Revisiting the notion of teacher professionalism

A working paper

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CHARTERED COLLEGE OF TEACHING

About the Chartered College of Teaching

The Chartered College of Teaching is the professional body for teachers. We are working to celebrate, support and connect teachers to take pride in their profession and provide the best possible education for children and young people. We are dedicated to bridging the gap between practice and research and equipping teachers from the second they enter the classroom with the knowledge and confidence to make the best decisions for their pupils.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost we would like to thank all Fellows and members of the Chartered College of Teaching who have contributed to the thinking that has gone into this report. We are also particularly grateful to members of the Ethical Leadership Alliance, the Chartered Teacher Assessment board and the Chartered College of Teaching Council for their comments on first drafts of this report and the framework, and to Gareth Conyard and Sam Twiselton who kindly reviewed the final report. Finally, special thanks goes to Jonathan Breckon for contributing his expertise on

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How to cite this publication: Müller LM and Cook V (2024) Revisiting the notion of teacher professionalism: A working paper. London: Chartered College of Teaching.

First published: 2 May 2024

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Foreword

As CEO of the Chartered College of Teaching, I truly believe that teaching is the most wonderful and influential profession. Every day, education professionals across our country and the world work incredibly hard to teach and support their students, helping them to grow into thriving adults, thereby laying the cornerstone for a functioning society.

I am therefore all the more concerned about the decline in respect and trust that our profession has experienced over the past years and decades. This decline has been associated with decreasing mental health and wellbeing among our teachers and leaders and growing teacher shortages in our country and beyond - teacher shortages that we simply cannot afford if we are to thrive as a society, especially in the context of an increasingly knowledge-based economy.

I recognise and welcome the many initiatives that aim to improve teacher recruitment and retention, including a focus on decreasing teacher workload, improving flexible working arrangements or addressing student behaviour. These are all important, but I am concerned that many of these initiatives do not address what I believe to be the root cause of teacher recruitment and retention issues: eroding trust in and respect for our profession.

The recent policy focus on evidence-informed practice illustrates this further. While I wholeheartedly agree that the use of high-quality evidence has the potential to improve teaching practice and thus student outcomes (this is after all the Chartered College's core mission), I am concerned about the way in which evidence-informed practice is often interpreted and portrayed in policy documents and frameworks, suggesting that there is one best way of teaching all students and not considering teachers' role in carefully interpreting and applying evidence to their contexts.

I therefore think that it is crucial for us to redefine what we mean by teacher professionalism and advocate for a more aspirational vision for our profession. We at the Chartered College of Teaching will use this to further refine and shape our offer and to advocate on your behalf. I am delighted to present this report to you and look forward to seeing how it will shape the direction of our profession in the years to come.

A·M·Peacock

Professor Dame Alison Peacock

Why defining teacher professionalism matters

Our mission is to empower a knowledgeable and respected teaching profession through membership and accreditation, which we believe will help to ultimately raise the status of the profession.

As the professional body for teachers, we are working to celebrate, support and connect teachers to take pride in their profession and provide the best possible education for children and young people. We are dedicated to bridging the gap between practice and research and equipping teachers from the second they enter the classroom with the knowledge and confidence to make the best decisions for their students.

Teacher professionalism can have a positive impact on teacher recruitment and retention by influencing a number of areas, including:

- the perceived status of the profession through professional autonomy and the required knowledge base
- teacher professional identity
- job satisfaction
- levels of self-efficacy (OECD, 2016; Suarez and McGrath, 2022).

Recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers in turn positively impacts student outcomes (Blömeke et al., 2016; Coenen et al., 2018). Given the potential impact of teacher professionalism on job satisfaction, retention and student outcomes, it is crucial to explore what we mean by professionalism and how it can best be supported. This is especially important in the context of teacher shortages which show no sign of subsiding (McLean et al., 2024) and which will likely continue to negatively affect teachers' lived experiences, further impacting recruitment and retention in the profession.

As the professional body for teachers, it is therefore paramount that we reflect on and share our organisation's definition of professionalism and use it to shape our activities and the direction of the profession more widely. Given its importance, this working paper therefore provides a brief overview of the notion of teacher professionalism, including its etymology and historical definitions, then discusses how it is often used as a political tool and how evidence-informed practice fits into the puzzle. Finally, consideration is given to the challenge of defining professionalism and our own working definition of teacher professionalism is proposed, which should form the basis of further work and discussion.

Exploring notions of teacher professionalism

Etymology and historical development

It seems helpful to first provide a brief perspective on the evolution of the term 'professional' as it explains some of the opposing views that continue to persist in the debate today.

