisfactory theoretical explanation. This kind of clinical research is both achievable and applicable as both performative and dispositional knowledge.

Finally, a professional approach to ELT would lead towards the formation of valid professional organizations, moving gatekeeper and policing functions away from teaching institutions and into the professional system of public accountability where they belong. Bottom up professionalism, starting with individual practitioner responsibilities, makes more sense than attempts to impose professionalism from above, and would be in line with Wilensky's account of the development of other professions. Such professionalism would be local, culture sensitive, accountable and achievable.

IMPLICATIONS OF PROFESSIONALISM FOR PRE-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION

I have suggested elsewhere (Farmer 2006, p. 80) that in some respects architecture as practiced in the UK may serve as a model for ELT professionalism. Architects usually study for three years at university to acquire the technical knowledge needed to be of use in the workplace, followed by a year of supervised, structured, recorded and assessed practical experience. The student then undertakes two further years of higher level theoretical or practical study and another year of fully documented practical experience before sitting the exams which give entry to the profession. The student's achievements are credited in three stages: Part 1, which certifies basic technical knowledge; Part 2, which certifies higher level practical or theoretical knowledge; and Part 3, which certifies competence to practice.

Arguably, in ELT, we have Parts 1 and 2 already. A course such as the University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations DELTA might be supposed to certify Part 1 and any Masters course Part 2. But no-one in ELT is licensed to practice, and that must give cause for concern. If we start to think about professionalism in ELT from the end (license to practice) and work backwards, the deficiencies in ELT professional education become apparent. TESOL (2000) takes a hard look at what services language programmers for adults should be able to deliver. If programmers are to provide the service we may suppose that the teachers delivering it must be competent in the services described. The document is organized under eight headings:

- 1 Program Structure, Administration and Planning
- 2 Curriculum
- 3 Instruction

- 4 Recruitment, Intake and Orientation
- 5 Retention and Transition
- 6 Assessment and Learner Gains
- 7 Staffing, Professional Development and Staff Evaluation.
- 8 Support Services

The detail and possible deficiencies of the TESOL approach need not concern us here. What is of interest is that it outlines a wide range of essential services only one of which is instruction, and it, at least, goes some way towards defining an agenda for pre-service teacher education which would equip teachers to avoid the kind of court case outlined in this paper. It should be no surprise to find that any course of study designed to educate teachers to this level would look more like a degree than a diploma.

It may or may not be thought necessary to add a Master's course to mirror Part 2 architectural education, but the conditions for licensing practitioners will certainly have to be considered. Architectural students preparing for their Part 3 exam buy a book of procedures. What they have to do in practice to avoid court cases is much too complex and demanding to be left to academic interpretations of first principles. Such a submission to prescribed procedures may be taken to be an example of Pratte's dispositional knowledge described above. From one perspective, a procedure book could be seen as an unacceptable restriction on the freedom of the teacher to carry out their duties as they see fit. This would be the case if the procedures were imposed by administrators, but if they were developed by the teaching profession to protect both student clients and practitioners from the kind of court proceedings described in this paper, a book of procedures may be more acceptable.

Valid dispositional knowledge allied to a sound academic and practical education are, therefore, the prerequisites for licensing an ELT professional. The procedures adopted by the profession need to reflect local legal and cultural conditions, while extending protection to both student clients and able practitioners.

IMPLICATIONS OF PROFESSIONALISM FOR IN-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION

If the outline of professional pre-service education given above is accepted, the purpose of in-service teacher education becomes clearer. It is not to become better teachers as such, but to maintain low vulnerability to court actions.

This is not to say that reflective practice and other current approaches to teacher development are invalid, just that they are

insufficient. If instruction is one item out of eight, a balance must be maintained between the demands of classroom practice, which will continue to be as personal and emotional as ever, and attention to the quality of the complete service.

Change is often assumed to be rapid and constant, and one of the purposes of in-service teacher education is to integrate the effects of change into practice. A professional approach may deal more with the detail of how services may be better delivered rather than major changes in what the services are. Research into how languages are learned, for instance, may have relatively little impact, as what we already know is unlikely to be overturned by future discoveries. On the other hand, the implications of a court case where a teacher was found to be negligent or incompetent would have a much larger effect.

CONCLUSION

If ELT chooses to head towards professionalism as it is understood in architecture in the UK, for instance, substantial changes in how teachers think about their work are implied. We may all need to feel more comfortable with and more supported by checklists of increasing comprehensiveness and complexity. Some of these are already with us though they have not yet assumed the role implied by professional practice. Examples would be the TESOL Programme Standards (TESOL, 2000) and the Common European Framework (Council of Europe, 2001).

There are alternatives to professionalism. Teachers may accept the conditions of work and other demands of their employers and continue to dedicate themselves to teaching in a committed but largely unrecognized way. They may continue to be educated according to the agendas set by masters and diploma programmers which limit their competences to the classroom or to academic production. And they may continue to strive for ever better classroom performance at the expense of taking a complete and responsible view of their work.

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