

**Informed or deformed  
professionalism ?**

**a sensual approach**

**Don't get too excited !!!**

# A deformed view of teacher professionalism

Barber's view of recent educational history from 'Large-scale education reform in England: a work in progress' (2001)

1970s uninformed professionalism

But what about the work of the Schools Council, teachers' centres, HMI national surveys, the Warnock and Bullock Reports ?

- 1980s uninformed prescription
- But what about TVEI, the APU test programme, HMI national courses, the Curriculum Matters series ?
  
- 1990s informed prescription
- What about the introduction of unevaluated national literacy and numeracy strategies, the decline in higher degree courses, the national curriculum for ITT, the unevaluated effects of national testing ?
- Informed or deformed prescription ?

- 2000s informed professionalism
- But what about the tyranny of national testing, ITT skills tests, national standards from ITT to headship, refusal to accept the Tomlinson report, the uncritical celebration of “what works”, the marginalisation of HEIs ?
- Informed or deformed professionalism ?

# Desperately needed to inform teacher professionalism and to counter its deformation

- A sense of perspective
- Common sense
- A sense of the possible
- A sense of challenge
- A sense of humour

## A sense of perspective

- My research into the history of education (no longer considered necessary for students because of the government's belief that "informed" educational history only began in 1997) has uncovered "gems" which have contemporary relevance for the pursuit of informed professionalism

## Lincolnshire 1885

“I can honestly say that the teachers in this district are daily suffering from pressure

- Teachers are expected to perform miracles and try to do so
  - Throughout the year I have been beneath my work
  - My doctor tells me I need complete rest
  - Query
  - How can a teacher obtain rest?
- 
- Informed professionalism (IP) needs to investigate and /or comment on “pressure” and its effects in both schools and HEI

- Log Book Entry 1880
- January 11:
- “Must get on faster with the reading to get through the course of reading prescribed for the next examination”
- Preparations for examinations is strange work. I believe it affects my nervous system for many failures in dictation or a sum make me tremble while a successful trial elates me beyond measure.”

IP needs to investigate and /or comment on similar contemporary issues, for example, early years teachers’ reactions to demands to teach synthetic phonics “first and fast” by the age of five .

# On a more positive note

- 1947-
- “At a pinch you could do without local education authorities. At a pinch you could do without the civil service. You could certainly do without the Minister.
- But without teachers the country would degenerate into barbarism in the space of two generations.”
- (George Tomlinson: Minister of Education)
- IP might investigate or comment on the changing role of local authorities as they impinge on schools or the effects of government rhetoric on teachers’ sense of professionalism

- 1905 (Board of Education)
- “The only uniformity of practice that the Board of Education desire to see in the teaching of Public Elementary Schools is that each teacher shall think for himself and work out for himself such methods of teaching as may use his powers to the best advantage and be best suited to the needs and conditions of the school. Uniformity in details of practice (except in the mere routine of school management) is not desirable even if it were attainable. But freedom implies a corresponding responsibility in its use”

IP might consider the changing nature of teacher professionalism and reconceptualise an appropriate professionalism for the 21<sup>st</sup> century

- IP can contribute to the rediscovery and celebration of common sense
- Hadow Report 1931
- “Method admits of many, indeed of innumerable varieties. Different methods will be used not only in different subjects, but also in teaching the same subject in different circumstances, and different teachers will face similar problems in different ways.”
- IP can investigate or comment on the effects of so-called “three-part lessons” or the legacy of the numeracy and literacy lesson formats
- ‘

- NUT Conference 1950
  - “Lesson material, no matter from what distinguished source, is not completely successful unless adapted to the special needs of the thousand-and-one classes in which it is used. The teacher’s own creative thought about his problems, based on experience and knowledge of his class, has more value than any one else’s ready-made lessons or methods”
- \* IP could investigate and/or comment on the advantages and disadvantages of using ready-made lessons downloaded from the web

- A sense of the possible

IP can contribute to the future direction of the education system by critically considering the nature and implications of aims such as the following:

- To give every child a flying start
- To put the needs of learners first
- To support practitioners (and parents as the first and most important educators of their children)
- To provide a more rounded and flexible curriculum
- To enhance social inclusion
- To remove barriers to learning
- (Based on Welsh Assembly 2001 *The Learning Country*)

- IP could consider the desirability (and practicability) of a re-formed education system involving :
- \* Extended education and family care focussing on the needs of children, not primarily the needs of working parents
- An extended and enriched foundation stage for 3-7 year olds
- \* A post-Foundation national (or international curriculum) for students up to the age of 14
- A “de-schooled” post-14 sector freeing near-adults from the constraints of a nineteenth century educational context and a largely early twentieth century curriculum
- An initial teacher education system freed up to prepare students (not trainees) to contribute constructively but critically to such developments