Even though this distinction is somewhat contested (Evetts, 2013), professions can be considered as a subgroup of occupations which distinguish themselves by a commitment to altruism and the public good over personal gain (e.g. doctors, lawyers, architects), which is possibly best illustrated by the Hippocratic Oath in medicine.

The meaning behind the term 'professional' is also well illustrated by its etymology. It originally comes from Latin *professus*, past participle of *profitēri*, to 'profess, confess' — from *pro* 'before' and *fatēri* 'acknowledge'. As people became more skilled in their professions, they started to 'profess' their skills to others and 'vowed' to perform their trade to the highest standards. In this original definition, the focus was thus on high standards.

By 1747 'professional' was used to describe individuals who belonged to a profession or calling, and by 1846 the term was commonly used to describe someone who was earning money as opposed to someone carrying out a hobby or activity as an 'amateur' (Harper, nd).

The 1950s and 60s were dominated by a rise of 'taxonomies' of professionalism that aimed to describe the traits inherent in professionals. Many of these can be traced back to Flexner who summarised professions as follows:

'Professions involve essentially intellectual operations with large individual responsibility; they derive their raw material from science and learning; this material they work up to a practical and definite end; they possess an educationally communicable technique; they tend to self-organization; they are becoming increasingly altruistic in motivation.' (Flexner, 1915 in Mezza, 2022, p. 156).

Job security, a high level of training, self-regulating professional bodies and a privileged status in society have been identified as additional factors distinguishing professions from other occupations, but the emergence of other highly educated careers has blurred the boundaries between professions and other occupations in recent years (Adams, 2020; Mezza, 2022).

This suggests that the definition of professionalism is not static but subject to continuous change, which becomes apparent in historical overviews of professionalism such as Hargreaves' (2000) four periods of teacher professionalism:

1. **The pre-professional age** when teaching was managerially demanding but technically simple
2. **The autonomous professional age**, a period marked by a rise in teacher autonomy and teachers gaining considerable pedagogical freedom
3. **The collegial professional age** with an increased focus on creating a strong professional culture
4. **The postmodern professional age**, with polarised direction and complexity. On the one hand, professionalism is seen positively and encouraged via professional development. On the other hand, this is viewed as an age of de-professionalisation where teachers crumble under competing pressures and their workload. Moreover, teaching is becoming increasingly demanding due to more heterogeneous classrooms and an expectation to respond effectively to a more diverse range of student needs.

For the UK context, the postmodernist professional age is characterised by increased autonomy at the structural/school level (e.g. free schools) but decreasing agency due to centralisation and restrictive accountability systems at the individual teacher level (Parker, 2015). The role of teacher professionalism seems even more important to discuss in light of these tensions. Sachs (2003) differentiates between old and new professionalism. Old professionalism is characterised by the following features: exclusive membership, conservative practices, self-interest, external regulation, slow to change and reactive. In contrast, new professionalism is characterised by inclusive membership, a public ethical code of practice, collaborative and collegial, activist orientation, flexible and progressive, responsive to change, self-regulating, policy-active, enquiry-oriented and knowledge-building.

It is notable how this 'new' professionalism assigns a much more active role to teachers; a role that involves them in policy-making and activism as well as the regulation of their own profession. Furthermore, the notion of 'collective professionalism' is emerging in this taxonomy, which is in line with more recent definitions of professionalism that focus more specifically on how professionalism emerges and is redefined in the context of professional relationships (Mezza, 2022).

The last two points, that a profession is characterised as enquiry-oriented and knowledge building, seem especially important as they elevate teachers to the level of knowledge producers, not simply knowledge consumers. Sachs (2016) explores this issue further and argues for the teaching profession to become more research-active, with teachers' practices validated and supported through research. This elevates evidence-informed practice and action research to being essential aspects of teacher professionalism.

Professionalism as a political tool

Since the 1970s, the role of power dynamics has increasingly been discussed in the context of professionalism (Mezza, 2022). Professionalism is not a static nor neutral concept but can be used as a device for professional control or protection. It can be used as a way for teachers to protect themselves against government control and dilution or the polar opposite — by government, to manipulate teachers into committing to longer working hours or poorer working conditions (Demirkasimoglu, 2010; Govender et al., 2016). However, this fails to acknowledge an important third option where teacher professionalism is used positively by governments to drive teacher development and quality. Since the turn of the 21st century, there has been a renewed focus on teacher professionalism as a driver of teaching quality (OECD, 2016; Mezza, 2022; Suarez and McGrath, 2022), including a whole project by the OECD focusing on new professionalism and the future of teaching.

