Being a ‘professional’ primary school teacher at the beginning of the 21st century: a comparative analysis of primary teacher professionalism in New Zealand and England

Terry Locke a, Graham Vulliamy b, Rosemary Webb b & Mary Hill c

a University of Waikato, New Zealand
b University of York, UK
c University of Auckland, New Zealand

Available online: 16 Aug 2006


To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02680930500221784

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.
Being a ‘professional’ primary school teacher at the beginning of the 21st century: a comparative analysis of primary teacher professionalism in New Zealand and England

Terry Locke\textsuperscript{a}\textsuperscript{*}, Graham Vulliamy\textsuperscript{b}, Rosemary Webb\textsuperscript{b} and Mary Hill\textsuperscript{c}

\textsuperscript{a}University of Waikato, New Zealand; \textsuperscript{b}University of York, UK; \textsuperscript{c}University of Auckland, New Zealand

This article analyses findings from two studies conducted collaboratively across two educational settings, New Zealand and England, in 2001–2002. These studies examined the impact of national educational policy reforms on the nature of primary teachers’ work and sense of their own professionalism and compared these impacts across the two countries. Adopting a policy ethnography approach, using in-depth interview data from samples of teachers in each country, it is argued that there have been discursive shifts in the meaning of the three key terms, autonomy, altruism and knowledge, embodied in the classical professionalism triangle. These shifts reflect policy-makers’ moves from a ‘professional-contextualist’ conception of teacher professionalism towards the ‘technocratic-reductionist’ conception that accompanies neo-liberal educational reforms in many countries. Teachers in both countries experienced increasing constraints on their autonomy as they became far more subject to ‘extrinsic’ accountability demands. Whether these demands were perceived as enhancing or diminishing teacher professionalism depended on the manner in which they were filtered through the profession’s defining quality, namely teachers’ altruistic concerns for the welfare of the children in their care.

Introduction

There was a quote that was around when I first qualified about being ‘an extended professional’. I saw myself as that. That was my challenge. I wanted to be ‘an extended professional’. 
There has been an increasing recognition that, whilst the processes of globalization are having profound implications for educational systems world-wide (Carnoy, 1999), an understanding of these processes should ‘address the processes of translation and recontextualisation involved in the realisation or enactment of policy in specific national and local settings’ (Ball, 1998, p. 119). One approach to this is policy ethnography, which assumes that ‘policy as practice is “created” in a trialectic of dominance, resistance and chaos/freedom’ (Ball, 1994, p. 11) and that struggles between competing discourses play an important part in this creation. Such an approach has been used in studies of the implementation in schools of globalized national reforms (see, for example, Bowe et al., 1992) and in the impact of such reforms on teacher identity (see, for example, Welmond, 2002). However, comparative research on policy across different countries tends to be restricted to discussions of influences on national policies rather than on the ‘policy as practice’ that necessitates the analysis of data collected from those teachers on whose work practices such policies impact. The York–Waikato Teacher Professionalism Project is one attempt to remedy this relative neglect.

The project explored changing discourses of primary teacher professionalism in the context of 1990s reforms in England and New Zealand. Based on data collected in 2001 from interviews with primary school teachers in each country by English and New Zealand researchers, respectively, the project examined teachers’ responses to national policy changes in primary schooling that occurred in the decade of the nineties. Like Smyth, working from a labour process view of teaching, we saw reform as a kind of ‘discipline and surveillance’, where policy becomes embodied in ways of organizing the day-to-day business of teachers’ work in ways that promote compliance (Smyth, 2001, p. 110). Thus, whilst this paper explicitly analyses primary teachers’ perspectives on the theme of teacher professionalism, we recognize that, as Smyth (2001, p. 103) put it in the Australian context, ‘an emphasis on teachers as professionals can deflect attention from a focus on teachers as workers’. In the English context a similar emphasis on situating discussions of primary teacher professionalism and identity within a broader macro perspective of post-Fordist changes in the organization of work can be found in the study by Menter et al. (1997) on the impact of marketization on primary schools. However, where in the research of Smyth et al. (2000) there is a clear relationship between the analysis of empirical data and the development of theoretical perspectives, considerable problems ensue in the Menter et al. (1997) study when data gathered have to be fitted into preordained premises derived from a particular theoretical framework (see Webb, 1998, for further development of this point).

While the influence of a global neo-liberal ideology can be seen in both New Zealand and England, specifics of national context have mediated policy change in different ways. On the one hand, the combination of a neo-conservative agenda and a prevalent media discourse of derision (Ball, 1990) resulted in certain aspects of the reforms in England (including curricular and pedagogical prescription and the trappings of a surveillance and audit culture) being more pervasive. On the other hand,
the location of the New Zealand educational reforms as part of the wider ‘New Zealand experiment’ (Kelsey, 1997) programme of public service reform made the devolutionary aspects of the reform more pervasive than in England; for example, where in England the influence of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) was reduced, their New Zealand equivalents (Regional Education Boards) were abolished. However, while the various policy reform documents (see, for example, Department of Education, 1988) resonated with language which appeared to endorse community empowerment, consultation and educator professionalism, they also lent themselves to a neo-liberal construction, emphasizing as they did notions of consumer choice, bureaucratic inefficiency and a determination to withstand the self-interested lobbying of ‘education providers’ (Gordon, 1992).

In England, since the election of the New Labour government in 1997, there has been an intensified emphasis upon the raising of standards, with pedagogical prescription (in the form of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies) added to the prior prescription of the National Curriculum and various auditing mechanisms (league tables of schools’ performance in pupil tests, OfSTED inspections, LEA target setting) designed to promote this standards agenda (Thrupp, 2001; Whitty, 2002). There has also been a refocusing of initial teacher education and of teacher in-service training on this standards agenda, with, for example, the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) defining criteria for competence in teaching (see, for example, TTA, 1998). Similarly, in New Zealand there has been a great deal of professional development to support the implementation of the new national curriculum, pedagogical changes such as assessment for learning and curriculum integration, as well as leadership and management professional development for principals and middle managers. A Teachers Council has been established by the government in New Zealand to set ethical standards for teacher professionalism and to register (and deregister) teachers in a similar manner to the establishment of the General Teaching Council in England in 1999 (the role of which to date appears to have been principally disciplinary).

In terms of the impact of the reforms on conceptions of teacher professionalism, the changes in New Zealand might be seen as less drastic than those in England. The New Zealand reforms included transforming the pre-existing national curriculum from one based on aims and brief descriptions of content into one which detailed outcomes as achievement objectives set out in eight levels, in much the same way as had occurred a little earlier in England. However, in addition to curriculum changes, schools in New Zealand in the 1990s were made ‘self-managing’ through Boards of Trustees (BOTs) and responsible for monitoring and reporting pupil achievement publicly (for a comparison of the English and New Zealand reforms, see Dale & Ozga, 1993; Gordon & Whitty, 1997). The Education Review Office (ERO), comparable to the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED) in England, was established to review and report every three years on a school’s effectiveness and make recommendations for improvement if necessary (Thrupp, 1998). Unlike the situation in England, there is no national testing of pupils in primary schools. Target setting is school-based and a variety of assessment tools, developed and distributed on a national basis, are available for schools to use to measure achievement, should they so choose. This has
led to widespread self-evaluation and self-regulation within New Zealand schools. In
general, New Zealand schools have accepted the idea that professional autonomy
needs to be ‘bounded’ by a recognition of the interests of education stakeholders and
have reflected this in measures such as teacher performance management, school-wide
assessment and reporting systems and collaborative planning (Hill, 2000).

