

Connecting Education and Enterprise: Initiating Transformative Professionalism Among University of Applied Sciences Lecturers

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ABSTRACT:

This paper presents the debate concerning professionalism in today's postmodern society. More specifically, how professionalism has been perceived in the field of teaching. Currently, this of concern for business lectures at universities of applied sciences (UAS) in Austria. This is due to their lack of an established professional identity within the Austrian higher education institutions (HEI). Because of this fact, Sachs's transformative professionalism model built around a community of practice is offered in hopes of assisting these lecturers in (re)establishing their identities by connecting education and enterprise.

KEYWORDS: transformative professionalism, business lecturers, university of applied sciences, communities of practice.

INTRODUCTION:

Barnett (2008: 190) argues that in today's post-modern age we are struggling with, what he calls, supercomplexities where 'the claims to authority that formed the basis of the professional's legitimacy as a professional are continually challenged'. We observe this being played out daily on the Internet, where according to Keen (2007: 44), in his book regarding the corrosive affects of this medium *The Cult of the Amateur*, 'By empowering the amateur we are undermining the authority of the experts ...'. However, these terms need not be perceived as being in diametric opposition to each other. As with Pro-Ams (professional amateurs) who are 'innovative, committed and networked amateurs working to professional standards' (Leadbeater and Miller 2004: 9 and 23), the distinction between the two can be seen as moving along a continuum. Austrian higher education institutions (HEI) have not escaped this phenomenon either, especially in the relatively newly established institution of university of applied sciences (UAS), with the hiring of lecturers from the world of business who are now confronted with their own professionalism in the world of academics.

Considering the above, some may define the concept of professionalism as 'an artificial construct, with ever-changing and always-contested traits', in other words it could be applied to any type of work (Crook 2008: 23). For these lectures this ambiguity could come as a stark contrast to the functional view of professionalism in business as being defined essentially as a relationship between 'the provider' and 'the client' (Nanda 2003). Thus, there is a need for these lecturers to understand the professional circumstances that they have inherited and to develop from them. In order to achieve this, their professionalism needs to be seen, as Hargreaves (2000: 167-175) identifies it, within the fourth age: post-professional/postmodern, for this aptly describes the circumstances most find themselves in. Therefore, in order to address these circumstances the remainder of this paper will explore the following areas:

1. Professionalism: from traditional to transformative
2. The current situation for UAS lecturers
3. Initiating transformative professionalism

PROFESSIONALISM: FROM TRADITIONAL TO TRANSFORMATIVE:

To achieve a more complete understanding of professionalism we need to first define it in general and secondly for the teacher in particular. According to Eraut (1994: 1-2), '[m]ost accounts of the ideology of

professionalism follow the functionalist models developed by Goode (1969), Merton (1960) and Parsons (1968) which accord primacy of place to the professional knowledge base', in order to provide 'the social control of expertise'. As seen above, this traditional meaning is currently being challenged. Since teaching has long suffered in comparison to more accepted professions such as law, medicine, and now business, because of its supposed lack of professional expertise, this challenge could be welcomed by some. Throughout though teaching has strived to advance its *professionalism* namely, 'improving quality and standards of practice' partially through professional development in hopes of 'improving [its] status and standing', that is to say *professionalization* (Hargreaves 2000: 152).

Unlike these accepted professions, a teacher's professional knowledge is 'practical, experiential and shaped by a teacher's purpose and values' (Clandinin 1986: 4; as found in Hargreaves and Goodson 1996: 11); therefore it is not easily comparable. Regarding these UAS lecturers from industry, Hargreaves' (2000: 153-176) *Four ages of professionalism and professional development* (pre-professional, autonomous, collegial and post-professional/postmodern) are valuable, not for their historic features per se, but in assisting in comprehending these lecturers' own previous learning biographies as well as their influence on them (see also fourfold typology Whitty 2008).

