

Ciaran Sugrue¹, Tone Dyrdal Solbrekke⁰

¹University College Dublin, Ireland, ²University of Oslo, Norway

Professional Accreditation in a Climate of 'Managerial' Accountability: Teacher Educators' Strategies, Accountability and Professional Responsibility? (0165)

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Outline/ Overview

The past two decades have borne witness to increasingly intensive political engagement for the purposes of improving teacher education and national audit systems have emerged to assure the public about the quality of college and university programs for professional educators. Sharing a concern about the increased global trends on standardising procedures the purpose of this paper is to:

- 1) Document succinctly the dominant discourse(s) in international/national policy rhetoric(s) on accreditation of initial teacher education against the backdrop of dominant global trends.
- 2) Identify the manner in which the dominant discourses are inscribed into policy and accreditation policy documents
- 3) Document the perspectives of key insider actors in teacher education and the strategies they deploy when navigating between the language, logics and tensions generated between accountability and professional responsibility
- 4) Discuss the implications of the strategies deployed and the manner in which 'legitimate compromises' may or may not be achieved between managerial accountability and professional responsibility.

There is scarcely one national context wherein initial teacher education is being criticised and reformed, as evidenced, for example, by the recent White Paper in England which sets the international context and tone by asserting that "what really matters is how we're doing compared with our international competitors" (Education, 2010, p. 3). Meantime, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in Dublin launched a document, the catalyst for which was Ireland's considerable drop down the PISA international league tables, particularly in Reading (OECD, 2010). This process culminated in the publication of a definitive plan to tackle literacy and numeracy (2011). It strongly suggests that Initial Teacher Education (ITE)

in relation to literacy and numeracy is inadequate. Simultaneously, the Teaching Council published a policy on the 'Teaching Continuum' (2011), and 'Criteria and Guidelines' for Initial Teacher Education (2011).

The Teaching Council, a statutory body (2006) about to take on significant powers with regard to teacher professional learning, has been accrediting initial teacher education programmes in the Irish context since 2010, and these seven reports on those programmes are published (www.teachingcouncil.ie).

This is the immediate context in which analysis in this paper is undertaken. However, the Irish case is situated within international policy reform discourses, influenced by the ideas of the neo-liberal rhetoric and practices of New Public Management (NPM) underlying much of current education policies. Yet, the discussion moves beyond more general critiques of globalisation, international competitiveness, continuous improvement etc, in pursuit of deeper insights into the manner in which international discourses are 'refracted' within teacher education policy.

Seeing teaching as a profession (Evetts 2003), we discuss current discourses in light of the traditional ideal of professionals; to serve both clients *and* the interests of society (Durkheim 2001; Parsons 1951,1968). In more recent times, this idea is recognised as the moral and political dimension of professionalism, characterised variously as 'social trustee professionalism' (Brint 1994), , 'civic professionalism' (Sullivan 2005) and 'critical professionalism'(Barnett 1997). Additionally, we use the concept of 'strategies' both 'coping' (Hargreaves, 1984)and 'survival'(Woods, 1984) , as analytical tools that enable us to undertake a micro-analysis of the logics, language and legitimacy of the dance of key teacher educators in 7 institutions as they negotiate professional accreditation externally and academic accreditation internally

Methodology

The empirical work will consist of detailed analyses of policy documents and the Teaching Council reports on 7 teacher education programmes (Primary and secondary) as phase one of a two-phased research design. The second phase will consist of in- depth semi-structured interviews with key insiders in these programmes to solicit, a) their perspectives on the process of accreditation by the Council teams, and b) their reactions to the commentary and recommendations in the reports, and their reactions to the Council's Guidelines and Criteria

for Initial Teacher Education (2011). The data from the interviews will be critically analysed in light of the discourses identified in the documents. Data will be discussed in light of contemporary teacher education literature (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Fairbanks et al, 2010; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Leonard et al 2010) and recent theoretical and empirical discussions regarding accountability and professional responsibility on professional responsibility (Sugrue & Solbrekke, 2011), while seeking also to identify the strategies deployed by these key actors. Data sources include-- current policy documents and accreditation reports (see references), individual in-depth and semi structured interviews with 7 key informants within each of eight teacher education programmes accredited.

Conclusions/ Expected Outcomes/ Findings

Based on initial analysis we anticipate that the evidence will indicate the strategies deployed by these key actors as boundary spanners between colleagues and institutional histories and trajectories as well as the external prescriptions determined by the accrediting agency—the teaching council. The evidence suggests that an important ‘coping’ strategy is the creation of multiple performance scripts as a means of re-presenting different faces to and for different audiences. While such strategies may be regarded as creative compliance, we speculate on the longer term consequences of such compromises and the possibility that managerial accountability in restricting as well as promoting multiple formation scripts may be inimical to professional responsibility, thus contributing to a hollowing out of professional responsibility, the quality of ITE programmes and ultimately the quality of teaching and learning in our schools.