Conceptualizations of teacher professionalism

Hoyle and John (1995, p. 1) stated bluntly that ‘Profession is an essentially contested
concept. Despite its widespread use in the media and in the everyday discourse of
those who would be readily regarded as professional people, and despite the best
efforts of sociologists, philosophers and historians, it defies common agreement as to
its meaning’. For all that, the term will not go away. Nor will its use by teachers as
they seek to define themselves in relation to their work practices.

One way of approaching the problem of definition is to adopt what might be called
an essentialist approach, which posits an ideal for professional conduct or abstracts
an ideal as a result of considering actual professions in action (Hoyle, 1982; Downie,
1990). Such an approach, described by Hoyle and John (1995) as the ‘criterion
approach’, leads to a set of defining characteristics or traits against which the conduct
of a profession can be measured. Hoyle’s (1982) essentialist approach, for example,
defined a profession in terms of its central social function, its length of training, a
body of knowledge, high levels of skill, a code of ethical conduct, client-centredness,
autonomy, independent decision-making and adaptability, self-governance and the
requirement that it play a central role in relevant public policy-making.

An essentialist approach to definition is inclined to be ahistorical and is conducive
to a description of the related term ‘professionalization’ as a process ‘... whereby an
occupation increasingly meets the criteria attributed to a profession’ (Hoyle, 1982,
p. 161). While there might be disagreement on the criteria, there is widespread
agreement, according to Hoyle and John (1995), in respect of the criteria of knowl-
edge, autonomy and altruism, forming what might be referred to as the classical
triangle (Locke, 2004a).

In contrast, a social constructionist approach to the question of definition views
‘profession’ as a historically situated concept susceptible to different constructions
according to time, place, policy environment and the discursive disposition (related
to matters of political and ideological control) of its advocates and critics (Johnson,
1972). Such an approach is less concerned with generating an ideal against which
conduct can be measured than identifying a range of historically bound descriptions,
each with its own implications for professional practice. It has some congruence
with a labour process view of teaching, in that it sees various constructions of the
‘professional’ as intimately related to ways in which power and control operate
through the organization of teachers’ work and the practices teachers are implicated
in (Smyth, 2001). In keeping with this social constructionist approach to the prob-
lem of definition, ‘professionalization’ is viewed as ‘a social and political project or
mission designed to enhance the interests of an occupational group’ (Hargreaves &
Goodson, 1996, p. 4). In the 1990s, however, the term could in a number of settings equally be applied to state projects aimed at ‘reprofessionalizing’ the teaching work force in accordance with a version of professionalism consonant with a particular policy agenda.

While it can be argued that the classical definition of a profession has instrumental value as a measure against which a profession might assess its status (Locke, 2001b), the triangle itself offers one a locus of discursive struggle depending on context. As Hirst (1982) and others recognized, forms of accountability always work to constrain and construe autonomy; one side of the classical triangle. There is always a tension between a profession (which wants to enhance its own autonomy) and those groups outside the profession who would want to have their say (as educational stakeholders) in calling a profession to account. As early as the 1970s Hoyle (1975) was using the term ‘restricted professionality’ for a narrowly proscribed, classroom-centred autonomy where teachers were totally free to do their own thing. In a way he was saying that autonomy, constructed in certain ways, could be viewed as antithetical to both altruism and the fostering of professional knowledge, the other two sides of the triangle. His solution was to coin the term ‘extended professionality’ for teachers who embraced a wider, collaborative vision of teaching that involved networking beyond their own classroom.

One way of negotiating this contested discursive terrain is to suggest, as a heuristic, two broad conceptualizations of the term. The first of these we term managerial professionalism which, according to Sachs (2003), is related to managerialist structures put in place to ensure the implementation of centrist policy reform measures and the compliance of a frequently resistant teaching profession. Sachs (2003, p. 26) drew on the work of Brennan (1996, p. 3) in seeing the corporate management model as reconstruing the professional as one:

who clearly meets corporate goals, set elsewhere, manages a range of pupils well and documents their achievements and problems for public accountability purposes. The criteria of the successful professional in this corporate model is of one who works efficiently and effectively in meeting the standardised criteria set for the accomplishment of both pupils and teachers, as well as contributing to the school’s formal accountability processes.

As argued elsewhere (Vulliamy et al., 2004; Webb et al., 2004), such an approach underpins the New Labour government in England’s promotion of a ‘new professionalism’, the nature of which is laid out in their 1998 policy document Teachers: meeting the challenge of change (Department for Education and Employment [DfEE], 1998). It can also be seen to underpin the New Zealand strategy to ‘enhance the professional status of teachers’ as reflected in the policy document Quality teachers for quality learning (Ministry of Education, 1997, p. 5). A number of commentators view the rhetoric of a ‘new professionalism’ as a ploy to market this view of professionalism since it is consonant with changes in the organization of teachers’ work demanded by an insistent audit culture (Smyth, 1992; Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996; Robertson, 1996).

A second conceptualization broadens and refines the classical definition of professionalism by drawing on Hoyle’s (1975) notion of extended professionality to
acknowledge the network of collegial and social obligations that necessarily constrain a teacher’s practice. This construction is related to Sachs’ (2003, p. 144) notion of ‘activist’ professionalism, with its emphasis on trust-building collaborative practices across sectional interests and a ‘generative politics [which] … allows individuals and groups to make things happen rather than to let things happen to them in the context of overall social concerns and goals’. This version, then, is located in traditions of ‘teacher empowerment’ (Garman, 1995) that seek to enhance teacher status and encourage teachers to contribute actively to the promotion of educational reform and wider societal change. As Locke (2004a) suggested, this version is enhanced by the coupling of professional expertise with ‘strategic’ knowledge that enables teachers to reflect critically on the discursive forces, including those emanating from policy reforms, that shape their practices and to develop avenues for activism and contestation.

We relate these two conceptualizations to a schema developed by Codd (1997, p. 140), who suggested that advocates of the sorts of neo-liberal, market-driven reforms characteristic of New Zealand, England and Australia tend to have a technocratic-reductionist view (as opposed to a professional-contextualist view) of teaching (see Table 1):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role model</th>
<th>Technocratic-reductionist</th>
<th>Professional-contextualist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Criterion of good practice</td>
<td>Skilled technician</td>
<td>Reflective practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogical aim</td>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To produce the attainment of specific learning outcomes</td>
<td>To enable the development of diverse human capabilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative context</td>
<td>Efficient management (hierarchical)</td>
<td>Professional leadership (collaborative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of motivation</td>
<td>Extrinsic</td>
<td>Intrinsic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form of accountability</td>
<td>Contractual compliance</td>
<td>Professional commitment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We argue that Codd’s technocratic-reductionist view of teaching relates to the managerial conceptualization of professionalism described above, whilst his professional/contextualist parallels the expanded view of the classic professional embodied in Sachs’ (2003) notion of ‘activist professionalism’.

