

TITLE:**The professional artistry of teaching: A question of recognition or regulated control!****AUTHOR:****Dr Sham Naidu****DATE PUBLISHED:****10 March 2012****ABSTRACT**

Many teachers view 'teacher evaluation' or 'teacher appraisal' as a means of effecting bureaucratic organisational change in schools. In essence, this change is attributed to 'political reconstruction' and the 'disciplining' of teachers. As a result, some common phrases associated with this ideological phenomenon of 'accountability' are: 'quality control', 'performance indicators', 'calculable teachers', 'describable teachers', 'comparable teachers', 'evaluatory eye', 'disciplinary power' and the issue of 'professionalism' (Smyth, 2001a, p. 117). The writer is of the opinion that teachers are the potential agents of change and not the policy makers situated in their ivory towers. But how can teachers change the world when they are daily subjected to bureaucratic processes designed to control and manipulate their work? For example, even the issue of professionalism in teaching has not escaped the gaze of surveillance.

The professional artistry of teaching: A question of recognition or regulated control

Dr Sham Naidu

The issue of professionalism in teachers' work has been highlighted by Grainger (2002, p. 1) in a short but concise paper presented to the New Zealand Principals' Federation—Nga Tumvaki O Aotearoa. Drawing from her experiences of more than twenty years as a teacher, counsellor, principal, education reviewer, adviser, consultant, researcher and lecturer, she maintains that 'all teachers are professionals'. If this were not the case, then teachers would engage in professions of a different nature; in ones that were less demanding and less complex. She also maintains that 'as professionals, teachers make what he or she does look so simple and natural to the untrained eye, that the uninitiated might well be tempted to believe that anyone could do it' (p. 1). This portrayal of teaching as a simple act is what Grainger (2002, p. 1) refers to as the 'professional artistry of teaching'. However, for her the problem with this term is that 'it is difficult to tie down and quantify, depicting as it does on the professional's many faceted response to all the cues and clues present, covertly or overtly' (p. 1). Further, she maintains that 'it has to do with how professionals frame the varied problems of practice, which they continuously experience and how they individually craft creative and innovative solutions to overcome them' (p. 1).

This being so, Grainger (2001, p. 1) argues that 'the literature illustrates that educational policy makers have turned to technical competency as a way of accounting for professional expertise, as it is easier to define, observe and assess'. She maintains that:

Rather than looking closely at what professionals actually do in the holistic school context, individual competencies are atomised, seemingly in a vacuum, and held up as the sum total of what teachers do. These competencies can then be listed and assessed as part of performance management cycles. (p. 1)

In this framework, according to Fish (1991, p. 30), 'those aspects of a teacher's work which can be readily observed, mastered and monitored are valued at the expense of the individual, multi-dimensional creativity with which teachers perform their roles'. Teachers' work is now subject to minute scrutiny by the observation of technical skills where teachers are subject to purely technical modes of accountability. This being so, 'aspects of style and personality, which contribute to professional performance, are sidelined' (Fish, 1991, p. 30). In other words, teachers are denied the autonomy that recognises their specialist knowledge and moral responsibility.

Whilst agreeing that 'the technical competency model of evaluation may sit well with the values which drive industry, i.e. to produce the best quality product as uniformly and cheaply as possible', Grainger reminds us that 'it is not a good fit with educational ideals, nor is it inspirational for teachers, as it seems to assume that teachers should not be trusted with more than the technical aspects of the job' (2002, p. 1). So what can teachers do to reclaim the expertise from which policy direction is increasingly alienating them? Concurring with Grainger (2002), the writer is of the opinion that the first step is to become aware of the forces that are shaping the profession and the attitudes and values that underpin them. Good starting points are the official documents, which communicate essential knowledge to the profession, such as the *Performance management guidelines* and *Professional standards for teachers* (South Australia). Teachers should critique whether these documents really reflect the nature of being a competent teacher, or do they create a document reality (Atkinson & Coffey, 1997) which is somewhat removed from practice? Once teachers start to question the message inherent in the policies that govern evaluation, it will become increasingly apparent that these policies can transmit a rather dubious form of knowledge, which may be dangerously divorced from the practice and context of schooling.

References

- Atkinson, P., & Coffey, A. (1997). Analysing documentary realities. In D. Silverman (Ed.), *Qualitative research: Theory, method and practice* (pp. 45-62). London: Sage Publications.
- Fish, D. (1991). But can you prove it? Quality assurance and the reflective practitioner? *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 16(1), 22-36.
- Grainger, S. (2002). *The dangers of educational expertise: What happens when experts make expertise look simple*. Paper presented at the New Zealand Principals' Federation—Nga Tumvaki O Aotearoa, Auckland, New Zealand.
- Smyth, J. (2001). *Reflections on a 'damaged life': The 'hidden injuries' of teaching within the self-managing school*. Paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle.