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## **A Model Professional? Characteristics of professionalism in trainee teachers and comparisons with the GTCE Code of Conduct and Practice.**

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### **Background**

The General Teaching Council for England (GTCE, 2009) have produced a revised professional code which set out the expectations of conduct and practice for all registered teachers. The code outlines eight principles that are said to reflect the core values of the teaching profession. Included among these eight principles are traditional themes relating to standard areas of teacher professionalism; namely facilitating student achievement, reflective practice and team-working. Also incorporated are more moral aspects of conduct such as demonstrating honesty and integrity, and promoting equality.

The arrival of this new professional code of prompts a number of questions to be asked about the nature of teacher professionalism, not least since the old code (GTC 2004) wouldn't have been updated with this more detailed, explicitly framed and comprehensive version, if it wasn't deemed necessary. Such questions could be concerned with the nature of the code's provenance and purpose; its characteristics and authenticity, and how widely the principles upon it is based are shared and valued by the education community. The last of these questions are of greatest interest here, and will be explored in relation to teachers in training.

Within the context of Initial Teacher Education, trainee teachers are unlikely to have considered the governance of the GTCE, the code of practice or its implications until they are already well embarked on their teacher education programme, and possibly not even until their training is complete. This lack of knowledge of the Code is likely to be true even though trainee teachers are bound by the code from the beginning of their training courses.

As they embark on their training programmes trainee teachers will naturally have their own notions of what it means to be professional in the context of teaching. These notions will have been formed partly by their own learning biographies, especially the role models of significant teachers, together with their social, ethical, moral and political viewpoints. The nature of these 'models of professionalism', at least for the younger first career trainee teachers will be built more on ideas relating to them as learners than to them as teachers. These models may well undergo significant shifts as their experiences of schools, children, teachers, staffrooms and parents grow as a consequence of their professional duties.

### **Research Questions**

This research paper has addressed the following three questions.

First, with what models of professionalism do graduate trainee teachers arrive onto their teacher education courses?

Second, how consistent are these models of professionalism with the expectations of the GTCE as communicated through the Code of Conduct and Practice?

Third, in what ways, if indeed they do, do trainee teachers' models of professionalism evolve over the duration of a one year postgraduate training course?

### **Methods**

Empirical data were collected through a two section self-completion questionnaire. The first section contained forty statements which were taken directly from the CoCP. Trainees were asked how well they thought the 'teaching profession as a whole' fulfilled these statements' expectations. Responses were presented on a five point Likert scale from 'wholly fulfilled' to 'not fulfilled'. The second section presented the same statements randomly re-organised only the trainees were asked this time how much they believed they would fulfil the statements' expectations when they were part of the teaching profession. Both sections of the questionnaire were administered twice around, 200 trainee teachers from two education institutions. The questionnaires were administered once at the very beginning of the one year training course and the second time close to the end.

## **Frame**

The purpose of this paper is to explore constructs of trainee teachers' models of professionalism and how they evolve and to explore the way in which such models maps onto the ideal type manifested in the GTCE's Code of Conduct and Practice.

Descriptive statistics and factor analysis were used to analysis the trainees' models of professionalism and to explore the shifts in viewpoint individuals, subgroups and whole cohort questionnaire outcomes. Comparisons were made between the views of professionalism that the trainees held for themselves and those which they held for the teaching workforce as a whole. These differences will be reported on at the conference

Raffo and Hall (2006) in their work on 'transitions to becoming a teacher' draw on Bourdieu's (1986) notions of cultural capital together with manifestations of biographical identity to analysis trainee teachers' evolving dispositions within the teaching profession. This analysis provides a useful lens through which influences on trainees notions of professionalism can be explored, particularly 'the central importance for trainee teachers of coming to terms with the rules, roles, procedures, norms and values' (Raffo et al., 2006) which have such an effect on their shaping dispositions.

Professional dispositions in other education settings other than in the UK have been undertaken. Flowers (2006) used confirmatory factor analysis to measure the professional dispositions of pre-service teachers in the United States. She provided strong evidence of the reliability and validity of her Clinical Experience Rubric (CER) scale. However, unlike Flowers' scale which used teachers' reports on pre-service teachers, this research uses the trainee teachers' own self-reports.

## **Research findings**

This paper reports on trainee teachers' early characterisation of professionalism and its position in relation to the Code of Conduct and Practice for themselves and practicing teachers.

Trainee teachers' views of professionalism at the start of their training may or may not be consistent with those expected by the GTCE. Are these professional values something that the trainee learn, grow toward or adopt during their training and early careers, or are they expected to meet fully the expectations and principles of the code from the very start of their training. How reasonable is it to suggest that initial teacher education programmes are able to make a significant contribution to shifting the trainees' concepts of professionalism and therefore shaping the professional nature of early career teachers?

The question is important since if the notions of professionalism are fixed and unyielding and there is little opportunity for re-framing and re-alignment, then since teacher education courses are the gatekeepers of entry into the professional, it becomes increasingly important, at the point of selection onto a training programme, that the trainees already have a good professional match to the GTCE's professional code of practice. Hence acceptance and entry onto the course becomes one of selection by professional disposition as well as that of potential professional competence.