While 1990s policy reforms in both England and New Zealand have tilted the balance in the direction of managerial professionalism (Sullivan, 1999; Locke, 2001a; Webb et al., 2004), we should note what Ball (1994, p. 20) referred to as the ‘complexity of the relationship between policy intentions, texts, interpretations and reactions’. One aspect of this complexity is the way in which teachers mediate policy
intent in their own workplace practices and the changing patterns of what Locke (2004b) called discursive subscription. While the York–Waikato Teacher Professionalism Project gathered data on the relationship of a number of workplace changes to ways in which teachers framed their sense of professional identity, this paper focuses on how teachers constructed and related their sense of professionalism to the changing accountability and control structures that organized their work.

Methodology

The rationale and procedures, including the sampling strategy, for the York–Waikato Teacher Professionalism Project have their origins in a parallel comparative research study, the York–Jyväskylä Teacher Professionalism Project. The latter was a follow-up to the earlier York–Finnish Project (YFP), which had examined teachers’ responses to national policy changes in primary schooling during the 1990s at a time when in many respects the educational systems of the two countries were moving in opposite directions (see, for example, Webb & Vulliamy, 1999a, b). The YFP involved fieldwork and teacher interviews during the period 1994–1995 in six English schools, spread across four LEAs, and six Finnish schools, spread across four municipalities.

For the York–Jyväskylä Teacher Professionalism Project all those teachers who in the year 2001 were still teaching in their original schools and some teachers from the original sample who had left (either to new teaching posts, to other jobs or to retirement) were re-interviewed. This gave a comparative sample of 24 English teachers and 13 Finnish teachers. In extending the research to New Zealand primary school teachers two teachers were interviewed from each of six schools that were selected to reflect a similar variety of schools as in the English sample. Table 2 provides a brief description of the 12 English and New Zealand schools (pseudonyms are used to preserve anonymity).

A degree of selectedness and serendipity was at work in the process of assembling the sample and, of course, the willingness of teachers themselves to engage as subjects in a research process in the midst of busy lives was a not inconsiderable determining factor. As researchers we were committed to the close-up rather than the wide sweep, with the aim of arriving at findings in respect of teachers’ sense of their professionalism that would be indicative rather than generalizable.

The teacher interviews lasted between 40 and 70 minutes and used a semi-structured interview schedule designed to explore three main research questions.

- How do teachers perceive teaching as a profession nowadays and what are its key characteristics?
- Have changes in teachers’ roles and responsibilities altered their perceptions of what constitutes teacher professionalism and, if so, in what ways?
- What are the implications of such changes for the recruitment and retention of teachers and for the future of primary teaching as a profession?

Each of the 36 interviews (24 from England and 12 from New Zealand) was fully transcribed and the analysis process was aided by the use of MAXqda (and its precursor
T. Locke et al.

Table 2. Characteristics of the sample schools in 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Size (pupils)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roseholme</td>
<td>Middle class suburb of large industrial city</td>
<td>380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seaton</td>
<td>Large village adjoining seaside town</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briggs Estate</td>
<td>Working class housing estate in depressed ex-mining area</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Lane</td>
<td>Commuter village near cathedral city</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverside</td>
<td>Rural village near cathedral city</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanglewood</td>
<td>Small village in rural location</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rimu</td>
<td>Central city with mixed catchment area</td>
<td>380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kauri</td>
<td>City suburb with mixed catchment area</td>
<td>306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totara</td>
<td>Working class suburb of small industrial town</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kahikatea</td>
<td>Rural location near provincial city</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matai</td>
<td>City suburb with bilingual population</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikau</td>
<td>Small rural town</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The English researchers did their initial coding and category generation in relation to the English teacher data. At a later meeting with their New Zealand counterparts at the University of Waikato these categories were compared and contrasted with those generated independently from the New Zealand teacher data. Decisions were made collaboratively between the four writers as to suitable themes under which to analyse the comparative findings of the research in such a way as to embrace both sets of categories without affecting the grounded nature of those pertaining in either country (for a fuller account of the project methodology, see Webb & Vulliamy, 2002, Ch. 1; Locke & Hill, 2003, Ch. 2).

This first level winnowing out of thematic strands was complemented by such techniques as ‘cognitive mapping’ and ‘dilemma analysis’ (Vulliamy & Webb, 1992). We were concerned to identify dilemmas and contradictions not just between but within respondents. This resonates with the concern of Bowe et al. (1992, p. 13):

> to explore policy-making, in terms of the processes of value dispute and material influence which underlie and invest the formation of policy discourses, as well as to portray and analyse the processes of active interpretation and meaning-making which relate policy texts to practice. In part this involves the identification of resistance, accommodation, subterfuge and conformity within and between arenas of practice and the plotting of clashes and mismatches between contending discourses at work in these arenas, e.g. professionalism vs conformity, autonomy vs constraint, specification vs latitude, the managerial vs the educational.

Certainly, the teachers we interviewed were engaged in acts of interpretation and meaning-making vis-à-vis the reforms. Moreover, the dilemmas and contradictions mentioned above we found to be susceptible to critical analysis as a means of identifying (again, through interpretative acts) what we will be describing as patterns of discursive contestation at work. Indeed, the patterns of conflict we will be discussing resonate with the very examples Bowe et al. (1992) mentioned.
Embarking on a ‘professional’ life

I always loved kids, I always got on with children well, so it seemed like an obvious thing to do. (Teacher, Kahikatea)

Both English and New Zealand teachers made use of words like ‘profession’ and ‘professional’ in sharing their reasons for choosing primary teaching as a career. Seven out of 12 New Zealand teachers explicitly mentioned a love of working with children. Another key expression used by New Zealand teachers was ‘making a difference’:

I think it makes you look at yourself as a person that has quite a lot of power ... sort of to make a difference in so many people’s lives and I think that, you know, that for me has quite a good sort of feel about it. (Teacher, Kauri)

Some New Zealand teachers identified the attraction of teaching with opportunities to develop creative or intellectual interests. Indeed, a number of women teachers viewed teaching as the one allowable career path where intellectual interests could be pursued. Other New Zealand teachers mentioned lifestyle considerations, such as holidays and advantages for women attempting to raise a family.

The English sample gave a variety of often overlapping reasons and virtually mirrored the responses of their New Zealand counterparts in emphasizing ‘psychic rewards’ (Hargreaves, 1999). Love of children and/or enjoyment of working with children emerged as one of the two predominant reasons given (in accord with other research on teacher recruitment in England; see Johnston et al., 1999; Thornton & Reid, 2001). A second major reason was the influence of positive primary school experiences, characterized by a happy, successful and secure working environment for teacher and pupil. Typically, teaching was viewed as a career you embarked on because of commitment to it rather than any expectation of personal gain:

I came into it knowing that it wasn’t a high status profession. The financial rewards weren’t great when I first came in but they are getting better now slightly. It was a job you did because you loved it, not that you were going to gain any recognition, you weren’t going to be high powered. It wasn’t going to be a job that people would say ‘Oh yes, how wonderful to be a teacher’. (Class teacher, Seaton)

Other reasons included the influence of relatives or friends, the generalized sense that teaching was a profession (even if not particularly ‘high status’), opportunities for higher learning and teamwork and, as with the New Zealanders, lifestyle advantages (e.g. long holidays). English teachers viewed the knowledge and skills demanded for career entry as extremely important in determining professional status. They agreed that making teaching a graduate profession and the increasing requirements at GCSE and A-level in order to secure a place in initial teacher training had enhanced primary teacher professionalism.

It is clear that these comparable sets of reasons from antipodean settings focus strongly on two corners of the classical professionalism triangle: expert knowledge and altruism. Not surprisingly perhaps, the notion of autonomy is barely mentioned. Issues of autonomous professional judgement, we suggest, only become issues once a teacher encounters the constraints of the job and a body of expert knowledge is in place.
What we can anticipate on the basis of these declared ‘value’ positions is something of the nature of the contestation around professional identity, which we report on in the following sections. If the good of the child is the undisputed end of teaching, then definitions as to what constitutes this ‘good’ become a key issue with respect to how one responds to changes in curriculum, pedagogy, school-wide organization and school audit. In an environment characterized by highly centrist policy initiatives, the ‘good’ of the children is also a locus for discursive contestation (e.g. where the ‘good’ of the children is constructed as synonymous with the economic ‘good’ of the country or the attainment of centrally prescribed attainment measures). A teacher who is convinced that the authoritative other (the State, the subject adviser, the university scholar, the local community) knows best how to define this good is more likely to sacrifice autonomy out of deference to the expertise of the other and that other’s judgement. Altruism, we might anticipate, as the profession’s defining quality has the potential to prove its Achilles’ heel and hold the key to changes in the construction of professional identity.

**Autonomy and accountability**

You are accountable in terms of have you met that objective, have you met those criteria, have you done it in that sequence properly for those kiddies. The professional trust has gone largely. (Former headteacher, Seaton)

In this section we report on teachers’ sense of the tension between autonomy (the ability of teachers to make situated acts of professional judgement) and accountability (the sense that in making a decision one is always answerable to something or someone). Teachers from both countries were invited to compare their present situation with the one pertaining prior to the reforms, particularly in relation to who or what controls their work.

**Accountability through the curriculum and testing**

Overall, New Zealand teachers were supportive of the reforms and at least tolerant of changing accountability discourses and practices. One principal asserted strongly that ‘It’s made teachers realize they are definitely accountable, that they are accountable for the learning of children. Yes, they’ve [the changes] enhanced teaching as a profession’. Another teacher provided a clear rationale for why the reforms were required, couched in terms of the need for teacher autonomy (in the ‘restricted’ sense of Hoyle, 1975) to be balanced by some form of constraint(s):

I think, you know, until we really had *Tomorrow’s schools* [Department of Education, 1988], we had perhaps a little bit too much freedom in a way I think to do our own thing rather than perhaps keeping to some sort of, well I suppose we kept to guidelines, but I think we tended to have a little, I don’t know what, because I think once the *Tomorrow’s schools* came in it somehow brought everyone up with a mild, well fairly big perhaps, jolt and I think from then it has changed really from those days. (Teacher, Kauri)
Fairly or unfairly, she is constructing a version of teaching prior to the reforms characterized by a freedom bordering on unconstrained license. Certainly, a common theme among New Zealand teachers was to construct past practice as characterized by a lonely kind of classroom autonomy. In general, pre-1990s New Zealand teachers were constructed by our participants as ‘traditional’, ‘old-school’, ‘old-fashioned’ and fitting Hoyle’s (1975) description of ‘restricted’ in their professionality. The introduction of the National Education Goals and the National Administration Guidelines in the mid 1990s (and their revision twice since then) have required schools and teachers to work school wide on raising achievement (among other requirements), and this is the ‘jolt’ she is referring to here.

English teachers who were teaching in the 1970s and 1980s recalled the freedom that they had experienced in deciding both curriculum content and how to teach it and the personal and professional satisfaction that they had derived from this. Accountability was intrinsically motivated and resided predominantly in their commitment and moral responsibility to the children and to the school:

I enjoyed the freedom of choosing the areas that I would do and I had very strict rules for myself that I was adamant that I wouldn’t repeat the same kind of work year in and year out. … That was one of the big pluses for me being allowed to think and having the autonomy to do something that I wanted to do. I had total freedom in terms of time and in terms of the capability that I had for working with children to always do what I wanted within my own professional bounds. That was the main buzz for me—yes I would be accountable at the end of the day if there was accountability to myself, the headteacher and the rest of the school. (Headteacher, Seaton)

While they acknowledged that the era of such freedoms had gone and that teachers, like others in the public services, ought to be publicly accountable for their actions, the range and extent of extrinsically motivated accountability mechanisms for controlling teachers’ work was thought to have become excessive:

It is as if nobody trusts your professionalism any more—you know what you say and your judgement. You constantly have to justify your judgement and I think that is one of the most tiresome things about the whole process of change that we are constantly having to justify ourselves, constantly having to demonstrate we are doing the job. (Headteacher, Tanglewood)

The ‘most tiresome’ here alludes to a strong sense of unnecessary work intensification arising from bureaucratic paperwork. Schools were constantly asked for evidence that they were following the government’s reform agendas and moves in other directions were challenged.

It is clear that the presence or absence of national testing as an extrinsic accountability mechanism constitutes a major difference in the comparative working lives of New Zealand and English teachers. As the English headteacher of Briggs Estate put it:

The thing that has changed is the pressure on teachers to perform, to meet targets, to raise standards, to be accountable. … There is enormous pressure on schools to be accountable.

We are fully aware of the league tables.

As argued elsewhere (Webb et al., 2004), English teachers felt that the pressure on schools to meet their targets and to demonstrate improved pupil attainment in the
national tests had a deleterious impact on children, especially in Years 2 and 6. Moreover, teaching to the tests was against teachers’ professional judgement but was thought to be necessary to reduce the stress involved for the children.

New Zealand teachers suggested that the extrinsic controls on professional autonomy that were changing the organization of their work had increased in degree and complexity. How they responded to this increase varied from individual to individual (and even within the same individual). The following extract comes from a teacher at Kauri who positioned herself as one for whom compliance came easily:

I think we've been lucky because with the principal that we have, she’s a positive getting-on-with-it type of person so if something comes from the Ministry or something, she tells us about it, we work through it and you accept it. I mean, I'm an accepting sort of person really, I'm a fence sitter as well, you know what I mean, so I don't, I've never objected to anything really in that sort of line with the new, any new systems that are coming in.

While the tone is positive, we might note that compliance is being constructed as motivated by two contrasting dispositions. The principal’s compliance stems from a determination to be positive, to make the best of things in a pragmatic sort of way. Her own compliance is viewed as stemming from a lack of a defined position, from ‘fence sitting’. Either way, there is little suggestion of a discursive ground for resistance to policy. A more sanguine and questioning attitude towards increased extrinsic accountability is expressed by a classroom teacher at Kahikatea:

I guess accountability. I find that very hard because a child not performing well doesn’t necessarily mean that the teachers are not good. It could be they’ve got a hell home life and often that’s not taken into account. We get this, you know, coming from the government all the time, the numeracy and literacy. ... They will read by nine, they will this by nine, but hey, not everyone is toilet trained at two, so why should we all have to read at nine. I think that’s diminished our profession a little bit, but sort of forcing children to fit into standards that, you know, may not necessarily be so.

In general, New Zealand teachers recognized an increase in extrinsic forms of accountability and were inclined to accept them if they were consonant with a discourse of intrinsic or professional accountability. As a member of the senior management team at Totara hedged, ‘It’s become more professional I suppose, a bit like accountants and doctors and lawyers and that you are more accountable to the people you teach and the parents, the community, everyone’.

