

## EDUCATIONAL PROFESSIONALISM IN AN AGE OF UNCERTAINTY: THE EMERGENCE OF *ECLECTIC* & *PRAGMATIC* TEACHER IDENTITIES\*

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### *Introduction*

This paper, which is partly theoretical and partly empirical in character, explores recent changes in the professional status and identity of teachers and headteachers working in UK schools. It is written in two parts. *Part 1*, which is mostly descriptive and analytical, briefly discusses aspects of the history of teacher professionalism in the UK over the past fifty years, indicating how conceptions of what it means to be an educational professional have undergone shifts of meaning in response to Government-mandated school reforms.

Drawing on a recently concluded research study, *Part 2* illuminates this earlier discussion, reflecting on the ways in which a small sample of teachers and school leaders are repositioning themselves in the face of changed circumstances, leading them to become increasingly *eclectic* and *pragmatic* in their professional philosophies and practice. The paper concludes by briefly speculating on the implications of these developments for a reconstituted 'democratic' teacher-professionalism.

### I. *Changes in Teacher-State Relations*

Other papers presented at this symposium have described and commented on the effects on teachers' work of recent educational reform in a variety of national contexts. In each of these contexts, with varying degrees of emphasis and inflection, new forms of strong devolved public management at the level of the school have been introduced alongside a reinvigorated control by the state of the school curriculum, and teachers' work generally, reinforced in many cases by external inspection. In a pre-symposium position paper, Kudomi (2005) theorises this trend in public education school reform in Japan in terms that draw attention to the ways in

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which a previously highly autonomous and trusted teaching profession has become increasingly subjected to and regulated by various kinds of evaluative management.

### Comparisons and commonalities

A specific contribution to this symposium, also led-authored by Kudomi, this time based directly upon questionnaire data collected from samples of teachers working in Japan and four other countries — United Kingdom, Sweden, United States of America and South Korea — describes the effects of these developments comparatively in terms that draw attention to specific but generalizable pan-national changes in the labour process of teaching alongside particular adjustments to its occupational culture. These changes and adjustments are creating a different kind of teacher, whose role is far more pronounced than hitherto — expectations and out-put controls are greater, for example, with working conditions more intensive and exhausting, while professional practice generally is more and more subject to surveillance, both from within and without the school, and thus heavily circumscribed as a result.

Comparative analysis of this sort, of course, is not a straightforward matter. In *Devolution and Choice in Education*, a book which examines sociologically the sorts of school reforms being discussed here, and which one of us helped to write a few years ago with Sally Power and another of this symposium's presenters, Geoff Whitty, a cautionary word is offered up about undertaking it: "Any cross-national discussion of educational restructuring needs to bear in mind a wide range of variance. Educational reform is being conducted within contexts with different histories, different constitutional and administrative arrangements and different political complexions. Moreover, the nature and extent of devolution, and the ways in which policies are interconnected, vary within and between countries" (Whitty, et al, 1998, p.35.)

However, almost immediately in the same book, we remark that, "while such variance needs to be acknowledged, it should not obscure the common factors". On the contrary, there exists, we argue, "considerable congruence in [such] policies . . . . It is the neo-liberal alternative which dominates, as does a particular emphasis on market-type mechanisms. This decentralization via the market is also articulated with justifications of quality and efficiency, drawing on the discourse of the new public management with its emphasis on strong school management and external scrutiny — made possible by the development of performance indicators and competency-based assessment procedures" (*ibid*).

Although those words were written over eight years ago, nothing that has happened on the school reform front since 1998 in our country, England, or indeed in the others being discussed at this symposium, leads us to want fundamentally to change any of them. To be sure, the rampant neo-liberalism reflected in education reform measures prior to the election in 1997 in the UK of a Labour Government is less visible today. But the continuities with the previous Conservative Government's priorities and policies are writ-large, notwithstanding Labour's different desire to increase educational opportunity and achievement for the many rather than the few (Power & Whitty, 1999).

### Teachers and the evaluative state

The role played by the state in this process cannot, then, go unacknowledged; nor must it be under-stressed. In *Devolution and Choice in Education*, which is significantly sub-titled, *The*

*School, the State and the Market*, we theorise the various ways in which the UK state has pioneered, often using accompanying legislation, specific reforms for schools that privilege non-educational constituencies of interest, notably business sponsors and parents, at the expense of teachers' professional perspectives. Drawing on Gamble's (1988) 'strong state' and 'free economy' thesis, we conclude that "bureaucratically provided welfare [in education and elsewhere in the UK] is being replaced by welfare distributed through quasi-markets" (pp. 35f).

Relatedly, we use Neave's (1988) concept of the 'evaluative state' to interpret the way in which Gamble's articulation is leading to a fundamental change in the nature of educational reform, which in the UK is now underpinned by a significant redistribution of functions between centre and periphery, entailing the state forcibly 'steering from a distance', often through intermediate agencies and the utilisation of regimes of assessment, monitoring and inspection. The effects at the level of the school of all of this, we argue, are plain to see: "Schools [now] have to develop new modes of response which require new structures and patterns of authority. In particular, it seems to encourage strong goal-oriented leadership at the institutional level, involving a shift from the traditional collegial model to that of the 'chief executive', and the growing importance of 'senior management teams' or 'cabinets' in schools" (1998, p.37)

In forcibly 'steering from a distance', the UK state has sought to contain, domesticate even, England's publicly-funded schools and the teachers who work in them. This is not the first occasion it has tried to do this. As Grace (1987) reminds us, for the past fifty years and more, the British state has periodically sought to redefine the work of its schools and teachers, including what it means to be an educational 'professional'. Indeed, Grace tells us, the whole story of teacher-state relations in Britain may be interpreted as a "dynamic historical process in which the balance of forces . . . change . . . as new alliances are formed and new 'educational settlements' created" (p.195).

### **A loss of trust**

According to Grace, the expansionism and affluence of the 1950s and 1960s in Britain, together with a shortage of teachers, warranted a 'legitimated teacher professionalism' (that is, one recognized by Government), with teachers distanced from formal control, and enjoying a considerable measure of freedom and autonomy, as well as improved status and working conditions. This 'settlement' (says Grace) "implicitly involved an understanding that teachers would keep to their proper sphere of activity within the classroom and the educational system, and the state, for its part, would grant them a measure of trust, a measure of material reward and occupational security, and a measure of professional dignity" (p.208).

The changed times of the 1970s and 1980s in the UK, which included crucially a period of economic recession — low growth rate, decline in profitability, rising unemployment, balance of payment deficits — realised new conceptions of the teacher's role, buttressed by ideologically inspired Rightist criticisms of schools and education workers. Education was cast by the then Conservative Government and its supporters as the culprit for the UK's economic failures; while teachers were accused in particular of being anti-business, incompetent, trendy and, occasionally, like some of their pupils, 'out of control'.