The definition of teacher professionalism varies across countries and so do the reforms aiming to increase it.Some of the highest-performing PISA nations vary drastically in their approaches to teacher professionalism. Hong Kong and Finland, for example, have relatively high levels of teacher autonomy which allows them to take ownership of their curricula, teaching approaches and professional development. In Singapore, much staff development is school-led which accords the teaching profession greater autonomy over their professional learning and facilitates a culture of professional excellence. Mainland China, on the other hand, is an example of excellence driven by top-down approaches. Teachers are expected to deliver centrally-led curricula and have little autonomy over teaching approaches or content (OECD, 2016).

A comparative study of teachers' decision-making processes in low-, mid-, and high-accountability systems (Afdal and Maraanen, 2023) illustrates that low-accountability systems can create more favourable conditions for teachers to take ownership over their decisions while high-accountability systems can push teachers towards increased use of pre-planned teaching materials, even if they do not consider them to be of a very high quality. The latter was considered particularly problematic in terms of individualisation, as the use of pre-made lessons allows for limited contextualisation and adaptation to students' varying needs.

While standardisation, including scripted lesson plans, have the potential to address issues around teacher workload and teaching quality, especially in the context of specialist teacher shortages, the rise of standardisation and the emergence of externally imposed accountability during the late 20th century has led to a gradual decrease in teacher autonomy (OECD, 2016). Recent data from the UK also shows that teachers report lower levels of autonomy compared to similar professions such as scientists, researchers, IT engineers, health and nursing professionals, lawyers and accountants (Worth and van den Brande, 2020). Noddings suggests one possible reason for this: '[u]nfortunately, altruism or service is often perceived as a sign of weakness with respect to professional status… the caring professions - e.g. teaching, nursing and social work - are thus classified as "semi-professions"' (2003, p. 248), which are also often associated with a lack of or decrease in autonomy and prevalence of top-down decisions (Demirkasimoglu, 2010).

Such a (perceived) lack of teacher autonomy and buy-in can be detrimental to successful policy implementation (Parding and Abrahamsson, 2010), which is why the notion of teacher autonomy is so paramount in the context of professionalism discussions.

Teachers' professional space

Teachers are not mere implementers of education policies. Evans (2008) differentiates between 'prescribed professionalism' at the policy level and 'enacted' professionalism that takes place in classrooms. Sexton (2007) adds that this 'practitioner professionalism', i.e. the skills, attitudes and practices that are required for teachers to be effective educators, is what matters most. Forsyth and Danisiewicz (1985) argue that the tasks of professionals are 'important, exclusive and complex' (in Demirkasimoglu, 2010, p. 2048) so they require the autonomy to make decisions independent of external pressures.

Teachers therefore operate in a complex, multidimensional space between professional autonomy and policy when making decisions about their teaching (Afdal and Maraanen, 2023). They need to translate policy documents into desirable learning outcomes and plan lessons to achieve these goals by combining their disciplinary, pedagogical and didactic knowledge and applying it in the context of their classroom and students. They thereby have to combine elements that are in close proximity (e.g. classroom, student, school) with elements that are further removed (e.g. exams, standards) and factors that have influenced and shaped them as professionals over time (Afdal and Maraanen, 2023; Bremholm and Skott, 2019).

Eriksen (2022) describes this process through three sensitivities (genre sensitivity, practice sensitivity and situational sensitivity). Genre sensitivity refers to the distinction between research and professional reasoning, which may lead to a teacher deciding that despite research evidence being inconclusive, it is good enough to justify trialling a new approach in practice. Practice sensitivity refers to ethical and moral domains that may lead teachers not to adopt a new, evidence-informed initiative if it goes against their moral convictions (Heikkilä and Eriksen, 2023). Situational sensitivity is concerned with the appropriateness of evidence for a specific context, which means that sometimes even the most rigorous piece of evidence may not be adopted if teachers decide that it is inappropriate for their students and classrooms.

This highlights that teachers need autonomy to weigh up the best available evidence, policy demands and student needs in their decision making. Teacher autonomy is a multidimensional concept (Lennert da Silva and Mølstad, 2020) that contains both individual and collegial dimensions. Frostenson (2015, pp. 23-24) defined collegial professional autonomy in the teaching profession as 'teachers' collective freedom to influence and decide on practice at local level' and individual autonomy as 'the individual's opportunity to influence the contents, frames and controls of the teaching practice'. Teacher autonomy also refers to the relationship between teachers and the state, with state regulation and control of education influencing teachers' capacity to make decisions and take action (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2007; Wermke and Höstfält, 2014). Taschannen-Moran (2009) also highlights the importance of trust and autonomy at the school level. Their research shows that teacher professionalism can be fostered when school leaders give teachers more autonomy over their pedagogical choices and foster an environment of trust with parents, students and teachers.