Accountability through audit

External audits of schools were a key external accountability mechanism in each country. Owing to the power of OfSTED to identify both ‘failing’ teachers and ‘failing’ schools, inspections in the English schools generated a climate of fear and insecurity. Webb et al. (1998) reported on the initial and very negative impact of OfSTED inspections, introduced by the Education (Schools) Act of 1992, on English schools. From their data they argued that ‘OFSTED inspections can cause loss of confidence, feelings of inadequacy, depersonalisation, and extreme anxiety which, combined with exhaustion from the intensification of work and stress, can halt creativity and
development even of schools deemed successful and render them debilitated’ (Webb et al., 1998, p. 553), claims further illustrated and substantiated by the research of Jeffrey and Woods (1996).

By the time of the interviews reported here OfSTED inspections had become accepted by teachers ‘as something we have got to suffer’. Working extremely long hours in preparation and feeling extremely stressed and anxious throughout the run up to the inspection and the inspection itself were an integral part of that suffering. This was intensified by the generally held perception that inspectors arrived at the school ‘looking for problems’ and gave ‘no recognition of what the school is achieving, it is what it is not achieving’. For example, the head of Green Lane explained how:

we had a real fight with them [the inspectors] because they say that this school should have far more children achieving level fives than they do. They don’t look at the actual profiles of the individual children; this is just because we are in a rural environment and so we had a real battle over that.

Afterwards, the Green Lane ‘post-OfSTED recovery party’ celebrated staff ‘survival’. While the description of their inspection experiences by teachers revealed their continuing vulnerability and powerlessness in the face of inspectors’ judgements, the fighting talk of headteachers’ accounts suggested growing confidence to challenge both the conduct and the findings of inspections, with the head of Roseholme reporting how ultimately the legitimacy of his complaints had been acknowledged by a senior member of the inspectorate who visited the school to offer a formal apology.

In New Zealand the ERO, which carries out three-yearly reviews of each school, was generally viewed by the New Zealand teachers interviewed as contributing to their professionalism. Unlike the English teachers’ perceptions of OfSTED, they had reasonably positive opinions about the ERO:

Well, I’ve only ever had very positive experiences with the ERO. I think if you treat them politely as people and make them welcome in your school. I don’t ever go into an ERO visit expecting everything to be perfect. Who wants to be perfect? ... When we go into ERO, I want them to see the school humming along, kids happy, teachers happy in their jobs and the curriculum (with) all the ticks and crosses in the right places. (Teacher, Rimu)

However, the vignette here, with its mention of ‘ticks’ and ‘crosses’, inadvertently constructs an ERO visit as generating administrivia. In general, teachers saw ERO as having a strong influence on what happened in schools because it was always ‘at the back of their minds’ that there would be an ERO visit to come and a concomitant pressure to produce a large amount of documentation. As occurred in England with OfSTED inspection reports, schools feared the possibility of negative aspects of ERO reports finding their way into local media, since, as some teachers remarked, this could lead to falling rolls and loss of income, staffing and so on. Despite teachers’ general acceptance of this form of external accountability, ERO’s constant but unpredictable ‘presence’ appeared to be a powerful source of surveillance and consistent with other New Zealand studies (see, for example, Hill, 2000; Thrupp et al., 2000).

One senior management teacher remarked: ‘It makes you feel more accountable. You know that someone’s going to be coming and checking up’. These two sentences
coupling ‘accountability’ with ‘checking up’ encapsulate perfectly the notion of extrinsic accountability we have been referring to.

While headteachers in England viewed themselves as controlled primarily by the Government through DfES policy directives and OfSTED inspections, they also viewed their LEAs as having re-established considerable control over them, particularly through their role as guardians of the Standards agenda. One commented, for example, that ‘The advisor coming in and asking about target setting is a pressure for me because I have got to then persuade the staff that the targets the advisor wants to set via the governing body are appropriate and realistic’. No such local administrative pressure existed in New Zealand since the reforms had abolished their Regional Education Boards; instead, Boards of Trustees had been created with devolved governance for all aspects of school life (except teachers’ salaries). This ‘self-management’ for primary schools had led to an immediate benefit for principals and teachers in increased budgetary control and an enhanced sense of fiscal autonomy:

I was trying to think back to what we did under the old system but I think we’d have to go back to the Ministry for a lot of our stuff. Whereas now we’re actually, I’m trusted with the budget or several budgets. And so I, as long as you know I meet the needs of the staff and the school that’s given me a little bit of say in what I do. (Teacher, Rimu)

The intensified ‘actually’, linked to the participle ‘trusted’, suggests that at least in this respect there is a gain in trust in comparison with what happened previously.

In other respects, however, teachers believed that the self-management of schools in New Zealand had curtailed teachers’ autonomy. One teacher stated: ‘I think Boards of Trustees in this current climate feel very empowered to ask all sorts of things of us that perhaps they perceive as being their right to and we end up resisting a lot of that because of the need for confidentiality of the children’. New Zealand teachers viewed Boards of Trustees as potentially both supportive and unjustifiably interfering. One principal commented: ‘That’s quite stressful on principals when people, Boards of Trustees especially, are allowed to come in and almost dictate to how you operate’. In respect of Matai School, the Board had had such a negative effect that the Ministry of Education had dissolved it and temporarily appointed a commissioner to assist the principal to run the school. In England, also, governors have an ever increasing role in determining the running and direction of schools through legal requirements concerning the curriculum, the salaries and disciplining of teachers, expenditure on staffing and the general resourcing of the school. They were mentioned by headteachers as a growing source of accountability and control but, as in New Zealand, the potential for interference was balanced by the potential for support.

In both countries it is clear that principals have a pivotal mediating role in respect of government policy and the shaping of accountability technologies in individual schools. In the English schools they were perceived as having considerable control over teachers’ workload, particularly in the amount of routine paperwork they required for curriculum policies and reviews, record keeping and reports and planning. While headteachers were recognized as helpfully shielding their staff from
Primary teacher professionalism

reform-related pressures and filtering out unnecessary tasks, generally they were viewed as compliant with government policy and requiring considerable amounts of paperwork ‘to cover their backs’ should it be requested by the LEA, OfSTED or other government agencies. The head of Riverside was viewed as exceptional in going against national policy and refusing to adopt the Literacy Strategy and for running the school with a relative lack of paperwork.