The state took revenge, clawing back its control, reducing the status of the teaching

profession, as well as redefining, without consultation, the concept of the ‘good’ teacher. Accordingly, the primary school teacher was expected to have subject knowledge, to ‘deliver’ a centrally prescribed National Curriculum, and to possess a whole range of new assessment and managerial skills. Overlaying all of these developments was an implicit reassertion of the ‘correctness’ of ‘traditional’ teaching techniques — whole class instruction and memorisation, notably — alongside an explicit condemnation of ‘progressive’ forms of pedagogy, especially those that gave pupils some say in the pace, direction and content of their learning. This major shift in the power-differential of teacher-state relations in Britain, involved (to use Grace’s words again) “a steady reassertion of central and visible control over state schooling, and a steady erosion of teachers’ professional autonomy” (p.217).

And this specific kind of erosion is the crucial aspect here. It is not that having, for example, a prescribed national curriculum and an associated regime of assessment are, by definition ‘bad’ things; or that holding schools publicly to account better for their work and achievements is ‘wrong’ in itself. Rather, what has been retrogressive is the overbearing manner in which these reforms were first introduced and then implemented in the UK, not to mention their aggressive economies of performance which made a virtue of overlooking professional ecologies of practice (Stronach, et al, 2002). Similar to the sentiments of the Director of the Board of Shinagawa Ward in Tokyo, which are reported in Kudomi (2005, p. 4), teachers in England, since the 1980s, have been implicitly defined by successive Governments and their surrogates as “untrustworthy people”, a label which has justified different Education Secretaries largely ignoring or marginalizing their professional interests.

### **A bigger picture: the social revolutions of our time**

But this is not the whole story. For, while it is clear that the state is *the* locus of power and control in these matters, the mode in which it mediates this power and control alters in relation to changes underway in the wider social formation, over which it — the state — may have only partial and indirect mastery. That is to say, while teacher-professionalism is, for sure, redefined periodically by the state, the state itself, and its teachers also, are constrained and influenced by social trends and tendencies in the contemporary world that, willy-nilly, are associated with and have leverage over what they do.

Some of these trends have economic characteristics (globalization, for example); others are existential and ethical (post-traditionalism, for example). To understand better the context in which teachers presently are actively redefining themselves professionally, and the rationale underpinning government efforts to compel them to undertake this process in a particular way and with specific effects, we need therefore to theorize contemporary life in order to develop an informed view of how the ‘new times’ in which both governed and government operate articulate with policies, actions and attitudes.

While no one denies that, today, we live and work in contexts of complex and rapid social change, there remains the question of how these ‘new times’ should be characterised. One answer to this question is provided by the British sociologist, Anthony Giddens, whose work identifies the deep structures of our times as well as suggesting ways of moving beyond the many political and moral dilemmas that arise from them.

In a succession of publications (1991, 1992, 1994), Giddens has identified a number of ‘fundamental transformations’ underway in high modern industrialised societies. Two of these

are especially relevant to this discussion. The first is the *growth of a globalized world economy*, whose activities make it increasingly difficult for governments substantially to manage national economies within their sovereign boundaries, but which also (and this is the crucial matter here) help reconfigure people's day-to-day activities, including local and personal life-styles.

The second is to do with the *emergence of a new individualism* in which people, in retreat from custom and tradition, are compelled to constitute themselves in their own terms, undertaking 'everyday experiments' involving a multiplicity of changes and adaptations in daily life. In following these processes through, individuals (which, of course, include teachers and agents of government) are confronted not only by a variety of ways of doing things, but by a host of uncertainties about what counts as the 'correct' way of doing them. A key aspect of this specific process for all concerned is the search for a teacher-professional identity that makes sense as teachers and the rest of us seek to come to terms with and live and work purposively within a modern society that is more ramified than any other in human history.

This process is inevitably conflictual, given the desire by modern governments to think of schooling and teaching in a particular way — a way that largely serves its political and economic interests — and the wish of teachers to navigate a professional course that is significantly of their own making, and certainly not overly constrained by state interference. How a group of teachers and school leaders is undertaking this manoeuvring process, and with what consequences and implications, is the focus of the next part of this paper, the conclusions of which will be informed by the theoretical discussion entered into so far.

## II. *Pragmatism and Teacher Professionalism*

The research outlined and discussed in this section arose out of a study entitled *Pedagogic Identities and the Consumption of Tradition*, which we undertook, with funding from the Economic and Social Research Council of Great Britain (reference R000237640), in partnership with Gwyn Edwards and Rosalyn George, between September 1998 and March 2001. The study examined the impact on school teachers' and school leaders' practices and perceptions — including, centrally, their perceptions of self — of the interplay between state-driven reform, societal change, and personal and local philosophies of education.<sup>1</sup>

The study complements others with similar purposes, each undertaken in the UK prior to our own. Pollard and his colleagues (1994), for example, identified five kinds of professional response among primary school teachers to the emergence of a more explicitly market-oriented system of state schooling and the introduction of greater centralised prescription on the content of the curriculum, ranging from 'compliance' at one extreme to 'resistance' at the other. Between these two positions, teachers' responses entail a *strategic mix* of 'incorporation', 'mediation' and 'retreatism', which in all cases, the last excepted, involve various creative rather than explicitly negative responses to change. Webb and Vulliamy (1996) reached similar conclusions, drawing special attention to the fact that many of the primary teachers in their study use the same school reforms to develop their practice in new and positive directions. On

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<sup>1</sup> The discussion which makes up most of the rest of this part of the paper is based upon two previously published articles, each jointly-authored by the research team — Moore, Edwards, Halpin & George (2002) and Moore, George & Halpin (2002). As the order of authors indicates, it was Alex Moore who took the lead in writing these articles, including the analysis of data they contain.

the other hand, Woods' research team (1997) portrayed a largely disenchanting workforce overwhelmed by the new climate. Analogous findings are reflected in Grace's (1995) research on the changing nature of English secondary school headship in the period 1990-94 which identifies three "broad ideal-type" responses to recent school reforms — 'managerial', 'distancing' and 'resisting'.

All of these influential studies throw into sharp relief how teachers' and school leaders' practical responses to, and perspectives about, recent educational reform are neither straightforward nor stereo-typical, but rather complex, varied and, on occasion, even seemingly inconsistent. One of the intentions in undertaking our research, then, was to build on the findings of these earlier studies and illuminate further their respective analyses. In doing so, we were reminded continuously of Grace's observation, made over twenty years ago, that "we know relatively little about how contemporary teachers experience their work situation; what constructs they hold of knowledge, ability and the educational process; what professional perspectives or ideologies inform their practice; how they accept, resist or negotiate the prevailing order of the school; of their consciousness of autonomy and of constraint; or how they view the activity of teaching in an urban working-class school" (1978, p.105).