Since through teaching lecturers enviably convey their own ideas of learning to the students, their prior educational experiences shape their professionalism. In Surgrue's study 'Student Teachers' Lay Theories: Implications for Professional Development', 'teachers' images of what they should do and how they should be as teachers, were heavily framed by the practical knowledge they retained of teaching from when they themselves were students' (as found in Hargreaves and Goodson 1996: 12). For some of these lecturers this could suggest the *pre-professional age* where teaching has been seen 'as managerially demanding but technically simple, its principles and parameters... treated as unquestioned commonsense (Hargreaves 2000: 156). For some, the *autonomous age* of teaching, with its "individualism, isolation and privatism" (Zileinski and Hoy 1983, Rosenholtz 1989; as found in Hargreaves 2000: 160 and 162) has brought a certain amount of discretion, but in turn has made them professionally isolated (both inside and outside the University), therefore ill prepared to cope with the changes to come in the following age and those occurring today. As in the age of *collegial* professionalism, the hiring of these lecturers in some part has led to 'de-professionalize the knowledge base of teaching and dull[ed] the profession's critical edge' and if done to excess would '[sever it] from the academic world altogether' (Hargreaves 2000: 166).

Given that these lecturers likely do not completely share the teaching ethos found in the first three ages, it would be prudent to focus more closely on the present *post-professional /postmodern age*. With its 'broader, more flexible and more democratically inclusive of groups outside of teaching and their concerns than its predecessors', this age is characterised by the blurring of the lines where learning can happen (*eg* in-company, online, etc.) and who can deliver it (Hargreaves 2000: 167 and 172). Though in doing this, Hargreaves (2000: 168) claims that it has returned 'teaching to an amateur, de-professionalized, almost premodern craft ...' seen in the pre-professional age.

To readdress these 'hollowed out' characteristics of professionalism in today's postmodern environment (Barnett 2008: 203) a new professionalism in teaching (Hargreaves 1994 and 2000) is needed in order to speak to the twofold interests of business and academics that these UAS lecturers possess. *Transformative professionalism* (Sachs 2003: 16) to some extent satisfies this as it comprises of the characteristics needed by these lecturers in the post-professional age. These include:

1. Inclusive membership
2. Public ethical code of practice
3. Collaborative and collegial
4. Activist orientation
5. Flexible and progressive
6. Responsive to change
7. Self-regulating
8. Policy-active
9. Enquiry-oriented

10. Knowledge building.

The means towards addressing these lecturers' professionalism is via Sachs' (2003) transformative approach. Due to the nature of this paper, not all of these can be fully detailed, but as seen later, the first four are of most interest for these lecturers' identities both in business and education. However, to appreciate these their present working environment first needs to be set out.

THE CURRENT SITUATION FOR UAS LECTURERS:

Like most universities of this kind, a UAS perceives itself as a company or as Cowen (2007: 22) terms it an *entrepreneurial university* with the tenor on being business-like. However, a UAS could additionally be called a *managed university* due to the micro management of all aspects concerning the running of it (Cowen 2007: 22). This includes the hiring of teaching staff according to free-market practices. Hence, these lecturers cannot truly be categorised as traditional university lecturers who professionally enjoy a certain amount of discretion and tenure.

While not having comparable conditions as those lecturers, these UAS lecturers do share a similar issue when it comes to the university's administration, that of alienation. As Nixon (1997: 98-99) discovered through various interviews with university teachers, several feel, 'a sense of "not being in the know"' when it came to administrative decisions. As one bluntly put it:

1. They're forever switching the goal posts.
2. It makes you feel jumpy – on the edge.
3. You never know what you're going to have
4. to react to next.

The heart of the issue, according to Handy (1978: 188), could be that of being 'overmanaged and under led'. This is due to the fact that universities should be seen as *organizations of consent*, 'like professional partnerships, mountain-climbing teams, and theatrical groups and orchestras' (Handy 1978: 180) where members should be led as well as being consulted on decisions (see also Fullan 2001). Additionally, in this type of organisation, individuals see themselves as valuable, 'not just [a] resource to deploy' (Handy 1978: 181). This identity disparity is also apparent among UAS lecturers.