The concept of 'professional space' (Maaranen and Afdal, 2022) permits to conceptualise teachers as active agents, who reflect on their role in the decision-making process between policy and practice. This space is also collective as decision making, especially lesson and/or curriculum planning is often a joint endeavour.

Teaching, therefore, is never a straightforward application of policy recommendations but always requires careful interpretation. However, how this professional space is interpreted by teachers likely depends on the policy environment in which they operate.

Teacher professional identity

An important mediating factor in the implementation of educational policies and thus a key aspect of teacher professionalism is teacher identity (Sachs, 2005). Teacher professional identity refers to the attitudes, beliefs and values that teachers have about their own roles and impacts teachers' self-efficacy, teaching quality, motivation to engage in continuous professional development, and therefore teacher retention and student outcomes (Suarez and McGrath, 2022). Sachs states that 'Teacher professional identity then stands at the core of the teaching profession. 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' (2005, p. 15). This can operate at the individual or collective level and will be impacted by multiple factors, including teachers' subject, the phase they teach in and their own educational experiences.

Teachers need to navigate their professional identity in the context of changing demands from parents, students and policymakers, a changing society with increased diversity and use of technology and, for many, a mismatch between the often narrowly defined outcome measures of many accountability systems and their own understanding of what matters most in education.

A strong teacher identity as part of a collective understanding of teacher professionalism can help to counteract some of the negative outcomes associated with increasing pressures from the education system (Suarez and McGrath, 2022). Teachers therefore need to be supported to develop strong professional identities and empowered to take more ownership over their profession (Sachs, 2016). A gain in professional autonomy has also been at the centre of calls favouring the professionalisation of the teaching profession. Increased professional autonomy can function as a buffer against top-down decision making and strengthen teachers' personal and professional sense (Demirkasimoglu, 2010).

However, 'teacher identity is not something that is fixed nor is it imposed; rather it is negotiated through experience and the sense that is made of that experience' (Sachs, 2005, p. 15) nor is it purely individual. Suarez and McGrath (2022) therefore propose a model of professionalism in which teacher identity, both collective and individual, sits at the heart of and is influenced by structures and support such as professional development, professional relationships and affiliations, collaboration and initial training. A reciprocal relationship exists between teacher identity and teacher behaviours, including teachers' commitment to the profession, professional development and teaching quality, all of which impact student outcomes. The latter finally influences teacher identity through reflection.

The graphic below depicts the core parts of the model and pink arrows indicate where change occurs through reflection.

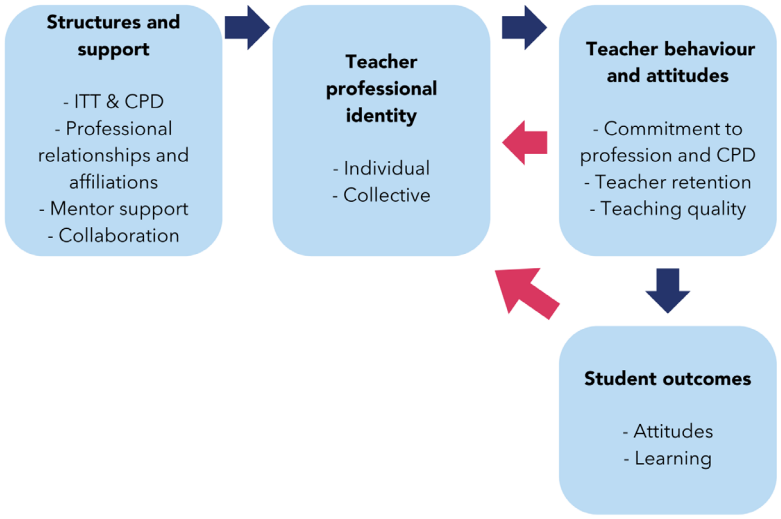

Figure 1: Elements of teacher identity (pink arrows represent instances of relationships via reflection) from Suarez and McGrath (2022)

Defining teacher professionalism

As the discussion above shows, teacher professionalism is a dynamic, fluid and highly contested term that has been defined and interpreted in a range of different ways historically and across a range of disciplines. In short, narrow, technocratic views are contrasted with views that consider teachers as reflexive practitioners with agency and autonomy, leading to a polarised debate and often contradictory definitions (Govender et al., 2016; Goodwin, 2021). This makes it difficult to provide a definition that is uncontroversial and all-encompassing but we believe that it is important to have a starting point, whilst understanding that any definition will be subject to constant evaluation and change as well as contextual, cultural and societal constraints.