In the four larger schools members of the Senior Management Team and subject coordinators also checked teachers’ paperwork and monitored the content and quality of their lessons, not only through scrutinizing the paperwork but also by classroom observation. While initially such monitoring by colleagues was resisted by teachers (Webb et al., 1998), the interview data revealed that it had become accepted practice. However, teachers considered that the greater accessibility of classrooms militated against taking risks and reinforced adherence to government advice:

> When people are coming in and you are going to be observed and you have got LEA advisors coming in, you have got your school coordinators watching and you have got OfSTED inspectors watching. … I think that sometimes you feel pressured that this is how you should teach it. Although you might have good ideas, I think that it takes a very strong teacher to actually say ‘I’m not going to do it like that’, when they have got the pressure of somebody watching. (Teacher, Roseholme)

The mandatory introduction of performance management systems (PMS) into New Zealand schools in 1997 was rapidly followed by the drafting of professional standards aimed at enhancing PMS by more clearly specifying ‘the dimensions of a teacher’s performance’ (Ministry of Education, 1998, p. 2). Sullivan (1999, p. 151) described the imposition of standards by the Government as ‘part of its play to reshape both the status of teachers and the work they do’. The issue of professional standards and their relationship to performance-related pay was hotly contested in the 1990s, particularly by the teachers’ unions, who finally capitulated in 1999 (Annesley, 1992; New Zealand Educational Institute, 1998). The latest primary teachers’ collective contract was settled between the primary teachers’ union and the Government on the basis that the Teachers Council would not register teachers unless they had been regularly appraised against the standards set down in the contract. Teachers saw such systems as a new feature of their professional lives and something that reduced their sense of autonomy:

> I’m not totally autonomous in my classroom but I am you know responsible for the actual teaching but I’m also accountable to the principal and to, you know, the deputy principal from the point of view that they observe my teaching appraisals and things. So I have to make sure that what I’m doing is right. (Teacher, Kauri)

The last sentence here would appear to link the form of accountability being described with Darling-Hammond’s (1988, p. 61) description of the new, compliant professional who does ‘things right’ rather than doing ‘the right things’. There is also a suggestion of the emergence of the ‘observer’ who resides within the teacher, thereby dispensing with the need for discipline in a coercive sense (Hartley, 1992). It is clear from New Zealand teachers’ comments that appraisal works to keep them...
performing in accordance with the expectations of the principal and the school as a whole. Teachers felt very much ‘under the eye’, as one described it, reinforcing the view of Smyth (2001, p. 115) that seemingly benign forms of teacher evaluation can still be a form of surveillance and control. However, New Zealand teachers themselves were generally positive about appraisal, seeing it as professionally supportive and reassuring, conducive to intrinsic accountability (i.e. indicating whether they were doing a ‘good job’ with the pupils) and useful in identifying professional development needs. New Zealand principals were generally viewed as accepting the reforms and working with staff to implement them.

Unlike New Zealand, performance management in England has yet to make a noticeable impact on teachers’ work, particularly their classroom practice (Wragg et al., 2004). It was implemented as the second phase of the introduction of performance-related pay. Headteachers in the English schools recounted how the first phase, known as threshold assessment, had involved them in an elaborate and time-consuming process in 2000 to determine which teachers of those who were eligible and had applied should be awarded a salary increase of £2000. For the teachers the process was regarded as ‘insulting’:

The fact that you have got your results, you are maybe working as hard as you possibly can and at the end of the day you still got to apply to show that you are good enough to do what you have been doing to the best of your ability already. I found that, and I think most members of staff found that, a major insult. Why on earth have we got to do this when we are already working flat out and it was another piece of paperwork?

Since 97% of the teachers who applied were successful, it was regarded as a futile exercise, giving rise to a general pay rise rather than as the anticipated rewarding of the most competent teachers (Wragg et al., 2004). However, as demonstrated by Mahoney et al. (2004, p. 452), the process generated considerable anxiety, anger and resentment and these emotions are likely to resurface in future annual decisions about pay as the system of performance-related pay develops, ‘especially if headteachers resort to setting “hard-nosed targets” in order to align the numbers of teachers meeting their targets with the capacity of budgets to reward them’.

Accountability through collaboration

Hargreaves (1994, p. 245) wrote that one of the ‘most promising metaparadigms of the postmodern age is that of collaboration as an articulating and integrating principle of action, planning, culture, development, organization and research’. Collaboration enables change to be viewed positively as providing ongoing opportunities for continuous improvement and allows teachers to make the transition from ‘restricted’ to ‘extended’ professionals, to use Hoyle’s (1975) terms. When terms like ‘collegiality’ and ‘collaboration’ are coopted in a policy reform environment it is the agenda this cooption serves and the potential for change in workplace power relations that determine the nature and degree of professional enhancement on the one hand or deprofessionalization on the other (Smyth, 2001). Collaborative practice as a means to the achievement of uncritical compliance and the spread of what Atkinson
(2003, p. 5) termed ‘invidious accountability’ is unlikely to engender professional enhancement.

The introduction of PMS in New Zealand, which led to school-wide changes in planning and new ways of tracking pupil learning and ascertaining the professional development needs of teachers, generated considerable collaborative practices. Among our respondents opinion tended to be split on whether these were conducive to professionalism and a survival strategy in the face of increased extrinsic accountability demands or relentlessly conducive to work intensification and what Hargreaves (1991) called ‘contrived collegiality’. Indeed, a number of teachers experienced this split in the form of a dilemma. More than half the New Zealand teachers expressed a belief in the collegial or team nature of professionalism. In this sense, the 1990s primary school appears to have become characterized by ‘extended professionality’, although as one of the principals explained, there can be losses:

The negative’s probably I think a lot of the magic’s gone out of teaching, some of those special exciting wonderful things that just happened without a plan and you wrote the plan afterwards because it was just good solid teaching that came on the spur of the moment thing that happened. And I think a lot of that’s gone because it doesn’t fit with the syndicate plan or the school focus or you know and I think you know the structure’s good but the structure’s bad! (Principal, Totara)

In this example adherence to the constraints of a plan is conducive to the disappearance, and the repetition of ‘gone’ gives the utterance an elegiac tone, of a particular kind of creative teaching (‘magical’, ‘special’, ‘exciting’, ‘wonderful’). In summary, for New Zealand teachers the increase in formal planning meetings could be both supportive and constraining, could foster their sense of being a professional or diminish it, because the endless round of meetings increased work intensification pressures, which in turn diminished their sense of themselves as being effective in their classrooms.

In England throughout the 1990s implementation of the National Curriculum and its associated assessment caused teachers increasingly to work together with colleagues who taught classes of the same or similar age pupils on joint plans and the moderation of judgements on pupils’ work (Webb & Vulliamy, 1996). Such collaborative working was viewed by teachers as valuable in giving access to colleagues’ views and ideas and providing security in times of uncertainty, such as OfSTED inspections. However, unlike the New Zealand teachers, they saw collaboration as a positive aspect of loss of autonomy rather than as essentially contributing to that loss. Nevertheless, their experience of collaboration was similar to that of the New Zealand teachers in that increasingly the escalation of meetings became viewed negatively as contributing to work intensification. Interestingly, the data for this project suggest that teacher collaboration is now decreasing as it is rendered less necessary owing to the detailed content prescription of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, growth in the use of government approved schemes of work available on the Internet and the narrowing of the curriculum, which has reduced the range of activities offered to children.

One of the potentials of collaborative structures in the school milieu, and one mentioned by our teachers, is safeguarding a teacher’s sense of professionality vis-à-vis a wider context where parents and the public at large have been legitimized in
their role as ‘holding teachers to account’. In both England and New Zealand children and their parents are being reconstrued as clients and customers and, as such, entitled to participate in determining the future direction of their schools. For Hargreaves (2000, p. 172) the new relationships that teachers are having to form with parents ‘is one of the greatest challenges to their professionalism in the post-modern age’. Teachers in New Zealand saw parents as increasingly demanding of accountability and several reported that parents surveilled teachers quite closely in the post-reform period and had become more vocal and demanding:

Well, when I first went in to teaching parents valued teachers. I don’t think they do now. If we went into a business and just parked ourselves down and observed what they were doing in their business they would think we were weird. Whereas a parent can come in, sit down at the back of your class and think that’s fine. They haven’t got the courtesy to say, ‘Do you mind if I see what’s going on?’ (Teacher, Nikau)

In terms of the wider community, several teachers commented that they believed that parents and the public at large were aware of the high workloads teachers carried and many saw teachers as more professional than in the past. Others, however, were not so sure and commented on a general willingness of parents to ‘come down to school and argue the point and believe their children over teachers’.