Another overarching intention behind our research was to construct its research design from an explicitly theoretical starting point centred on the hypothesized *role played by tradition in the process of professional identity-construction*. This focus was informed by recently published social-theoretical analyses (notably Heelas, Lash and Moros, 1996, and Giddens, 1994) which delineate, using the related leitmotifs of 'detraditionalization' and 'post-traditionalism', a new meta-language for understanding the complex relations prevailing between changes currently taking place in the broader social formation and adjustments concurrently underway at the micro-institutional level of personal and professional identity.

The nature of our indebtedness to this and other pertinent scholarship is outlined in another paper (Halpin, et al, 2000). There we state that "tradition, in the education context and generally . . . is constituted by particular sets of practices". We also observe that tradition is "a mode of understanding the importance and worth of these practices as well as the medium by which they are shaped and transmitted across the generations". Understood in this way, tradition is "one means through which continuity is conferred upon experience, and whereby the past is able to speak to the present". Traditions also "crystallise around the history and culture of particular institutions or groups in society (schools and teachers, to be sure, but many others as well) and are crucial to both moral deliberation and action, and to the manner in which allegiance is related to authority". Consequentially, we conclude, they "provide some of the most significant symbolic materials for the formation of identity, both at the individual and collective level . . ." . To that extent, following Carr and Hartnett's (1996) portrayal of tradition, we see tradition as providing not only "a framework within which ideals, policies and practices and changes are implemented . . . (but also) "languages, vocabularies and political repertoires which make possible new ways of thinking and act as boundaries beyond which it is dangerous to go" (p.107).

Halpin et al (2000) also draws attention to some especially important theoretical insights developed by Bernstein (1996) which highlight specific identity-related tensions thrown up by the various competing forces currently impacting on teachers' work (notably forms of de-regulation and marketization at the institutional level and increasing curriculum and pedagogic prescription and surveillance at the level of the classroom), one of which entails a

conjectured “dislocation between the culture of the pedagogic discourse (whereby teachers seek to do what is essentially ‘right’ for their students) and the management culture which has become the device for creating an entrepreneurial competitive culture” (Bernstein, 1996, p. 75). This kind of analysis encouraged us to reflect on the extent to which these apparently competing cultures are able to *co-exist* in ways that contribute to the formation of new pedagogical and educational identities, and whether and to what degree teachers and school leaders feel confusion or conflict as a result.

Data for the study were drawn from nine contrasting state-funded schools across the 5-18 age-range located in different parts of Greater London — specifically, 1 infant, 1 primary, 1 middle and 6 secondary schools. The schools were selected on the basis of their having undergone some major redevelopment in the two or three years immediately preceding the start of the project. These changes were diverse, including: successfully achieving specialist status; appointing a new headteacher; becoming significantly more popular locally in terms of target numbers; and introducing radically new whole-school policies. Fieldwork in these schools consisted of three kinds of activity: initially, *conducting audio-recorded semi-structured interviews* on a one-to-one basis with a cross section of their staffs (n=66), including in each case the headteacher (n=9), and, subsequently, towards the end of the project, undertaking a series of follow-up audio-recorded *focus group interviews* (n=11, implicating 38 respondents) with one or more sets of staff in each school; *informal observation* within each school, including attending special school events such as prize-givings and parents evenings; and collecting and collating *public documentation* from each school, including web-pages and prospectuses, official inspection reports and whole-school policy documents.

The one-to-one *teacher* interviews were organised around a schedule of questions that asked respondents to say why they had first become a teacher; how they viewed their careers so far and saw them unfolding; how they characterised their personal philosophy of education and the influences on its formation. We also sought their views on four specific sensitive aspects of school policy — the need for schools to prescribe what pupils should wear; the most appropriate form of pupil grouping for teaching and learning; the legitimate extent and exercise of authority in school; and what counts as the ‘basics’ in education. Finally, we wanted to learn about how these teachers felt about particular government-sponsored educational reforms, in particular the National Curriculum and its associated regime of testing and, in the case of respondents working in primary and middle schools, the literacy hour and target setting generally. The intention behind asking these questions was to examine indirectly the role played today by tradition in the construction of teachers’ pedagogic identities.

The one-to-one interviews with the *headteachers*, which were undertaken on the same basis, followed a similar pattern of questioning, though issues specific to their role were pursued, including what had brought them into headship in the first place and how they thought schools today should be managed and led. In both sets of interviews — that is, with the teachers *and* with the headteachers — we asked how far each respondent was able to identify him or herself professionally in terms of being a ‘traditionalist’ or a ‘progressive’.

Besides providing an opportunity to give interim feedback to each of the schools in our sample, the *focus-group interviews* allowed us to follow up issues that had emerged after undertaking preliminary analysis of the data obtained from the one-to-one interviews. Although it was not always possible to involve all the teachers we had previously interviewed in this activity — a number for example had moved to other schools since we first began the

research — a significant proportion were able to participate. These interviews, also audio-recorded, were organised around a number of themes, to which were attached the following general questions: Do you individually have a sense that you have changed in the way you think of yourself in terms of your function and professional identity as a teacher? Has your personal vision for education been strengthened, or weakened or both through recent increases and developments in external pressures of one kind or another? Do you tend to work more ‘within the system’ than previously — that is, doing your best within its constraints rather than questioning the wider social and educational systems?

The analysis discussed here, which is based upon fragments of our interview data, identifies ways in which teachers and school leaders perceive and experience their work in the light of conflicting views as to what constitutes good educational practice. In particular, it considers the extent to which teachers and school leaders in the UK may be becoming more consciously and deliberately *eclectic* and *pragmatic* than previously, and less obviously *ideological* or *political* in the construction of their professional identities.

### **Eclectic and pragmatic**

The selection of the terms ‘eclectic’ and ‘pragmatic’ to describe both teachers’ and school leaders’ practice and the ways in which they identify themselves professionally arose out of a principled and early rejection of two other terms — ‘compliant’ and ‘resistant’ — that feature strongly in other people’s research in the same area as ours. We employed these terms by way of recognising that some teachers and school leaders came across in interview as significantly oppositional to public policy, while others seemed generally content, albeit sometimes grudgingly, to put into practice whatever was imposed upon them. The categorisations ‘compliant’ and ‘resistant’, we felt, did insufficient justice to this wider and more complex range of professional positionings.

A more helpful way of categorising our respondents’ professional identifications, indeed one strengthened by virtue of the fact that the categories were suggested, unprompted, by several of them, was in terms of *eclecticism* and *pragmatism*. The central reason for this was that, while very few of the teachers and school leaders we interviewed openly declared themselves as either wholesale supporters or wholesale rejecters of government reforms in education, almost all of them talked of the ways in which they had modified previous practice to bring it in line with current policy, or had found ways of incorporating current policy into a largely unaltered continuing practice. In arriving at such accommodations, these teachers and leaders had clearly been involved in making selections or *reselections* from a range of educational traditions, and they had been making those selections partly as a matter of achieving preferred pedagogic identities, but partly also in a spirit of compromise — in some instances more willingly entered into than in others — in which preferred pedagogies were perceived as under threat.