Based on the discussions above and our mission, we inscribe our approach to professionalism within Sach's (2003) framework of 'new' professionalism which assigns teachers an active role and propose combining it with an adaptation of a recently published framework of professionalism (Mezza, 2022).

Mezza proposes a definition of professionalism based on literature reviewed from a range of disciplines (e.g. medicine, law, psychology, nursing) which encompasses cognitive, legal/social and ethical domains (depicted below). The aim of this Venn diagram is to indicate overlapping areas between the three domains and illustrate how they influence each other.

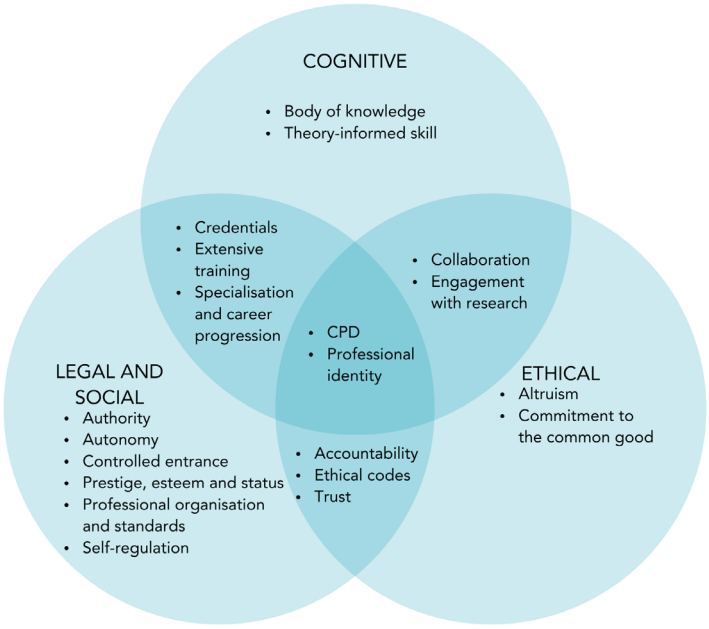

Figure 2: Teacher professionalism (Mezza, 2022)

According to Mezza, the aim of representing professionalism as a Venn diagram rather than a list is to showcase how the different aspects are interconnected, stimulate discussions about their interactions and overlaps, allow more room for flexibility by taking a systems/holistic approach and illustrate that (policy) action on one area can affect another area. It should therefore serve as a tool to discuss professionalism in context and across sectors. The following sections discuss aspects of the diagram, explore how the Chartered College's work relates to them and present an adapted Venn diagram that forms the Chartered College's working definition of professionalism.

The cognitive domain

According to this framework, the cognitive domain of professionalism relies on a body of knowledge and theory-informed skill and overlaps with the ethical domain of the model through collaboration and research engagement.

Bodies of knowledge

Initial teacher education lays the groundwork for developing a common body of knowledge about teaching but this knowledge needs to be revised and updated continuously. At the Chartered College of Teaching, we believe that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to teaching and learning but that teachers need to develop a repertoire of effective teaching strategies. This will allow them to choose the ones that are most effective in their classrooms. Rather than developing strict models of how teachers should teach, we advocate for teachers to engage with a wide range of evidence. We therefore propose the plural 'bodies of knowledge' instead of the singular 'body of knowledge' to capture the multiplicity of voices that should be represented and considered. This should also highlight and address concerns about a lack of diverse voices in research production and dissemination.

Theory-informed skill, skill-informed theory and engagement with research

Evidence-informed practice has received a lot of attention in education internationally (Malin et al., 2020; Malin and Brown, 2022), not least due to its potential to improve student outcomes (Burns and Schulle 2007; Mincu 2014) and teacher job satisfaction (Bell et al. 2010; Godfrey, 2016). Yet teachers' levels of research engagement remain relatively low, not least due to the limited practical relevance and accessibility of academic research (Coldwell, 2022; Guilfoyle et al., 2020; Joram et al., 2020; Kiemer & Kollar, 2021; Nägel et al., 2023), leading to persistent research-practice gaps (Rycroft-Smith, 2022). We would therefore like to expand this definition by adding the notion of 'skill-informed theory' as the Chartered College's mission is to improve two-way communication between academic research, policy and practice and move away from a top-down approach to evidence-informed practice.