This New Zealand comment is echoed in England by the Riverside headteacher’s comment that parents ‘have been encouraged to question what goes on in school and they do, far more than they used to and I feel that we are constantly having to account for what we are doing’. For primary teachers in England only those parents who actually became involved in school and/or classroom activities were regarded as fully appreciating the changing roles and responsibilities of teachers. More noteworthy was a parental willingness to challenge the organization and teaching in the school and the growth in parental expectations of teachers’ responsibilities towards their children. However, as documented by Vincent (1996), schools resisted parental influence where they considered it unwarranted and actively sought to safeguard their professional authority.

As suggested earlier, the autonomy component of the classical professionalism triangle only becomes salient for teachers once they are in school. In this section we have examined the manner in which increasing pressures for external accountability via a series of policy measures have impacted on teachers’ sense of their autonomy. Before concluding, we will examine more briefly the ways in which such external accountability has influenced the other two components of the triangle, altruism and knowledge, that in part shaped teachers’ original conceptions of the career on which they embarked.

**Altruism and accountability**

The quality that the teacher has is that they have got to believe in their ability to make a difference, but they need the understanding, the knowledge of how they are going to do that. (Headteacher, Green Lane)

Our data suggest that in both countries the altruistic concern of teachers for the welfare and development of their pupils remains very dominant throughout their
primary teacher professionalism 573

careers. Teaching was felt to be a particularly rewarding job because of the pleasure of watching children grow, develop and make progress and the fact that teachers were a vital part of this process. Thus, for example, a New Zealand teacher’s comment that ‘it is nice to know that you perhaps have made a difference in some people’s life’ is mirrored by an English teacher’s comment that ‘you are so important in their life and that is a real privilege’. Such intrinsic rewards of the job were sometimes explicitly pitted against teachers’ dissatisfaction with policy-makers’ external demands, as in an English teacher’s comment that ‘there will always be people who love the job and no matter what the government throws at them they will put up with it’. Teachers in both countries viewed the core of primary teaching, the very heart of primary professionalism, as the ability to motivate and develop children’s learning and to boost their confidence and self-image, a finding that is consonant with other research into primary teachers’ professionalism and identity (see, for example, Broadfoot & Osborn, 1988; Nias, 1989; Woods & Jeffrey, 1996; Hargreaves, 1999; Osborn et al., 2000).

However, the expression of such altruistic concern showed evidence of being affected by a growing dilemma for teachers as to whether their altruism could remain the holistic child-centred one that had brought them into teaching or whether it needed harnessing to, or reconstructing in accordance with, the demands of the external accountability agenda discussed in the previous section. Thus, for example, the New Zealand principal of Matai explicitly linked the ‘making a difference’ theme to the achievement of learning outcomes that are publicly accountable:

We are here to give our children maximum opportunity to achieve and this is how we show that we are making a difference for these children and I think that’s the focus now, that at the end of the day we have to show as professionals, we are providing programmes that suit children and that children have got a choice to achieve, they have an opportunity to achieve and that the learning outcomes at the end are good, that they are actually achieving.

Such an emphasis fits well with some academic and policy-makers’ redefinitions of the moral purpose of schooling to embrace the ‘new professionalism’ agenda. In England, for example, David Hopkins, an academic known for his contributions to the ‘school improvement’ literature, became Director of the Standards and Effectiveness Unit at the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), where he wrote of the need to inject a ‘contemporary moral purpose of leadership’ because of ‘the vital importance of closing the gap between our highest and lowest achieving pupils and to raise standards of learning and achievement for all’ (Hopkins, 2003, p. 60). Clearly at stake here is contestation over what exactly ‘making a difference’ means and whose and what agenda these different meanings serve.

This double-edged approach to the altruistic concerns for the child that, as argued elsewhere (Webb, 2005), underpins competing models of educative, instructional and pedagogic leadership in primary schools was found within the responses of individual teachers in our sample. Thus, on the one hand, a New Zealand teacher said that ‘what keeps me in teaching is children learning and being able to make a difference with children, with their learning, but also with their lives’; on the other hand, an English teacher said that ‘I am happy that our children are in there who are achieving high
Knowledge and accountability

Being a professional is constantly learning and seeking that further development in your own teaching. (Principal, Nikau)

In an era of reform, the character of professional development is clearly going to be affected by the agenda driving it. The state, bent on achieving the compliance of a potentially resistant profession, will have an interest in tailoring professional development to an agenda consistent with policy implementation. Funding to professional development agencies is likely to be tied to the delivery of such an agenda, with those advisors ‘facilitating’ this agenda having their careers advanced by their cooperation. Furthermore, when extrinsic accountability measures are increased it is unsurprising to see the professional development needs of teachers becoming defined in terms of their ability to deliver on those same measures.

In the New Zealand context the pressure of reforms (including the introduction of PMS) led to the increased formalization of school-wide planning and appraisal. These organizational technologies both affected and effected the identification of professional development needs in teachers, needs often referenced back to reform demands. As one teacher remarked, ‘It has made us focus and look at ourselves’. While there is a potential downside to such public mechanisms for identifying professional development needs (being observed and found wanting), there was general acceptance of these from the New Zealand sample, despite an occasional reference to unrealized fears.

In general, New Zealand teachers saw most of the professional development on offer as related to reform implementation, but accepted it as positively enhancing their sense of being professionals, comparing it favourably with what had been available previously:

There’s more [professional development] available, well, there seems to be more available, and it’s more professional, like when I went on courses before it was really a day off school, you know, which is quite a sad scenario. Whereas now it’s not a day off school. It’s another day of hard work and that’s got to be good for professional development. (Teacher, Kahikatea)

New Zealand teachers, then, communicated a sense of a positive professional development environment, providing a number of opportunities, including curriculum implementation contracts, school management and leadership courses and conferences, further academic study and research opportunities, all of which increased their sense of being professionals.

Like their New Zealand counterparts, English teachers were in agreement that an enthusiasm for, and engagement in, continual learning and the constant upgrading of skills were key characteristics of today’s professional teacher. However, there were widespread complaints concerning the narrowness of professional development opportunities, reflecting government priorities and the tensions that sometimes
existed between their own perceived needs and the training needs of the school as a whole. The in-service training agenda had been transformed from one where previously teachers chose from a wide variety of courses to ones explicitly linked to the Labour government’s new policy framework of ‘professional standards’, including: standards for qualified teacher status; induction standards for beginning teachers; standards for crossing the performance pay threshold; standards for advanced skills teachers; national standards for headship. In addition, courses were provided to support the implementation of new government initiatives, such as the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. However, there were also some examples, discussed more fully elsewhere in Webb (2005), of more personally empowering instances of school-based in-service training. These included the Green Lane headteacher and a colleague successfully applying for a DfES teacher research grant to work on the design and implementation of a thinking skills programme for pupils and the deputy headteacher being awarded a professional bursary to enable her to identify strengths and weaknesses in science teaching and learning in the junior classes.