# A sense of challenge

- IP can also offer a sense of challenge to contemporary orthodoxies.
- Three illustrations related to tests and targets:
- (1.) Wiliam's case-study on the effects of national testing in a primary school
- When asked to say what level she thought she would achieve in the forthcoming SATs a girl in year 6 remarked:
- "I'll be a nothing"
- Similar case-studies of children in 2006-7 could be illuminating

- Fielding's challenging comments on the effects of target-setting:
- "Target-setting is the Viagra of economic and educational underperformance: set some targets and you'll feel better, be seen to get something done and satisfy the prurience of an increasingly promiscuous accountability"
- "If it is to achieve its educative potential then target-setting should be less arrogant in its ambitions, less strident in its approach and more explicitly reciprocal in its understanding of the learning process"
- IP could investigate and/or comment on the effects of target setting both in schools and in HEIs

- One modest contribution of my own published in the Times Educational Supplement
- “When will this obsession with grading children end...or begin ? – Perhaps with a starred grade on birth certificates for children with well above average birth-rate?”
- IP could investigate and/or comment on the effects of labelling by level on children’s self-esteem (and perhaps that of their parents !)

# The most urgent challenge of all

Two defining moments for teacher professionalism:

1905 : “Each teacher shall think for himself, and work out for himself, such methods of teaching as will use his powers to best advantage and be best suited to the particular needs and conditions of the school.”

2006 : The announcement that primary schools will be required to teach children to read using synthetic phonics . A government minister supports “being prescriptive about what is right” .

- If this were to happen (and its very likely) it would destroy the last vestige of teacher autonomy (the freedom to decide how to teach) so eloquently expressed in 1905.
- Why aren't the professional associations, the chief inspector and local authority leaders contesting this usurpation of teacher professionalism ?
- Why has teacher education been absolutely silent on this issue ? Why aren't professors of education, deans of faculty and principals protesting about this erosion of professionalism ? Why are they silent ? Are they frightened to speak out ? Do they realise what may happen ?

- Has the usurpation of teacher professionalism by “officialdom” and its allies taken place so insidiously that the fateful crossing of a line has not been appreciated or have so many agents and agencies been subtly co-opted and compromised in recent years ?
- Why has teacher education in particular been so timorous ?
- This is an issue on which all primary and secondary teachers and tutors should unite since it goes to the core of our professionalism
- But will anything be done ?
- Past precedents are not encouraging
- Perhaps it’s appropriate that I’m now in semi-retirement

# A sense of humour

- IP can use material which provides a much needed sense of humour – a particularly potent weapon against governmental and management derived absurdities:  
*of Schools)*

My all-time favourite unearthed in a study of early twentieth century Scottish education but you'll all recognise it from your personal experience as teacher or pupil or college tutor

- “The bodies of children are always in a state of very active growth. Hence the bodily secretions are relatively large in amount and readily become offensive in quality even when children are healthy. Within the school the children are continually moving. They keep the school dust in perpetual circulation; they add to the organic impurity of the atmosphere by respiration, by repeated coughing or sneezing, or where slates are used, by spitting”
- (Scotch Education Department 1907 *Cleansing and Disinfecting*)
- Perhaps IP needs to examine the olfactory dimension of education !

- A second example - related to the first phase of workforce reform as experienced in secondary schools:
- God I shall miss  
That stolen kiss  
Far from the Year Ten Mafia  
Producing lists  
Within the mists  
Of darkest reprographica
- \* I can't forget  
The day we met  
Preparing new materials  
The way your eyes  
Checked my supplies  
Was utterly ethereal

- Do you recall  
The upper hall  
Of maths invigilation  
Such pure delight  
On summer nights  
Surpassed examination
- No more the fun  
With staple gun  
While mounting class displays  
I can't go on,  
The magic's gone  
(in five and twenty ways)      Mike Kivi
- \* IP could investigate and/or comment on the unintended as well as the intended consequences of workplace reform

- Something from elsewhere
- Extracts from an American teacher's contract (1930s)
- “I promise to abstain from all dancing, immodest dressing, and any other conduct unbecoming a teacher and a lady.
- I promise not to fall in love, to become engaged or secretly married.
- I promise not to go out with any young men except in so far as it may be necessary to stimulate Sunday-School work
- I'll leave you to consider how IP might consider such issues !

# Thoughts to take away (from someone in semi-retirement and adapted from Robin Richardson)

- 1. Questions
- Never stop asking unanswerable questions through IP
- 2. Avoiding burnout
- You have a duty to take care of your self, and your self includes your body (for the body is not just that thing which carries your head around) and also your spirit (which is not just that strange place you sometimes visit, without being adequately consulted in your dreams)

- \* 3. Nothing ever finishes

Unfolding is endless. A millennium doesn't finish, nor does a culture, nor a project, nor a professional life, nor a love, nor a university, nor teacher education, nor a conference, nor a career in education, nor this organisation nor this talk.

\* Everything, everything everywhere is always unfini.....