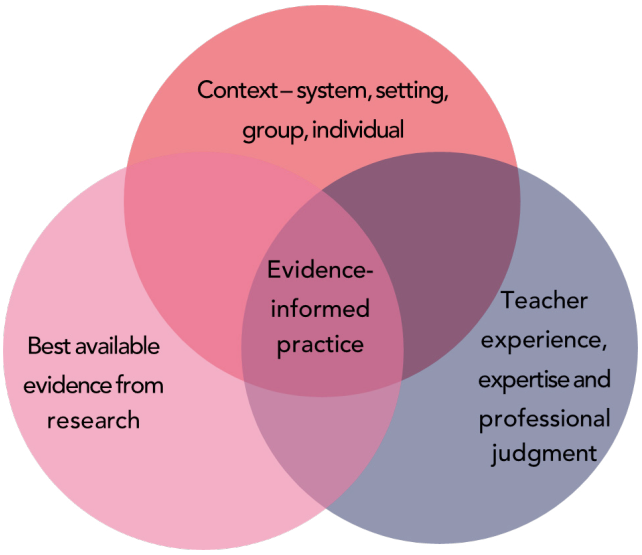

Figure 3: Evidence-informed practice (Scutt, 2019)

As Scutt (2019) outlines, evidence-informed practice requires the careful combination of the best available evidence from research with teacher experience, expertise and professional judgement and context-specific implementation. Conceptualising evidence-informed practice as a top-down practice where research is simply communicated to teachers without recognising the necessity of making context-specific adaptations and changes, fails to recognise the importance of teacher expertise. Evidence from medicine highlights that practitioner judgement is essential, especially in light of unclear or missing evidence and evidence-informed guidelines often fall short when considering individuals' needs or preferences (McCartney et al., 2016). A top-down interpretation of evidence-informed practice runs the risk of curbing practitioner autonomy, which should be avoided given what we know about the importance of autonomy for teacher job satisfaction and self-efficacy. It thus is not enough to increase teachers' access to research, although this forms an important part of evidence-informed practice, it is equally important to increase researchers' access to teacher expertise. This will ultimately help to develop models of effective teaching that are based on practice-informed theory.

A related concept and one that sits neatly within the concept of professionalism (Flutter, 2023) is phronesis, i.e. '… the comprehensive capacity that integrates knowledge (often tacit knowledge), judgement, understanding and intuition in order to effect appropriate and successful action, not as epistemic theoretical knowledge, and not as technical application of skill, but as active knowledge that is its own means and ends' (Boney, 2014, p. 20). According to Florian and Graham (2014) phronesis must not be viewed through an individual frame but is collective, thus aligning itself with the 'collaborative' element within Mezza's model.

Our recently published research priority setting activity on applied cognitive sciences (Muller and Cook, 2023) illustrates the added value of taking practitioner voice into consideration, following on from a report by Perry et al. (2021) calling for more applied cognitive science research. The final 15 research priorities highlighted the need for more complex research designs that take interactions between different cognitive science and other teaching strategies into consideration. Also, more studies on a wider range of subjects and with different age groups are much needed as well as studies investigating the ideal frequency with which different cognitive science strategies should be implemented.

These findings highlight two important points in the context of professionalism. Firstly, they illustrate that teachers have and need autonomy in implementing research in practice, as academic research is unlikely to provide responses to all questions teachers face in their everyday practice or be able to account for the many factors that make classrooms highly heterogenous. Secondly, they highlight the need for two-way communication which recognises teachers as equal partners in evidence-informed practice, not merely implementers of findings.

Collaboration and engagement with research

Eriksen's (2022) 'practice sensitivity' clearly sits at the intersection of the ethical and cognitive domains of this diagram. According to Eriksen, practice sensitivity relates to teachers' collective ethical reflections on research evidence and may lead to teachers resisting an intervention if it goes against their moral commitments (Heikkilä & Eriksen, 2023).

Our own study of professional dialogue in journal clubs (Cook et al., 2024), illustrates that teachers and teaching assistants do indeed interpret and apply research evidence according to their own ethical and moral standards and with their students' best interests in mind. One example from this study showcases how teaching assistants think retrieval practice should be adapted so as to better meet the needs of students with SEND. This highlights once more the active role teachers and teaching assistants play in interpreting and applying research evidence according to their context, taking ethical dimensions into consideration.

Furthermore, this study highlights how teaching professionals develop critical research engagement skills through professional dialogue and collaboration. We therefore believe that it is paramount to highlight the role of criticality in the context of research engagement.

The ethical domain

We know that commitment to the common good sits at the heart of teachers' motivation to join the profession in the first place and it is essential that teachers' act in their students' and the wider society's interest. However, we also believe that it is important to strike a balance between teachers' commitments to their students and their own mental health and wellbeing.

As discussed above, teacher professionalism can be misused by policymakers to demand unsustainable levels of workload, which has been shown to negatively affect teacher retention. We therefore advocate for teachers' mental health and wellbeing to be considered as part of educational policymaking in order to improve teacher recruitment and retention and thus student outcomes.

