Introduction

This contribution focuses on renewed interest in the way teacher professionalism is being contested and reconstructed in the changing context of civil society. The paper looks at the effects of social, economic and cultural change that challenge public and professional systems of accountability in so-called postindustrial society. Though policies designed to modernise education affect nation states in different ways we are witnessing significant congruence in their impact on teachers' work and the wider purposes of public education. At the same time it is acknowledged that these effects are paradoxical both in restricting and opening up new policy futures.

Two contrasting notions of the professional are explored. The first perceives teacher professionals as the subjects of external rules and constraints (structure) that restrict their room for manoeuvre and, the second, as active agents with the power to define their own sense of identity (agency) within the contradictions generated by market reform. Whilst both stereotypes ring true, this paper offers a less caricatured and potentially more relational view of the ways in which professional habitus is constructed through changing forms of pedagogy and practice (Bourdieu, 1977; 1998). The challenge for modern social democracy, according to Marquand (2000), is to both retrieve and reinvent the public domain in order to restrict unaccountable incursions of the market and to promote more reflexive forms of professionalism that find their legitimacy and expression in wider communities of practice within civil society.

In the present context education and public services worldwide face a period of continuous crisis and restructuring that demand new thinking beyond the limits of market and

* デニス・グリーソン論文の日本語訳は日本教育政策学会のホームページ http://wwwsoc.nii.ac.jp/jasep/に掲載する予定です。
managerial reform. The vision of expansion that accompanies lifelong learning, changes in childhood, family, work and lifestyle balance, health and social inclusion, involves forms of social reconstruction that require fundamental changes in the remaking of civil society. The scale of such change presents a massive challenge to education that question traditions and practices that place pedagogy and social justice at the heart of the public domain. The reasons for this are compelling as both old (bureau professional) and new (market based) public management regimes have failed to meet the changing needs of civil society. In times of rapid change the construction of new communities of practice that generate interagency, federated and networked learning -interconnecting education, health, community, family, childhood, law and employment (e.g. Every Child Matters) - are pressing the case for new forms of post market public provision. The question arises: what is the purpose of the professional in this process, if any?

Modernisation and Globalisation

Mass education from the middle of the last century has fulfilled a key role in advancing notions of the nation state and cultural homogeneity. At the same time recognition of diversity within contemporary states is challenging long standing notions about the insular status of the nation state as borders, boundaries and populations shift and change place. Following two major world wars, the collapse of the former communist state, ethnic conflict, the rise of religious fundamentalism, migration and refugee movement following internescine conflicts, have all served to question established conceptions of the nation state. All such developments alongside increasing globalisation and the growth of world trade zones have raised new challenges for education in terms of its public purpose in responding to fast changing social, economic and civil imperatives (Esland, 1996).

In many post industrial societies where both economic and natural resources are in decline investing in ‘human capital’ now constitutes a central platform of economic and education reform (Coleman, 1988). As governments increasingly articulate the rhetoric of a ‘knowledge economy’, traditional cultures, practices and organisational structures of teaching and learning are found to be in question. The drive to improve indicators of educational performance to ensure that teachers and other public sector workers are equipped and able to operate in rapidly changing professional environments is leading to
attempts to re-skill and re-culture teacher professionalism through workforce reform. The cornerstone of such reform is the increasing focus on the performance of schools, colleges and HE and the capacity of education leaders, inspection and audit regimes to measure that performance which, in turn, holds professionals directly accountable through rewards and sanctions. Though the idea of market performance and finance driven education is not new, there is an emerging global consensus that education is the key to future economic prosperity. The essence of this is captured in Bill Clinton’s (1992) observation that “…what we earn will depend on what we can learn and how well we can apply what we learn to the workplaces of America” … that later became enshrined in Tony Blair’s (1997), UK election mantra “…Education, Education, Education…” as the driving force of modernisation.

In Japan recent structural reform of education is aimed at revitalising the national economy in the aftermath of a collapsed ‘bubble economy’, scarce natural resources and the global threat of BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India and China) (Japan Business Federation, 2005). According to Fujita (2005), the proposed market reforms underpinning the policy agenda have less to do with improving the quality of education and more to do with cutting state subsidies to local authorities, the transfer of revenue sources and reforms to the block grant. If the rationale for deregulation advocated by the Koizumi’s Government is that it will make education more market sensitive, Nakajima (2006) discerns a deeper underlying purpose:

“Deregulation, as it is, does not mean lift-up of regulations imposed by the central and local governments in general. Rather it seeks to minimize those regulations imposed on economic activities of monopoly capital for the purpose of securing the basic human rights of people, those regulations without which the existence of disadvantaged social agencies would be severely threatened, as their activities are socially needed but difficult to appreciate in terms of market value. The aim of deregulation is to make a new social settlement based on a principle of competition”. (Nakajima, 2006, p.30)

Whilst the transition from Welfare State to New Public Sector management has been less virulent in France, Japan, Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Holland than in the USA, England, Australia and New Zealand, recent shifts to the right have accelerated the process of market reform. Most recently the ‘Nordic Model’ recognised for its success in balancing
economic growth with strong social democratic partnership development, has not been immune from the impact of neo-liberal reform. According to Hendriksson et al (2005):

"What is at stake in Finland is a loss of the pluralism of professional projects which was based on state-enhanced democratic professionalism and which emerged in the institutional matrix of the universalistic welfare state. In terms of the institutional conditions of professional projects, new public management has reintroduced the state-market divide into welfare service work". (Hendriksson et al 2006 pp 186)

Throughout the world governments have largely abandoned the belief that effective education systems can be run on the basis of consensus, trust and professional autonomy (Halsey et al, 1997). One of the basic assumptions is that public sector services, compared with the private sector, are bureaucratic, self serving, and characterised by inefficiency. In response, the introduction of quasi market reforms, based on private business systems, have been introduced to allow for the centralised micromanagement of education and other public services at local level. This involves sharply focused interventions and policies in which accountability, system development and outcomes are subjected to management at both the macro and micro-educational levels (Gleeson & Husbands, 2001).

At macro-educational levels state direction prescribes the operating environments for schools, colleges and Higher Education with increasing precision that includes recruitment and retention targets, prescribed curriculum, structured assessment regimes and outcome measures (test and examination results), all of which are increasingly centrally managed and data driven. At micro educational level governments exhibit growing interest in efficiency and effectiveness, achievement and attainment through direct interventions in pedagogy, professional and institutional management linked to workforce reform. Increasingly performance management acts as a policy device which binds together micro and macro forms of intervention which involve measured levels of teacher, pupil and school performance, connected to external inspection, funding, pay, staffing and resources. In this process of simultaneous devolution and control, teachers have become micro 'managed' to the point that their productivity can be measured locally against national standards in terms of the test results and examination performances of their students (Gunter, 2005).
Whilst the nature and implementation of quasi market and managerial reform varies between different countries, there are striking similarities in the way performance management has been used to attack the sources of teachers' collective strength, their unions and professional organisations (Thrupp, 2002). The view from below is that change from above does not necessarily compensate professionals for the loss of their professional autonomy, despite greater flexibility and decision making being granted at the level of the school. Evidence from a variety of studies indicates that the 'trade off' between the loss of professional discretion and an increase in institutional autonomy has had a largely negative effect on teacher morale (Thrupp & Ball, 2000; Ozga, 2000; Troman, 2000).

One explanation of such negativity is that it results from the relative newness of the reform process that with time, improved teacher education and better leadership, will rectify such anomalies in due course. Wider research reveals, however, that neo-liberal market reform has intensified differences between schooling and levels of achievement by reinforcing rather than challenging social class divisions through forms of market competition that produces 'winners and losers' (Ball, 2003). At the same time education is becoming increasingly exposed to private-public partnership agreements, consumer and public choice agendas which privilege business and commercial interventions in the governance, sponsorship and running of schools. According to Marginson, this becomes a self-fulfilling process:

"The growing resort to company sponsorship and 'user payments' increases the market component of education. In turn this increases the degree to which education fosters rivalry and exclusion, and selection at the expense of the academic and the democratic". (Marginson, 1993, p. 171)

Thus behind government rhetoric associated with raising levels of efficiency, achievement and attainment through the market, there are also strong economic and commercial interests in play. Some of these relate to the global impact of various world trade agreements that a majority of national governments are signed up to (Avis et al, 1996). These agreements are designed to liberalise the free trade of goods and services on market and commercial principles. As governments worldwide seek to modernise their cash strapped education and public sector infrastructures through borrowing, in line with General Agreements on Trade
[GATs], the terms and conditions of their loans and development plans are scrutinised on the basis that they conform to stringent market criteria (World Trade Organisation; World, Bank). This involves evidence of market testing, business auditing systems, privatisation and the delivery of public services that are tied into loans and borrowing contracts. As a consequence the political economy behind national policies of modernisation are beginning to reveal cracks in the balance of power between the centre and the local domains in liberal democracies (e.g. the UK, Finland, Denmark, Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) that hitherto resisted the encroachment of neo-liberal market reform (Esland, 1996). Whilst GATs and global agreements on trade may appear some distance from the classroom, the political-economy footprint is strongly in evidence (Halsey et al, 1997). The increasing opening up of secondary education in England to commercial and business sponsorship in the running of independent state schools (Academies), indicates a trend that is increasingly testing the accountability and governance of public policy that social democratic education once served. As a consequence new questions are being asked about the purpose of public education and what function professionals serve in its reconfiguration (Helsby, 1999).