In our scheme of things, the term ‘eclectic’ then is used to describe the extent to which teachers and school leaders make choices from a wide range of educational traditions, philosophies, theories and practices available to them — choices that more often than not result in a pedagogical identity that is inflected in a variety of directions, not all of which articulate in any straightforward way, either philosophically or ideologically. So, while in the past, for instance, we might have expected teachers who opposed school uniform to be equally



opposed to setting students according to notions of ability, and to favour student-centred over front-of-class teaching — in each case, perhaps, on the same ideological grounds of egalitarianism — our interviews demonstrated that no such assumptions could now be made, and that today's teachers would often support school uniform (for example) while opposing academic setting, or would happily mix student-centred classroom activity with substantial amounts of front-of-class teaching.

The term 'pragmatic', on the other hand, is used to define the *rationales* behind the eclectic selections that teachers and school leaders make. Why, for example, did different teachers favour or oppose school uniform, mixed-ability teaching, or certain forms of classroom practice and organisation? Why were some school leaders generally in favour of recent government reforms in education, others generally oppositional to them, and others ambivalent towards them? What accounted for apparent ideological contradictions in the choices that some of these teachers and school leaders were making? And to what extent was the eclecticism of some teachers entered into more proactively and positively than that of others?

In developing our thinking about teacher eclecticism and pragmatism, and in subsequently considering the implications of teachers consciously and deliberately identifying themselves professionally through the use of these terms, we took a strong lead from Coldron and Smith (1999), who suggest that teacher identities are "partly given and partly achieved by *active location in social space*" (p. 711, emphasis added). Social space is conceived by Coldron and Smith as "an array of possible relations that one person can have to others". Some of these relations, they argue, are conferred by "inherited social structures and categorizations", while others are "chosen or created by the individual" (*ibid.*).

Coldron and Smith suggest that policies that "impose greater degrees of uniformity and conformity threaten to impoverish the notion of active location, restricting the number of potential positions the teacher might assume" (*ibid.*). Significantly, given our own initial theorising, this notion of teachers achieving professional identities through actively positioning themselves is related by Coldron and Smith to the analyses of *tradition* carried out by MacIntyre (1981) and Taylor (1989), wherein traditions are characterised as "ways of acting and thinking, patterned into practices and sets of practices" (op cit, p. 713). In this configuration, teachers, as active agents, position themselves "within [a] plurality of related resources [or traditions,] in response to needs that arise from an assessment of the circumstances in which they find themselves" (op cit, p.714). They are thus "active participants in a rich array of educational traditions" (op cit, p.721).

Coldron and Smith's account of the development of teacher identities and the function of educational traditions in this process is very close to our own practical definition of professional pragmatism. It also serves to draw an important distinction between, on the one hand, feeling free and able to make choices on the bases of assessments of current situations and circumstances against a background of current skills, understandings and experience, and, on the other hand, feeling forced into making decisions with which one is not necessarily happy through being overly constrained by current situations and circumstances. To refer again to Coldron and Smith's account, not only might some teachers be severely restricted in their choice of positionings by such matters as increased government control or increased student disobedience; they might also find themselves pushed into some kind of professional identity crisis.

### Principled and contingent pragmatism

It was with Coldron and Smith's analysis in mind that we not only chose to use the term 'pragmatic' to distinguish the practice of selectivity from its purposes, but also came to identify *two different kinds of pragmatism*, each pointing towards a contrasting kind of professional identification. The first was 'principled pragmatism', in which pedagogical eclecticism is characterised by an emphasis on the relations *created* by the individual; the second was 'contingent pragmatism', in which pedagogical eclecticism is more or less *inherited* (not always happily) from the categorizations of others. While both kinds of pragmatism are of course always the result of teacher agency, the principled kind, we concluded, is less reactive than the contingent, suggesting a new form of extended teacher professionalism in contrast to its more restricted variant.

To illustrate this difference with reference to our interview data, the following provides an example of the teacher as 'principled pragmatist'.

*Edward is a young social studies and humanities teacher, now in his sixth year of teaching. His teaching philosophy owes much both to his pre-service training course and to a "home upbringing that impacted on what I thought education was about". Thus, from an early age he came to believe that "the more education you receive the better it is for you" and that "the only status you can have in our society is educational qualifications". This belief in the value of education per se may help to explain Edward's repeated emphasis in interview on the importance of his students' achieving good examination results and doing well academically, while a complementary belief, in the function of education as "expanding the mind of the individual" in ways that lead to a "fuller understanding of the world" and "a greater tolerance of other people", may help to explain his considerable interest in the pastoral aspects of education and his own role as a form tutor.*

*The translation of Edward's educational philosophy into what might be termed a teaching style involves the rejection of the 'traditional-progressive' dichotomy through which teachers often identified themselves when Edward was a school-student himself. As Edward puts this: "I wouldn't fit easily into any of those labels. I try to look back on each of those approaches and use parts of them both ... I would say I am a happy medium of traditional and progressive... 'Traditional' — you can see in the way I put the chairs in rows in my classroom; but 'progressive' in the sense that I'm ... keen on allowing students to speak for themselves."*

*Edward's personal change in teaching style is reflected in many aspects of his practice and self-presentation. During his early days at the school, for example, he would, he says, dress casually, eschew front-of-class teaching, and adopt a relatively relaxed form of self-presentation in the classroom. His 'new realism', however, suggested to him that alternative self-presentation and pedagogic strategies might be more successful in engaging and retaining his students' interest, particularly in view of the fact that he was a beginning teacher and looked young for his age. Consequently, he began to wear a suit and tie and to develop a "firm persona" with "tighter control over the beginnings and ends of lessons". This new, less student-centred style of classroom teaching, which, says Edward, demanded less effort in terms of preparing resources, enabled him to devote more time to pastoral work with*

his own tutor-group, which previously, he felt, had suffered against the demands of his subject teaching.

Edward's "reinvention" (to use his word) of himself as a teacher is occasionally described by him in terms of contrast and dissimilarity with other members of the teaching profession, including, centrally, other teachers at his present school. While he is reluctant to criticise colleagues, he is happy to talk about his initial 'shock' on entering teaching at "how lacking in academic rigour most teachers appeared to be", and suggests that most of his colleagues are "fairly naive in terms of educational issues and fairly complacent about teachers' status and pay". In this way, Edward sets himself up as something of a new breed of professional surrounded by older teachers whose attitudes and approaches belong to a bygone era.