The administrative burden continues to negatively impact teachers and leaders. In the education staff wellbeing charter, the Department for Education has committed to 'supporting the sector to drive down unnecessary workload' (DfE, 2022). But effects do not seem to have reached the sector and workload is at an all-time high, not least due to more difficult student behaviour following the COVID-19 pandemic (McLean et al., 2024).

International data shows that longer working hours are clearly associated with lower teacher wellbeing. Yet it is not so much the working hours per se but rather what teachers do in those extra hours that makes the most difference. Every extra hour spent on marking and planning has a significant negative impact on teacher wellbeing, possibly because a lot of this work is carried out in evenings and over the weekend (Jerrim and Sims, 2021).

Teacher workload in England is substantially higher than in other comparable OECD countries (Allen et al., 2021). The average full-time teacher in England works 49 hours, which is a whole working day more than the OECD average of 41 hours (Allen et al., 2021). Around one quarter of full-time teachers in England even work more than 60 hours a week (Allen et al., 2021). Teachers in England also spend more time on planning, marking and administration than peers in other countries (Jerrim and Sims, 2019). Workload also continues to negatively affect teacher retention. It is the number one reason cited by ex-teachers for leaving the profession (Worth and Faulkner-Ellis, 2022). And working hours have remained roughly the same over the past 20 years, indicating that any policies targeting teacher workload have largely failed (Allen et al., 2021).

This is why we think it is paramount that teacher mental health and wellbeing be included as essential parts of teacher professionalism and to counter-balance altruism as only when teachers are well, can they engage in professional learning and teaching.

Credentials, extensive training, specialisation and career progression

Mezza (2022) highlights the need to recognise teacher expertise and create pathways for career progression beyond the traditional leadership track. Our joint research with colleagues from Sheffield Hallam University and the Education Policy Institute (Booth et al., 2021) also emphasised the need for more targeted CPD opportunities for mid-career teachers who do not wish to embark on the leadership track but rather wish to develop and be recognised as expert classroom practitioners.

CPD and professional identity

Research has repeatedly shown that continuing professional development (CPD) can positively impact teacher effectiveness and, in turn, student learning although the size of the impact depends on the nature of the programme (e.g.: Fletcher-Wood & Zuccollo, 2020; Kennedy, 2016; Sims et al., 2021; Sims et al., 2023). Research from the Education Policy Institute (EPI) (van den Brande and Zuccollo, 2021) indicates that introducing a formal entitlement of 35 hours of CPD per year could boost pupil attainment by an extra two-thirds of a GCSE grade, which could increase lifetime earnings by over £6,000 per pupil.

An entitlement to high-quality CPD may also help with the retention of mid-career teachers. Research shows that high-quality teacher professional development is a crucial factor in retaining teachers, especially in their early and mid-careers (Coldwell, 2017).

Given the positive impact of high-quality CPD on teacher effectiveness, job satisfaction and retention, it is central in professionalism.

Accountability and trust

School inspections are an important aspect of the accountability system and have been found to have a positive impact on standardised test results (especially in mathematics), self-evaluation and school management processes (Hofer et al., 2020). However, unintended adverse inspection effects are also well-documented in the research literature (Ehren et al., 2016; Hofer et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2017; Klerks, 2012; Nelson and Ehren, 2014; Penninckx and Vanhoof, 2015). Negative consequences of school inspections can range from 'teaching to the test' (Nelson and Ehren, 2014), to teacher stress and anxiety (Penninckx and Vanhoof, 2015; Ehren et al., 2016), a disruption of teaching practices (Klerks, 2012), cheating, data and document preparation for inspection, or the narrowing of teaching practices (Ehren et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2017), to name but a few. Jones et al. (2017) found that 50 per cent of English headteachers believed that inspections resulted in a refocusing and narrowing of the curriculum, as opposed to just 10 per cent of Austrian and Swiss headteachers.

While assessment and accountability practices are generally on the rise across the OECD (Teltemann and Jude, 2019), negative inspection effects are particularly common in the context of high-stakes inspection systems, of which the English system is one (Altrichter and Kemethofer, 2015; Jones et al., 2017). This is because teachers may feel that they have little to no room for innovative teaching and curriculum when standards have to be achieved, which in turn negatively impacts their motivation and instructional quality (Hofer et al., 2020). At the same time, higher levels of accountability do not necessarily lead to better student outcomes (Björn and Joakim, 2021).

Trust is an important component in accountability. While high-stakes accountability systems are typically associated with low levels of trust and high levels of control, the reverse is true for low-stakes accountability systems. Given the unintended negative consequences associated with high-stakes accountability systems and mixed results regarding their effectiveness, one approach to improving the current inspection system would be to develop a 'higher-trust, lower-stakes inspection system' (NAHT, 2024, p.8).