In response to this question old solutions directed to new challenges on lines of 'more of the same' are clearly no longer viable (Ball, 2003). At the same time there is growing recognition that market and managerial reform represent weak mechanisms of civil renewal. Paradoxically neo-liberal reform in its failure to address the intersection between 'private and public issues' has drawn attention to its limitations as well as those longstanding inequalities that predate market intervention (Wright-Mills, 1968). Ironically, market failure associated with the centralised regulation of devolved services (schools, clinics, hospitals, health services) has stimulated new 'post market' questions about how a more networked society might operate in providing improved education and public services for all. This, coupled with post industrial changes in work, organisation and gender; family, lifestyle and consumption are reshaping people's agency and relationships, thereby stimulating public demand for new ways of organising the public and private spheres of civil society. As such issues of public choice, user engagement and social partnerships do not operate in isolation. The market, in this respect, is open to question and contestation in contexts of community demand where municipal and 'new' neo-liberal solutions are seen to
be in conflict (Clarke & Newman, 2006). Similarly, teacher professionalism is not a separate cognitive activity cut off from wider society of which modernisation is a part. Inevitable processes of de-professionalisation and professional reconstruction operate in a continuous process of mediation, invention and intervention. The notion that professionals are either passive victims or free agents in this process is a misnomer. Rather the key question concerns how professionalism is constructed and ‘gets done’ in real world situations in contexts where the market, public accountability and civic society operate in conditions of increasing tension? In addressing this question the section which follows examines some of the contested policy-practice issues involved in the making and taking of professionalism (Gleeson et al, 2005).

**Professionalism re-configured?**

Whilst neo-liberal reform has focused attention on outcomes that can be measured on national indicators of performance, the market mechanisms that underpin such positivism is an illusion. In reality there is no such thing as ‘the market’ but a series of markets that act as pulleys and levers designed to alter institutional behaviour and challenge collective action (Gleeson & Keep, 2004). Current fascination with market modelling through the introduction of targets, performance management and audit mechanisms is not only based on a crude understanding of how business works but it also reflects a ‘cringe culture’ on the part of governments toward big business that privileges its rights of access to run public services (Caulkin, 2006). Of itself the market is not an innovative process and has no purpose other than regulating and controlling conditions in which ‘winners and losers’ operate. At one level performance measures act as a powerful influence on institutional and individual behaviour through, for example, linking pay, performance, funding and resources to student recruitment, achievement, test and examination results. At another, however, such measures have little impact on improving the actual quality of teaching, learning and creativity in the classroom. According to Thrupp (2002) this is explained by the impact of narrow forms of instrumentalism that underpin a culture of mistrust:

“Strongly influenced by discourses of economics, education accountability has shifted away from a focus on inputs and processes and onto a focus on outcomes and products. Increasingly, schools have become commercialised, functioning more like small businesses and less as institutions with an educational mission”. (Thrupp, 2002, p.3)
If the fatal attraction of targets is their simplicity in instrumentalising standards, the danger is that they become the rationale of the system at the expense of wider pedagogic goals. This not only has a narrowing effect on learning but it can also redefine teaching and learning as a contractual arrangement designed to increase credentialism at the expense of real learning. Some of the consequences of this are plain to see among students learning to pass tests, e.g. in maths, that meet teacher and school targets, but reflect little understanding of the underlying knowledge processes involved. Other examples include hospitals seeking to cut waiting lists by performing easier rather than more difficult operations, or schools excluding pupils with learning difficulties in order to keep league tables respectable. In other cases this has led to teachers altering students’ marks to improve their own performance. In relation to the UK’s Higher Education Research Assessment Exercise, Caulkin (2006) comments on the lengths universities are prepared to go to improve their scores in a competitive HE marketplace.