In contrast to these reservations about the practice of some other teachers at his school, Edward is generally more positive about recent academic-related government reforms and about the ways in which they have impacted on his practice and experience of work. He does feel very bitter about the public regard for teachers and the way in which poor levels of pay have been allowed to persist. However, he believes that much recent educational reform — in particular, the proliferation and rigour of government inspections — has "increased the effectivity (sic) of the profession" and, in personal terms, "helped me to sharpen up a lot in how I teach and to be a lot more effective in putting ideas across to the students". Where Edward has problems with change, it tends to be where he sees it abused or taken to extremes. Thus, while he is in favour of drives to improve examination results, he is concerned that this can put too much unacknowledged pressure on classroom teachers, particularly when it is under-funded, and he declares himself suspicious of the 'back to basics' agenda, which he feels undermines the judgement of professional teachers, oversimplifies the educational issues, and appears to promote mechanistic, "uninventive" modes of teaching and learning. He also worries about the constituency of the National Curriculum, and the promotion — as he sees it — of technical and vocational subjects and courses at the expense of (for example) the social sciences.

Edward's testimony is typical of many of the respondents in our study, notably in his recognition of and willingness to draw upon a range of educational traditions and discourses, and in his awareness that this is precisely what he is doing. Edward is thus able to perceive his own pedagogic mission not only in terms of helping his students develop academically, but also in broadening their minds in ways that are not restrictively academic, and in encouraging them to be more tolerant of other human beings. He finds no contradiction in adopting the 'traditionalist' practice of sitting his students in rows — and therefore restricting their opportunities for student-student dialogue — while pursuing a broader aim of bringing about improved socialisation and co-operation, arguing that he needs to achieve discipline first if he is subsequently to be able to teach in the way he really wants to.

We might say that Edward comes across as a teacher making his own informed evaluations of and choices from a range of possibilities, seldom completely rejecting or completely accepting any of these, but approaching each one critically and refusing to be labelled by himself or anybody else as a particular kind of classroom practitioner. There is a clear sense of purpose and agency in Edward's observations — a feeling that choices are still there to be made. In

Edward's personal narrative, for example, he configures himself as someone who has moved from a well-meaning but naive teacher to a more 'realistic', tougher teacher who is now more likely to get the empowering results he has always been after. While he is both 'resistant' about some local and national policies and 'compliant' in relation to others, neither his compliance nor his resistance makes him particularly uncomfortable or compromises his self-image as the teacher able to make choices. Where he complies (as in the case of government inspections), it is usually out of genuine agreement, and where he resists (as in the cases of school uniform or the over-vocational nature of the National Curriculum) he is generally happy to do so at the personal and local level, apparently experiencing minimal impact on his practice.

Although Edward's eclecticism was common to the vast majority of the teachers we interviewed, not all were as comfortable as him with recent educational reform or with current trends in education or, indeed, with local school policy or perceived developments in social behaviour among their students. On the contrary, many felt that they were being *forced* to make compromises, rather than actively pursuing choices: that is to say, of making necessary but not always welcome adjustments to their practice in order to respond best to external pressures from central government, from other teachers, or indeed from students and their parents. Such teachers we described as identifying themselves more frequently within the notion of contingent pragmatism. *Whereas the teachers we have described as principled pragmatists are eclectically proactive in their pragmatism, teachers' eclecticism among those categorized as contingent is far more reactive.*

The following exemplification includes a number of instances in which a teacher's eclecticism is founded on such contingent pragmatism. Even though his pragmatism appears at other times to be principled in its construction, the overall picture is of a teacher who feels forced into a professional way of being with which he is critically uncomfortable.

*Graeme has been in teaching for nearly twenty-five years — a career spent at just two secondary-schools in the same area of London. Having qualified at a small training college in the 1970s, he began his career as an English and Drama teacher, and continues to work within the English Department at his current school. After six years of teaching, however, he opted to specialise in the pastoral aspects of education, and has been a Head of Year ever since.*

*Having experienced what he calls an "appalling" education himself, Graeme rather drifted into teaching with a tentative vision of ensuring that some students at least got a better deal out of the system than he had. He still maintains that his own school experiences — in particular, the more negative ones — have helped him to understand his own students' feelings and need. This feeling of being able to empathise with his students has helped to keep Graeme in a job that for many years he "enjoyed tremendously". Recently, however, he has become disillusioned professionally, finding it increasingly less rewarding to teach the younger students, and he is currently, at the age of forty-nine, looking for a move out of the profession altogether in order to "spend ten years doing something else — anything — I don't know [what], but totally different".*

*The reasons given by Graeme for his disillusionment with teaching are varied. Partly, it is a matter of age and a perceived drop in energy levels and desire. This has, in turn, led to his becoming less tolerant in the classroom. Perceived changes within his school, within*

education generally and within society as a whole have also been contributory factors. Graeme feels, for instance, that he has lived through increasing levels of internal and external bureaucracy, with “so much paperwork going round that I feel half the time I am not getting on with the job”. The increased bureaucracy is itself perceived by Graeme as part of a larger picture of teachers’ having to complete more and more work and — particularly in his own case, where he has to combine substantial pastoral duties with a heavy teaching load — having to fulfil too many different roles to be able to do any one job properly. A further perceived difficulty is the increasing pressure from inside and outside the school “to do better and better and to achieve better and better results”, including, centrally, better and better examination results. As Graeme says: “I feel as a teacher I have got to get those results, all the time”. This pressure has, in his view, led to there being less and less time for the ‘socialisation aspect [of education]’ — what he calls “preparation for life”. He is both concerned and depressed that the notion of a ‘liberal education’ no longer exists: “we are getting terribly vocationally minded, even at year 9, [when] children have ideas of careers foisted upon them .... which I think is terrible.”

The increased pressures experienced by Graeme have undoubtedly contributed to a change of teaching style and philosophy on his part that he appears to be less than happy about: “I have become less progressive: I have become a reactionary, I find ... I have become less liberal ... in my thinking about education. As a teacher, I have become more abrasive.” These changes of philosophy and style have not entirely been forced upon Graeme by the changed circumstances of his work: they are also, in part, based on the evidence of his experience. On issues related to the National Curriculum, school uniform, and school traditions and rituals, for example, he adopts what he chooses to call a ‘balanced’ view, happy to see and discuss the pros and cons in each case, and — despite his regret that new teachers seem to be less “political” than they used to be — declining to take a straightforward or “politically correct” view on any of these issues. Thus, while he is “anti” the National Curriculum because it places too much emphasis on academic subjects and restricts teachers’ opportunities to pursue their own educational agendas, he is, like Edward, generally in favour of the “tightening up” he believes it has created. While he sees school uniform as being problematic to enforce and, in the case of his current school, “an awful mishmash”, and while he does not believe in the notion of its fostering “a corporate identity”, he maintains that it makes life far easier for parents and helps increase a school’s popularity. Thus, in the case of school uniform, Graeme brings no ideological perspective either to his arguments in favour of it or to his objections to it, approaching the subject purely within the context of local issues related to his own school. To an extent, this same brand of pragmatism is invoked in his discussion of mixed ability teaching: “I used to be totally pro mixed-ability, but our results are improving all the time, and that has come from setting”.