As Sachs (2003: 135) states, 'Teacher identity stands at the core of the teaching profession' (see also Palmer 1999). Although this will be explored further later in terms of transformative professionalism, it is necessary to briefly mention it here for it is this very idea that presents a dilemma for how these lecturers are currently being seen. This can best be explained by what several UAS students have expressed confidentially over the years about some of these lecturers from business. They are seen as being 'gelagert' (*trans* warehoused). Meaning they are neither accomplished enough to remain in industry nor capable enough to teach at traditional universities, so they are being 'stored' until their pension. Hence, their 'professional legitimacy' is being called into question.

Considering professionalism more closely from an academic and business point-of-view, we can see that although the discourse regarding students at universities nowadays has 'mov[ed] away from the traditional scholarly partnership towards a more contractual association informed by consumer notions' (Fulton Philips 2004 as found in Jones 2010: 44), the concepts behind professionalism at a UAS are yet unclear. Specifically, how might these lecturers perceive their own self-interest and organisational loyalty?

According to Hargreaves (1994: 256), 'Teachers' beliefs and practices are grounded not only in expertise and altruism, but also in structures and routines to which they have become attached and in which considerable self-interest may be invested'. In business, being humans, our self-interest has an obvious influence on our transactions, but it is how one manages these conflicts of interest that makes one a professional (Nanda 2003: 8). Handy (1978: 179) in his classic work *Gods of Management* additionally points out, 'Professionalism, of course, carries responsibilities, but they are responsibilities to the practice of one's trade, craft, or skill, not to an organization'. These insights into professionalism in the business world could potentially influence these lecturers in their further professional development, for example their own self-interest as opposed to a teacher's altruism. Their loyalty to their perceived profession could also possibly have a detrimental impact on their loyalty to the university, as opposed to a teacher's self-

interest, which is invested there. To bridge these differences a new type of professionalism needs to be applied.

INITIATING TRANSFORMATIVE PROFESSIONALISM:

As can be gathered from the previous sections, being a UAS lecturer comes with certain challenges most notably their professional identity in business and academia. In order to meet these an approach is required that connects both the needs of education and that of enterprise for all stakeholders involved: transformative professionalism. Therefore, the following will demonstrate why seeing professionalism this way is necessary in fulfilling the current needs of these lecturers.

Just as the work of Peter Senge (1994, Senge et al 2000) with 'learning organisations' and Etienne Wenger (1998, Wenger and Snyder 2000) with 'communities of practice' (CoP) confirm that the goals of business are not mutually exclusive from those of education, so does the following quote aid these lecturers in perceiving their present situation differently and helping them to clarify their identity via transformational professionalism (Palmer 1999: 171):

1. *They have stopped blaming institutional conditions for teaching's*
2. *low estate and have stopped conspiring with those conditions as*
3. *well. Instead, they act in ways that honor their own commitment to*
4. *the importance of teaching ... they teach each day in ways that honor*
5. *their own deepest values rather than ways that conform to the*
6. *institutional norms.*

Believing that we are responsible for and not completely defined by my own postmodern teaching environment, this particular professional identity embodies that of an *activist* (Sachs 2003: 131). In that it 'shed[s] the shackles of the past, thereby permitting a transformative attitude towards the future' to emerge. As previously stated, this entails 'overcom[ing] the legitimate or the illegitimate domination of some individuals or groups' (Sachs 2003: 131). For some of these lecturers this would obviously mean their working relationship with the administration and students. According to Hargreaves (2000: 176), one approach to becoming 'professionally stronger' in this postmodern age is by opening up and becoming 'publicly vulnerable and accessible'. This can take the form of always having an open door policy in the classroom and office, and even being able to justify how and what you teach, especially to the students who are now viewed as 'customers'.

Nevertheless, as in today's workplace significant change does not lie in only one person, but through systematic and informed reflection, in other words 'thinking through the ways different groups can be engaged' (Senge et al 2000: 318). We have attempted to work towards collaboration by means of CoP. Within these 'informal network[s]', where according to Senge et al (2000: 377) 'the bulk of learning takes place' we have striven to increase our professional development in teaching without any formal support from the University. Throughout the years, these colleagues have successfully weathered many administrative changes within the school and have grown professionally from it (Wenger 1998). It could be said that the above view of professionalism gives UAS lectures the opportunity 'to renegotiate an alternative form of professionalism' (Sachs 2003: 13) that fits both their business and academic selves.