Conclusion

Our focus in this paper has been the impact of policy-driven educational reforms in New Zealand and England on primary teachers’ conceptions of their professionalism. In terms of the classical teacher professionalism triangle of altruism, knowledge and autonomy, both groups of teachers were characterized by an altruistic interest in children and a valuation of professional expertise and its continual development; both groups were also aware of increasing constraints on their autonomy as teachers have become far more subject to what we have termed ‘extrinsic’ accountability demands produced as a result of a range of policy shifts. In analysing our data we were interested in the articulation of dilemmas and suggestions in the language of our respondents of shifts in the discursive meaning of key terms. This interest is in accord with Luke’s (1995, p. 15) assertion that ‘The meanings of … keywords are tied closely to particular orientations to the world. They are dynamic, changing in accordance with the demands and needs of the institution or community in question’.

One way of making sense of the complex of dilemmas and attitudes discussed previously is to see it in terms of the two competing constructions of teacher’s work and teacher identity, described previously as managerial and classical/activist or, using Codd’s (1997) terms, technocratic-reductionist and professional-contextualist. Drawing on this schematization, we represent some of the tensions and dilemmas discussed previously in Table 3. In the left-hand column we list the keywords that we see as particularly susceptible to discursive contestation and shifts in signification. As Table 3 shows, these words can be seen to have different meanings according to the discourses that construct these meanings.

Like any schematization, Table 3 is a simplification. It is certainly not meant to suggest that technocratic-reductionist teachers are bad. Indeed, many of the dilemmas experienced by both English and New Zealand teachers suggest that they want to be both sorts of teacher and that their allegiance is frequently torn. Rather, such a
scheme provides a way of mapping the kinds of discursive shift and potential for discursive contestation we would view as a major finding to emerge from our interpretation of the interview data.

Our respondents had taken time out of busy professional working lives to reflect on questions for which there were no simple answers. As researchers we were humbled by their ability to reflect on causalities and to explore genuine dilemmas. Such ability, on the face of it, bespeaks ‘active agency’ and the use of ‘professional judgement’. Our teachers, on opposite sides of the globe and from different cultural settings, though differently constrained and enabled, were certainly not disempowered in some crude sense by the sovereign power of the state and its mandated reforms.

However, there were two broad ways in which their work was susceptible to control. The first was via the complex of particular requirements arising from a more centrally prescribed curriculum and assessment agenda and the way their work was being reorganized by extrinsic accountability mechanisms to serve that agenda and ensure compliance with it. The second was via discourse itself, via ways in which they were being subtly ‘interpellated’ (Althusser, 1971) to bring new meanings to some of the concepts they were attached to as professional values. In our discussion we have mentioned such concepts as ‘professional’, ‘autonomy’, ‘accountability’, ‘making a difference’ and so on. To assert, for example, that centrist, policy-driven reforms are mediated by the value systems of teachers at the chalkface is, we believe, to give insufficient credence to the power of hegemonic discourses to become the linguistic stock-in-trade of teachers, to construct their values and to inscribe their subjectivities (Locke, 2004b), a process which Atkinson (2003, p. 5) termed the ‘organisation of consent’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keyword(s)</th>
<th>Technocratic-reductionist</th>
<th>Professional-contextualist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>Managerial professionalism/ ‘new’ professionalism</td>
<td>Classical professionalism/ ‘extended professionalism’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>Mainly extrinsic (audit)</td>
<td>Mainly intrinsic (professional)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>Constrained by extrinsic accountability mechanisms</td>
<td>Constrained by intrinsic accountability obligations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altruism/making a</td>
<td>Viewed in terms of raising the standards, measured by test</td>
<td>Driven by a holistic child-centred concern to benefit children’s lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>difference</td>
<td>results, of all children and closing the gap between high and low achievers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegiality</td>
<td>‘Contrived’ collegiality (almost for survival) with dangers of increased surveillance</td>
<td>‘Extended professionality’ Collaboration and professional networking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>Externally determined and designed to make teachers effectively implement government reforms</td>
<td>Individually determined by schools/teachers needs and to find better ways of addressing a community’s learning needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For teachers in England most aspects of the extrinsic accountability agenda, coupled, they perceived, with a decline in the general public’s assessment of the status of the teaching profession, were viewed as impacting negatively on their professionalism. This applied especially to the work intensification associated with the surveillance audit culture of target setting, league tables of test results and OfSTED inspections. Teachers perceived that compliance with such centralized reforms had diverted their energies away from their central task of teaching children. However, that this was not a blanket rejection of government prescription is illustrated by the fact that, as discussed in another paper arising from the York–Waikato project (Vulliamy et al., 2004), they felt that such prescription concerning pedagogy enhanced their professionalism despite the fact that it reduced their autonomy in the classroom. This is because their compliance with the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies led them to change some of their professional values concerning desirable pedagogy, since they saw the changes in their teaching methods as bringing direct identifiable benefits for children. As with the English primary teachers studied by Osborn et al. (2000, pp. 232–233) between 1989 and 1997, they had developed ‘new understandings about how to achieve their underlying professional values. These have in turn become the basis for a new “professionalism” which is a synthesis of past and present ideologies’.

For teachers in New Zealand the curriculum and assessment regime was also more prescriptive, with big increases in extrinsic accountability measures and a heightened potential for surveillance. In general, however, despite the negative impact of work intensification, they saw the reforms as enhancing their professional knowledge base and leaving their classroom practices relatively unscathed. A number of school-wide procedures were acting to constrain their autonomy. Like their English counterparts, however, if they saw these as somehow serving the needs of their pupils and enhancing their collegiality they accommodated these structures with their sense of themselves as professionals intact and even enhanced.

Like Marshall and Ball (1999, p. 81), we would assert that what is at stake in this account is ‘the balance between gains and losses, “impositions” and opportunities, in the ongoing restructuring of teachers’ work’. Likewise, in respect of the teachers in our sample, we would argue that

These are not simple stories of oppression and exclusion, but of a struggle between antagonistic discourses—a struggle over and through meanings and practices. (Marshall & Ball, 1999, p. 81)

For the English teachers in our sample the ‘balance’ tended to the negative, a finding comparable with Woods et al. (1997). For the New Zealand teachers the overall mood was more upbeat, a finding that we suggest reflects a less oppressive audit culture in that country.

Notes on contributors
Terry Locke is an Associate Professor in the Department of Arts and Language Education at the University of Waikato. He is coordinating editor of the e-journal,

Graham Vulliamy is Professor of Education at the University of York, where he has taught since 1972. He is an executive editor of the International Journal of Educational Development and of the British Journal of Sociology of Education. He was President of the British Association for International and Comparative Education (BAICE) for the year 2002–2003.

Rosemary Webb is a Reader in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of York. Prior to university teaching and research, she taught for 10 years in infant, primary and middle schools and from 1989–1991 she was a Professional Officer for Primary Education at the National Curriculum Council. She has published widely in the field of primary education and especially, in collaboration with Graham Vulliamy, on the changing nature of primary teachers’ work.

Mary Hill is a Head of Centre for Education in the Faculty of Education at the University of Auckland. Prior to university teaching and research, she taught in primary schools and was Deputy Principal of a large urban school. She is currently Chairperson of the Board of the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER). Her research interests include teachers’ work and professionalism, teaching, assessment and curriculum reform and practitioner research.

References