“Because funding and student applications depend on research and teaching ratings, universities go to great lengths to improve their scores. Even though the next Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) is two years off, institutions are already drafting submissions, conducting mock inspections, hiring consultants to coach (or hide) weaker departments and individuals, and setting up PR and marketing campaigns to spin results. Before the cut-off date in 2007 a buzzing transfer market in star researchers is ratcheting up overall costs for no additional gain in quantity or quality”. (Caulkin, 2006)

Despite its professed dedication to raising institutional standards through market competition, neo-liberal reform operates on command and control principles that demand compliance in the prescription and measurement of knowledge. It has little to with its construction or invention. One consequence of this phoney market is that far from improving teaching, learning and public choice, it strengthens the conditions that control innovation. According to Caulkin (2006) the appeal of targets is that they manage to simultaneously impose oppressive controls on people whilst, at the same time, lose control of the system. Paradoxically revelations by government audit and inspection authorities confirm this view providing evidence of institutions failing to meet their targets. Invariably however it is teachers, parents, students and heads that are held to account for such apparent
'failure' rather than the market or the targets involved (Gleeson & Husbands, 2001).

As the ethos of schooling shifts from a public to a private process the nature of schooling and teachers work - as part of community and civil society - stretches social understanding of its purpose. Inevitably this shift exposes the politicisation of education which 'strips out the meaning' of teacher professionalism (Ozga, 2000, p.355) from its public mandate and legitimates the need to restructure teachers work on grounds that they are 'part of the problem'. According to Gunter (2005) the process of workforce reform and remodelling does not begin with the nature of teaching and learning and how to improve pedagogy. Rather it seeks to sedate teachers into making externally determined changes in their work.

"A danger of re-modelling is that it is just that, a 'do it yourself' makeover, where the surface fabric looks different but underneath the structural issues of having to do work that does not make sense to students or to teachers continues. While a teacher may have a lap top and may be able to access lesson plans from the internet, and may have an assistant to do photocopying, this does not necessarily mean that student learning and achievement is improved. This is largely because there is no conceptual link between the speeding up of ready made resources and actual pedagogic practice with learning'. (Gunter, 2005, p15)

If one effect of this process has been to turn professionals into managers of learning, another is that it redefines the nature of teachers work in prescriptive terms. This not only alters the relationship between teachers and the state but it also signals their change in status from trusted professionals to licensed practitioners. At the heart of this process is the curtailment of teachers’ discretion over their work and measures that meet continuing demands for greater efficiency and productivity. Whilst this process is designed to raise standards of achievement in a competitive global economy, the danger is that the progress being made has the opposite effect in alienating the teachers and students involved. In the view of a former Chief Inspector of schools restoring the morale and professionalism of teachers is the main priority of future reforms.

"This must be an essential key to improving public services. They (teachers) are hidebound with bureaucracy, externally set targets and naming and shaming. We need to look at ways of allowing teachers to become creative again”. (Perry, quoted in
Embracing such a proposal is neither clear cut nor straightforward as it appears. Bureaucracy is not per se the primary cause of the problem to which Perry refers. Rather it is a symptom of the ways through which neo-liberal reform has captured public systems of public administration and democratic accountability via market levers and managerial technologies. The issue is not then one of abandoning audit, inspection or performance cultures, but rather addressing who such systems are for and accountable to in a democratic society. Simply getting rid of bureaucracy and targets alone, or granting schools greater autonomy to determine their destinies, ignores wider questions of power and accountability in terms of who is setting the standards, and how trust works in a knowledge based economy. Evetts (2005) argues that this draws attention to some classical questions in sociology about societal mechanisms of social order and control, including ‘...how and in what ways the discourse of professionalism is being used (by states, by employers and managers, and by some relatively powerful occupational groups themselves) as an instrument of occupational change (including resistance to change) and social control’ (Evetts, 2005, p.15). In addressing these issues the section which follows returns to relational aspects of agency and structure in constructing professionalism in the wider context of civil society (Whitty, 2002).

**Contested Futures: professionalism in civil society**

Whilst the previous analysis has accentuated the hegemonic effects of modernisation on professionalism, the process is by no means uncontested or clear cut. Research emphasising the deprofessionalising tendencies associated with performance management often exaggerate the power of structure over agency in the way professionals respond to tensions in the workplace. Recent research evidence shows that professionals do not necessarily act passively in mediating tensions or contradictions in their work, and are resilient in adopting strategies to maintain their sense of autonomy and professionalism, often against the odds (Stronach et al, 2002). This is not simply a reiteration of the way professionalism is often portrayed as being constructed from below as much as from above. Rather it embraces recognition of the unintended ways in which market reform changes the boundaries of professional knowledge by challenging occupational standards and re-shaping the
workplace - thereby exposing broader articulations of power, identity and knowledge to greater public scrutiny (Ranson, 2003).