Despite his concern that teachers are becoming less political, that the pressures of the job are focusing too much attention on the academic side of education over the social and the pastoral, and that he himself is becoming ‘a reactionary’, Graeme appears to have little difficulty in supporting setting on academic grounds, and putting the social issues to one side — precisely, it seems, because of the pressures he feels to ensure that, in the interests of achieving a more comfortable life, his students achieve ‘good results’.

There are many areas in which Edward and Graeme have the same concerns and much the same views. Both, for example, have an ambivalence towards the National Curriculum that includes a fear that the emphasis in schools is becoming overly vocational; both claim to have a balanced view on such key issues as school uniform and the setting of students according to notions of ability; and both have a leaning towards — and a fear for the future of — the ‘socialising’, ‘pastoral’ aspects of education. But there are key differences. *Whereas Edward purposively navigates his way through a sea of possibilities, Graeme self-presents as a drowning man not even inclined to clutch at straws.* Although he can, like Edward, be described as pedagogically eclectic, his is a very different kind of eclecticism, in which selections are made out of desperation rather than choice, rendering him a teacher (in the words of Troman & Woods) for whom “the repeated reinvention of the [professional] self is a stressful and convoluted process” (2000, p.10).

### **Management, leadership and pragmatism**

Since so many of the teachers we interviewed had chosen to identify themselves as pragmatists, we were inevitably led to consider whether their headteachers configured themselves in the same way, and, if they did, to explore what the implications of this might be in terms of current philosophies and practices of school management.

As with the classroom teachers in our sample, we quickly recognized that some of the descriptors previously used to characterise headteachers’ practice no longer seemed adequate, a situation that may have more to say about the changing *contexts* of teaching and headship than any possible flaws in the initial categorisations themselves. Grace’s references, for example (1995, pp. 196-7), to the ‘headmasterly’ and ‘social democratic’ traditions of headship, and their relation to the ‘new managerialism’ (Gewirtz, et al, 1995) still provide a useful framework for the sociological location and description of headteachers’ approaches to leadership and management, as well as identifying the previous practices and existing discourses upon which headteachers are likely to draw in configuring their professional identities. However, we would argue they no longer serve to account, discretely, for the management and leadership styles of headteachers *as individuals*.

In this connection, it is interesting to remark that seven out of the nine headteachers we interviewed consciously ascribed to their management styles and practices elements of *both* the ‘headmasterly’ tradition (characterised, in Grace’s terms, by a perpetuation of fixed and unquestioned hierarchies, patriarchal domination, and strong authoritarian leadership) *and* the ‘social democratic’ tradition of the ‘bureau professional’ with its notions of “meritocratic excellence, expertness and specialist understanding, with dedication to moral commitment to notions of individual and public good” (*ibid*). They achieved this co-existence, moreover, within a very particular style of management which had, as with the teachers we interviewed, a conscious philosophy of eclecticism and pragmatism at its core.

To reinforce this point, it is important to recognize that these management styles were themselves located within and across a range of *discourses of management*, many of which have long established histories in the world of business. As with traditions of headship, these discourses of management were drawn upon eclectically by the headteachers we interviewed, who had become familiar with them sometimes directly (e.g. through attendance at courses) and sometimes indirectly (e.g. through the internalisation of positions statements originating

in Government-sponsored texts). If we consider two such contrasting management discourses — those of so-called ‘Taylorism’, which is characterised by short-termism, quality-control inspections of final products, the accomplishment of minimum requirements, firm and often punitive hierarchical structures, and numerical quotas, and that of ‘Total Quality Management’ (‘TQM’), which is characterised by orientations towards ‘ownership’, self-management, the interests of ‘clients’ or ‘customers’, and continuous inspection for quality measured against prescribed ‘standards’, we find many instances in our headteacher interview data of respondents being aware of *both* approaches, and indeed of consciously incorporating elements or traces of each of them within their own practice. Thus, one of the heads we interviewed described his own management style in the following terms:

*“I’m looking at ways in which in this school we can do things quicker — so as to make life easier for us here, because one of my biggest concerns is teacher burn-out, with trying to keep the staff well-motivated and well-oiled, making the system of structures as good as they can be [so that] in a sense the rest takes care of itself.”*

Aspects of ‘Taylorism’ are clearly discernable in these comments. Even so, it would be wrong to describe the overall approach of the headteacher who uttered them in only these terms, since it is clearly underpinned by a very strong adherence to what is sometimes called the liberal humanist approach to school leadership. Thus, while this particular headteacher is concerned that only well-motivated, ‘well-oiled’, efficient and not over-stretched workers will effectively produce the desired end or ‘product’, he has a genuine concern also for the quality of the working life of his school’s teachers that exists independently of any plans he has for ‘performance’ and marketability alone.

We found in fact that most of the headteachers we interviewed were happy to combine discourses of efficiency and productivity with discourses of fulfilment and care in accounting for their management styles and school ethos. What particularly interested and concerned us, however, was the capacity and inclination of these headteachers on other occasions to adopt essentially ‘Taylorist’ forms and styles of management *couched within* more acceptable terms and aspects of ‘TQM’ forms and styles. The following extract from an interview with another headteacher in our sample provides a useful example of this kind of practice:

*“When I first became a head I think I wanted to be in on everything. ... But now I manage the outcome. So... everybody has an action plan, and that relates to the School Development Plan. And if they meet their own targets, I don’t care how they get there. ... I trained all the heads of department to use the Ofsted format of observation of lessons, and we do that and we grade lessons. I must say, not everybody is happy with that, but they do it. So I wouldn’t say that all the things I want everybody is totally happy with, but I think there is a lot of trust that we are going in the right direction. We are prepared to give me the benefit of the doubt in some things they are not yet quite comfortable with!”*

In this instance, the headteacher may be seen to be using her authority to coerce staff into her mode of thinking and operating within the school, and thereby implementing the cultural and structural reforms required by Government at the local level. She masks this process, however, by couching it within a values-laden discourse of collegiality and trust, and by the part-ironic use of the term ‘we’ to signify both herself and the staff as a whole. Lest we are too quick to label this school leader in terms of a Taylorist approach to management, it needs to

be added that, for all her interest in outcomes and systems, she still passionately believes in the importance of teachers' having an educational philosophy and a desire to learn, and supports democratic structures for the benefit of the school's students through the active promotion of an egalitarian ethos and a school council.

The complexity of these accommodations, which resist simple categorisations and labelling, is nowhere better illustrated than in this particular headteacher's decision to allow her school to host and run a Government-sponsored initial teacher training course. She is aware that such schemes have been criticised by many mainstream providers and practising teachers as providing competence-based teacher training on the cheap, but is unconcerned by the possible political issues of the scheme, or indeed of the resistance to the scheme on the part of some of her own staff. For her, the scheme provides an opportunity to involve her teachers more closely in the training of teachers within certain subject areas as well as a chance to shape student teachers in the way she prefers. Interestingly, her desire to have more control over the content of the student teachers' training does not lead her into a competence-based approach, but rather, in sympathetic response to some of the concerns of her staff, back to forms of training in which courses of initial teacher education in the UK had a greater emphasis on the philosophy and theory of education.

The notion that policies can be accommodated and internally marketed without any fundamental change to the school's or headteacher's underlying educational philosophy is a theme that ran through all the headteacher interviews we conducted. There may, of course, be an element of wishful thinking at work here. It is possible, for example, that the promotion by one headteacher of a return to setting away from mixed-ability teaching owes rather more than she would care to acknowledge to externally-imposed pressures, including the demands of revised examination syllabuses, than to a genuine subscription to a 'what works' philosophy. Nevertheless, *it is clear that accommodations are made by headteachers, and that they are made, as with many of the teachers we interviewed, both consciously and pragmatically.*

This being the case, the role of the headteacher not merely as manager of people and change but as *leader and visionary* would appear to be of paramount importance. So, no one will be surprised if we now report that all of the headteachers interviewed spoke enthusiastically and with some emotion about this aspect of their work. For one of them, for example, leadership "is about being passionate, and that is the one thing I bring to this school"; for another, management may be "about outcomes, but leadership is about the head's personal vision"; while for someone else, "leadership is about trying to provide people with a direction and a purpose and some sort of vision of what you can achieve in the institution".

This concept of leadership was nearly always couched within that broadly-defined liberal-humanist rhetoric we mentioned a moment ago, as these fragments from our interviews illustrate:

*"Leadership is about ensuring that children get the best possible chance ...about building a responsible community of people who are involved in their learning and are also a bit more democratically involved in how the school operates ... develop[ing] this learning culture ... at the same time as maintaining the ethos of a sort of friendly, open and very positive relationship with both children and parents."*

*"I have a very strong belief in high expectations for the whole ability range. [...] I've always been against this kind of idea of children having a ceiling of intelligence and a ceiling*



*of attainment. [...] I suppose I ... believe in education as a means of social engineering... I think that children should have high expectations of going to university regardless of what class they come from."*

An important issue here of course is the extent to which these visions are authentic or merely manufactured. Part of the difficulty in answering this question is that all of our headteacher-respondents expressed, in one form or another, both a view of leadership itself *and* a view of what they wanted their own leadership to achieve — that is, not only a notion of *how* to promote a vision, but a clear idea also of *what* that vision was. Our evidence suggests that they certainly saw a functional instrumentality in leadership. This is notably evident in the observations of one headteacher who told us that, for him, leadership “is about trying to provide people with a direction and a purpose and some sort of vision of what you can achieve in the institution”. It is also suggested by the observations quoted earlier as spoken by the headteacher who had decided to involve her school in a particular teacher-training initiative. While she perceives colleagues as sometimes needing to be cajoled and coerced into putting into practice unpopular policy decisions, she takes a consciously flexible rather than a thoughtlessly evangelical line herself in dealing with public policy directives, deliberately seeking to keep a firm grip on an underlying and shared philosophy of education in the liberal-humanist tradition and not trying to fool herself or her staff into feeling anything other than ambivalent about this process.

If we are to take such interview responses at face value, it appears then that the vast majority of the *headteachers in our sample are not engaged exclusively in any particular kind of reaction to imposed policy change, but are more inclined to respond pragmatically to individual reforms, sometimes accepting, sometimes rejecting, and sometimes actively subverting them in ways that enable them to maintain a practical commitment to core educational values* (see also Gold, et al, 2004, which reaches similar conclusions). On occasion, they may also *utilise* policy change for other ends. The fact that one headteacher, for example, had successfully applied for a relatively arbitrary kind of specialist status for her school was not seen by her as approving of selection or buying into some form of educational elitism, but as a purely pragmatic way of increasing student numbers and attracting further funding to improve the fabric of the school and the all-round quality of her students’ education.

Our understanding, in short, is that, *for all the current emphasis on management and managerialism, with its underpinnings of instrumentality and performativity, the qualities of the headteacher as progressive liberal-humanist educational leader are not necessarily being eroded as a result of recent mandated policy changes*, the main features and requirements of which tend to become refracted in the school situation into all manner of tactics and local strategies, rather than into a wholesale acceptance of the policies themselves.

So, while individual headteachers certainly perceive themselves as having to be more proactive about marketing their school, and more creative about defining and packaging its image, they also find that their devolved power enables them to apply personal vision and leadership in often accommodatory ways in the course of negotiating and orchestrating the various interests which they are now obliged to recognize and manage.

However — perhaps partly *because of* these necessary accommodations—the headteachers in our sample all proved very resistant to categorisations, whether these be in terms of tradition (being ‘traditional’ or being ‘progressive’), management discourse (‘Taylorist’ or ‘TQM’), or

response to central policy and other pressures. Consequently, while we acknowledge the intentionality of central government in seeking to implement what might otherwise be resisted policies, we have not found that headteachers necessarily fall into line as neatly or as uniformly as the policy and rhetoric — or, indeed, some educational, specifically sociological, theory — might want them to or say they do. Rather, our research supports the view expressed by Billig *et al* that:

“[t]eachers’ ideological conceptions tend not to be so neatly packaged and consistent as those are [sometimes] posited ... [T]eachers may well hold views of teaching, of children, of the goals of educational practice and the explanation of educational failure, which theorists of ideology would locate in opposed camps. ... Further, it is not unknown for teachers to be aware of such contradictions, to feel themselves involved in difficult choices and as having to make compromises.” (1988, p.46)

While most of the headteachers in our sample appeared then to buy into some form or other of managerialism, including positive references to ownership and autonomy as well as to effectiveness, system-serving and performativism, they were also clear, in discussing their *leadership* role and qualities, about the educational and social values underpinning their attitudes to students, to parents and to staff, tending to locate such comments firmly within the liberal-humanist tradition of education and some version of the comprehensive ideal. At the management level, this reflected a parallel response to the headteachers’ *personal* responses to educational reform. As with most of the classroom teachers we had interviewed, the headteachers in our sample were often in favour of the reforms, but were highly critical of certain aspects of them at the same time. In summary, like the teachers we interviewed, our *heads presented themselves as pragmatic and eclectic in their attachments to educational and headteacherly traditions and to broader management discourses, as well as in their responses to policy reform and to the varying demands of stakeholders and the quasi market. This pragmatism may have included a necessary level of compliance, but did not necessarily represent an ideological selling out.* Regardless of whether or not we think a certain amount of self-delusion may have been in operation in this respect, headteachers themselves were very clear that there was a personal *educational* vision underpinning their pragmatism, and while they felt forced on occasion to compromise that vision, they were largely unwilling to abandon it.