What makes CoP so attractive for this circumstance is that it is a concept that exists both in the worlds of business and academia, therefore not completely foreign to these lecturers (see Wenger and Snyder 2000). Although CoP 'are not self-contained entities' (Wenger 1998: 79), which would be desirable considering these lecturers' previously mentioned experiences, they could provide them 'the opportunities to solve problems, develop new ideas and build relationships with peers who share a common passion' (Wenger and Snyder 2000: 145). Being that these communities 'develop in larger contexts – historical, social, cultural, institutional ...' (Wenger 1998: 79), 'they are vulnerable because they lack the legitimacy – and the budgets – of established departments' (Wenger and Snyder 2000: 144), which is a currently an issue at many UASs. For some of these UAS lecturers there is an urgent need to develop their academic professionalism, however having the 'emphasis ... placed upon participation in a community of practitioners, rather than merely the acquisition of a set of skills or practices deemed to

satisfy bureaucratic requirements' (Sachs 2003: 67), may leave some frustrated with the entire project. Regardless, Sachs (2003: 133) argues that these communities 'hold the key to real transformation' for teachers' 'classroom practice and in terms of how they construct their professional identities'.

The list of 10 characteristics concerning transformational professionalism, mentioned above, is clearly useful to any educational professional. However, the first four (inclusive membership, public ethical code of practice, collaborative and collegial and activist orientation) are the most influential for these particular lecturers' professionalism, because they connect both the academic and business worlds. As we are firmly in the postmodern age of teacher professionalism with its 'marketization of education' (Hargreaves 2000: 168) as proven in the hiring policies and administrative structures at several UASs, these lecturers' professional environment already reflects a more inclusive membership as in this approach and business rather than the more exclusive membership previously known at traditional universities. Another particular area of interest is the public ethical code of practice. This has been mentioned recently by Watson (2007) as being desirable for teacher professionalism, as well as being understood as an already accepted practice to those in business (Nanda 2003). An additional advantage to this characteristic is that it could provide professional teaching guidelines for these lecturers who have very little experience in this field. As for the collaborative and collegial features of transformative professionalism, the case for this has previously been made in the communities of practice part.

However, it is the activist orientation with its identity formation that holds the most promise for these UAS lecturers' current situation. It is a simple fact that '[w]ork is no longer a means of paying for the groceries; it is central to one's personal identity' (Handy 1978: 179). Forming one's identity should not be underestimated for these lecturers either. This insight makes the need for transformative professionalism even more pertinent.

CONCLUSION:

At the beginning of this paper we attempted to lay out the current debate concerning professionalism in today's postmodern society, from Keen's *Cult of the Amateur* where expert status is under threat to Leadbeater and Miller's Pro-Ams where expert and amateur are but a distinction on a continuum. Although to many there seems to be no clear answer when it comes to teacher professionalism. The most hopeful sign comes from Sachs' transformative professionalism. For it is this approach that we can confront Barnett's supercomplexities of today and the de-professionalization of teaching it brings. Not that it gives us a definite answer, for 'teacher professionalism is not static' because it 'is activist in its orientation' (Sachs 2003: 16-17) thereby encouraging those in education to be responsible for defining their own professionalism. In doing this it focuses its attention on the core of professionalism whether in education or an enterprise: identity. As Sachs (2003: 135) claims, 'It provides a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of "how to be", "how to act" and "how to understand" their work and their place in society'.

Although many of these UAS lecturers were, in all reality, never a part of the teacher professionalism debate, they can still profit from this approach in their current teaching situations. Whether interacting with the administration, collaborating with colleagues or teaching students, the communities of practice found with in transformative professionalism, 'provide the context and conditions for teachers to be strategic and tactical ...' (Sachs 2003: 133). Two professional characteristics normally found in business are now a part today's discourse in education.

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