The paradox of market reform is that despite its many failures to modernise and improve the delivery of public services some of its ideological underpinnings - deregulation, diversity, devolution and public choice - have drawn attention to the structure and creative practices that define the parameters of contestation and struggle around markets at local level. One such example is the way in which different forms of professional identity are constructed through conflict within the spaces and contradictions of everyday education practice, rather than from the formal requirements of external sources of government, policy makers or major corporations. As key elements of managerialism and performance management come into question, evidence of professionals resistance toward centrally imposed targets, through non-compliance, trade offs, resistance and underground working practices is increasingly in evidence (Gleeson, 2001). Such practices, often associated with collective action, shared narratives, peer learning, cooperative and inclusive working arrangements, operate mainly through informal networks that are often hidden from view. Whilst official discourses of professionalism stress the formal significance of skills, qualifications and competencies, they largely ignore the ways in professional knowledge and identity is constructed invisibly through micro political cultures in the education workplace (Gleeson & Knights, 2006). Widespread professional disbelief in disembodied measures of performance management adds to the intriguing question as to whether neoliber al reform has had the unintended effect of reconfiguring new cultures of professionalism as practitioners seek to reconstruct or restory their identities in and against the audit culture (Stronach et al, 2002; Ranson, 2003).

Whilst different permutations of professionalism offer insight into how diverse cultures of practice arise, they remain largely framed by low trust forms of control and accountability. At the same time, however, professionalism is not a fixed but a fast changing process best understood in the contexts and cultures which shape its practice. The argument so far is that marketisation has had paradoxical effects in attracting critical attention to its creative and restrictive elements whilst, at the same time, generating new conditions in which professional identities are being constructed beyond the market and often in response to
managerialism and mismanagement. If the dominant influence has been recognition of the failure of the market, the question arises: what follows?

In addressing this question there is evidence that forms of performance management that dwell on past and present performance produce defensive learning cultures that restrict innovative thinking among students and teachers (Smyth and Shacklock, 1998). A more productive approach is to focus on the future by exploring issues relating to how key stakeholders (parents, students, professionals and community) can fill the pedagogic void left by neo-liberal reform. Quoting evidence of a recent case study research Gunter (2005) argues that when schools begin to focus more on the nature and purpose of learning, with teachers taking more responsibility for the standards involved, this impacts significantly on school improvement and the nature of teacher’s professional motivation. As professionals become more aware of alternative interpretations and reworkings of democratic professionalism (sharing, co-operation, inclusivity, interagency practice) this encourages new ways of thinking about winning back control of the teaching and learning process. This is not a process driven primarily by structural constraints but through a discourse of professional authority grounded in greater participation of professionals working together, often across sectoral boundaries, in reaching collective decisions around common problems (Smyth & Shacklock, 1998).

At the same time the reflexivity through which professionals intervene to recapture a more critical sense of pedagogy and professionalism is not a clear cut process. Reflexivity is a risky process when conducted in isolation. Yet, many of the key issues confronting professionalism today already operate in risky conditions of conflict and struggle rather than consensus and trust. From the analysis so far it is apparent that one effect of market reform has been to divert considerable professional energy away from its core pedagogic purpose. Another has been to accord the market with a mythical status of improving teaching and learning that has proved elusive and, at the same time, open to challenge.

Conclusion

In addressing the contested nature of professionalism this paper has given weight to professionalism as a lived experience at the interface between neo-liberal reform and civic
society. In this respect professionals have a significant role to play in mediating pedagogy, policy and practice at the interface of citizen, state and society. As others have argued the professional imagination is more likely to find its authentic expression through pedagogy and supportive forms of democratic governance than from the dead hand of self serving audit and managerial cultures (Avis et al, 1996). This imagination not only requires a process of personal transformation but also new forms of association within which citizens rights in education policy can be reasserted against restricted visions of the state and a marketised society (Whitty, 2002).

Promoting more inclusive professional cultures alone are unlikely to succeed in the absence of wider changes in the distributive policies adopted by government and the state. New solutions are required that will transform the market machinery of performance management in favour of a more public vision of the purposes of pedagogy and professionalism in anticipation that this might shift the policy making agenda - and that both government and professionals are up to the challenge (Gleeson & Husbands, 2001). By reminding ourselves that professionalism does not just operate in a context but also as a social practice draws attention to its civic embodiment in a more vibrant democratic society (Gleeson & Knights, 2006). Where professionals are able to intervene in a wider public discourse about standards of learning and pedagogy in civil society, the innovative possibilities of them taking a lead in a knowledge economy may yet become a possibility.

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