### III. *Teacher Pragmatism & Democratic Professionalism*

Having noted that both teachers and school leaders in our study preferred to describe themselves as ‘eclectic’ and ‘pragmatic’ rather than (say) ‘traditional’ or ‘progressive’, we remain cautious, even so, of imputing too much to this identification shift. Certainly, we do not want to suggest, for example, that teacher identities in the UK have totally and universally changed during the course of the last twenty years. Indeed, we have no evidence to suggest that today’s teachers and schools in the UK are any more or less ‘pragmatic’ or ‘eclectic’ than they ever were, though we suspect that the form this takes presently is differently inflected and focused. Moreover, while it is true that schools in England previously marketed themselves very consciously as ‘traditional’ or ‘progressive’, and teachers working in such schools sometimes used one or other of these terms to identify themselves to colleagues, to students, to

parents and to themselves, personal professional experience tells us that these identifications were never that clear-cut, and certainly were not presented without modification. Schools that used to market themselves as ‘progressive’, for example, were by no means of a kind, some incorporating into their style and public representation aspects and practices that might equally appear in the marketing of more ‘traditional’ schools. In other words, schools and teachers that previously identified themselves as traditional or progressive did so, we would argue, as a kind of shorthand that may have sent out an immediate message, but that bore no true correspondence to the complexity of the individual school’s or teacher’s actual philosophy, policy and practice.

The point about ‘eclecticism’ and ‘pragmatism’, then, is not that they are new, but rather that it is new for teachers and school leaders in the UK to adopt the terms so ubiquitously and enthusiastically as *identifying signs* of their professional outlooks and actions, in the same way that ‘traditionalism’ and ‘progressivism’ were adopted for a similar purpose in the 70s and 80s. Accordingly, the real question to ask and answer is why is that teachers and school leaders use particular signifiers of identification at different moments in educational history, and, in particular, why are ‘pragmatism’ and ‘eclecticism’ presently such popular and powerful signifiers of professional identification?

There could, of course, be all manner of possible explanations, many of them relatively straightforward, as to why this might be so. The more obvious of these include that teachers have simply come to realise that a pragmatic pedagogical approach, in which one draws on proven good practice from within a range of pedagogic discourses, simply results in more effective classroom practice. Today’s teachers may also be aware of the bad press given to the terms ‘traditional’ and ‘progressive’, and are thus keen to distance themselves publicly from such signifiers.

Our own view of what is happening here embraces both of these explanations, but goes beyond them, positing the suggestion that the abandonment by teachers of terms like ‘traditional’ and ‘progressive’ in favour of a philosophy of ‘what matters is what works’ is part of a broader rebellion against embedded ‘either-or’, binary, oppositions in Western thought, particularly when these are grounded in an unreflective form of traditionalism. Such kinds of foundationalism appear no longer capable of providing many people with the answers they seek about what to do and how to do it, either in their personal or their professional lives. For, as we learnt earlier (from Giddens), “tradition [today] is more and more contemplated, defended, sifted through, in relation to the awareness that there exists a variety of ways of doing things” (1994, p.83). Teachers are inevitably caught up in this process, as they are too in the essentially experimental aspects of modern living initiated by the local and personal effects of economic globalization and the risk society generally. To that extent, both the specific politics of education and politics in general can no longer be so easily engaged with using the conventional discourses of Left and Right, the traditions of each of which, in any event, are seriously caught out of position by the changes underway in modern capitalist societies and the new challenges these pose (see Halpin, 2003, pp.59-66, on this). Thus, the increasingly ‘and-also’ nature of teachers’ professional pragmatism, mimicked in the political sphere by the rise of so-called ‘Third Way’ thinking (Giddens, 1998), may reflect broader trends underway in the wider social information — trends that seek to work positively with the grain of heterogeneity at the expense of an ideological commitment to any one way of thinking and acting. This may disturb Left political-purists seeking to mobilise teachers to undertake

particular forms of opposition to Government education policy; but it is how things are today, and no amount of wishful thinking on their part alters this fact.

But is such a principled pragmatism necessarily a good thing, truly indicative of a more balanced, less ideological, approach to teaching that seeks to select the best practice available? Or is it, rather, that teachers are, as some members of the educational-Left insist, buying into a form of false consciousness — specifically, a political discourse in which the inclination to mobilise for active, collective political opposition is diverted to more isolated pragmatic engagements in the internal politics of their own institutions? In other words, is the adoption by teachers and school leaders of a pragmatic stance leading unconsciously to their professional *depoliticization*, such that healthy educational debate — including the adoption by them of oppositional stances — is being eroded and replaced by an all-pervasive politics of compromise?

One reading of our data might suggest this is the case. Another, and the one we prefer, realises a different, more positive conclusion, and one that articulates with the notion of ‘democratic professionalism’, as outlined and advocated in Geoff Whitty’s earlier contribution to this symposium. In a previous formulation of this notion, Whitty argues that the “next re-formation of teacher professionalism will . . . need to be one in which teachers’ professional expertise is harnessed to a new democratic project for the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (2000, p.292), requiring new collectivist forms of association within and beyond the education context. While correctly insisting that such a shift is the only way forward, Whitty acknowledges that it will not be easy to realise, given that it requires existing teacher-organizations, and individual teachers, to respond differently to some fundamental questions about who has a legitimate right to be involved in defining teacher professionalism and to be represented under its auspices.

Whitty is surely right to alert us to the difficulties that would lie ahead in the course of implementing his vision for the profession. On the other hand, the evidence of this contribution suggests that teachers themselves might not be at all hostile to making it a reality, to the extent that, unlike in previous times, they are today pragmatically more open to new ideas and, relatedly, less wedded to old ones. Concomitantly, their increasingly ‘and-also’ professional identities seem to us to be more in tune with the fostering of new forms of democratic practice than the professional isolationism practised by most teachers in the past. Indeed, to return to those ‘social revolutions of our time’, with which we began this contribution, it could be argued that both globalization and de-traditionalization, accompanied by greater social reflexivity, provide the very conditions in which new kinds of democratic practice, of the sort Whitty is commending, might flourish. Certainly, these processes alter irrevocably the status of the formal political domain, while encouraging simultaneously new kinds of social interconnectedness within it. As Giddens puts it: “The advance of social reflexivity means that individuals have no choice but to make choices; and these choices define who they are. People have to ‘construct their own biographies’ in order to sustain a coherent sense of self-identity. Yet they cannot do this without interacting with others, *and this very fact creates new solidarities*” (1994, p.126, our emphasis).

This applies as much at the professional level as the personal one. Indeed, the new ‘dialogic spaces’ created by globalization, detraditionalization and reflexivity at both levels have to be filled in some way or another. Whitty’s notion of ‘democratic professionalism’ provides one way of conceptualising what this ‘filling out’ might entail for future generations

of teachers. It also encourages discussion about what kinds of new collectivist forms of association within and beyond the education context will be most suited for purpose. How should they be constituted and organized institutionally? Who will take the lead in bringing them about? What will be their sources of power and their potential for strategic action? With what goals, content and programmes will they be concerned? Is there a case for seeing them in both single and multiple issue ways, operating sometimes for a short while with a discrete membership, or more permanently with a continuing body of people? While we are not sure how to answer these questions, we are convinced they are presently some of the right ones for teachers and education academics to ask.

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