One jurisdiction that is commonly cited as an example of such a system is Finland, where control is focused at the entry to the teaching profession (Hwa, 2021) and while it would be naive to believe that any other system can simply be copied and pasted into a new context (Hwa, 2022), it could serve as inspiration of how the current accountability system can be improved and the status of teachers raised as a result.

The legal and social domains

As highlighted in the previous section, controlled access to the profession can play an important role for teaching quality and in connection to accountability. Professional standards are also important tools to regulate the quality of teaching and self-regulation is an essential characteristic of professions (see above definitions).

Another crucial aspect of professionalism is teacher autonomy, which has been highlighted as an influential factor in student success (OECD, 2020; Derkakhshan et al., 2020; Hawthorne-Kocak, 2021). Supporting teacher autonomy has been shown to have a positive impact on students' achievement. Teacher autonomy has also been associated with higher job satisfaction and intention to stay in teaching, especially if they are given more autonomy over their professional learning (Worth and van den Brande, 2020). Giving schools and teachers the freedom to take the approach they regard as most suitable for their contexts is likely to further support students' learning. Given the link between autonomy and teacher job satisfaction, this could further benefit teacher retention and thus student achievement in the long-term.

Our working definition of teacher professionalism

Based on the contents of this report and consultation with expert practitioners and researchers, we have developed a working definition of teacher professionalism that is based on Mezza's (2022) model, with amendments as shown in the figure below.

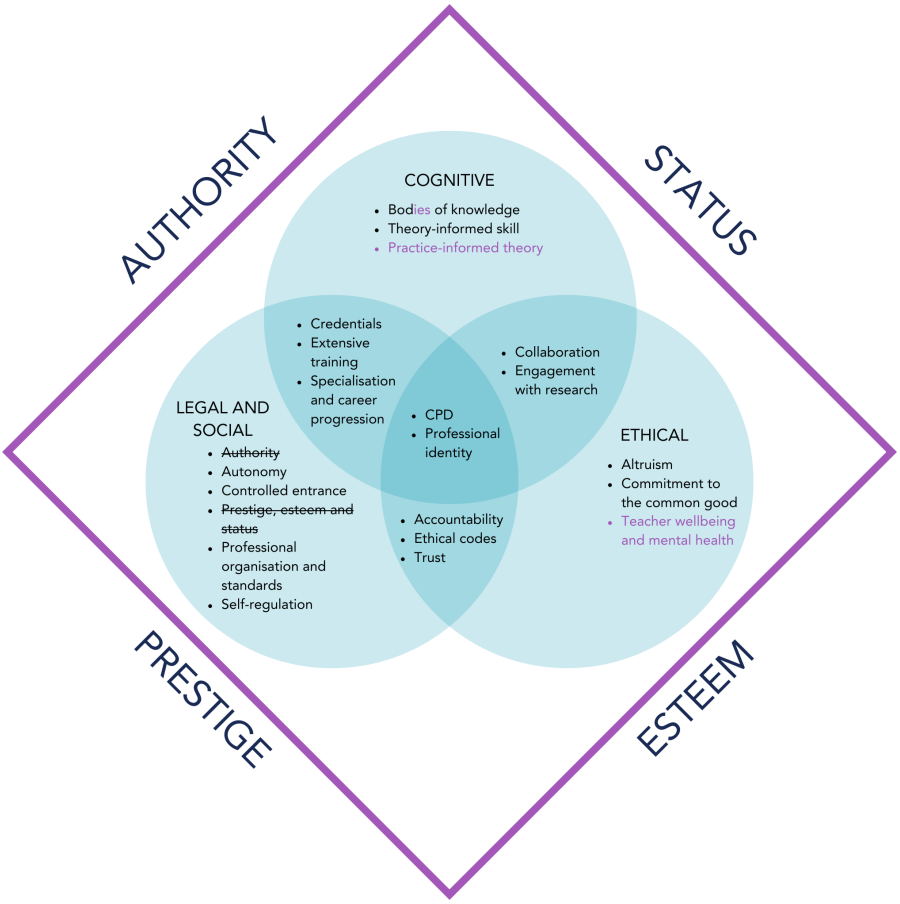

Figure 4: Amendment to Mezza's (2022) model

One of the changes to Mezza's model is to expand it with the concept of 'practice-informed theory' to highlight the importance of recognising teacher expertise as an essential aspect of evidence-informed practice. Furthermore, and as proposed above, we suggest that the plural of 'bodies' of knowledge be used instead of the singular so as to highlight the importance of listening to multiple voices, especially those who are traditionally underrepresented. This will support the development of more equitable teaching practices.

In the ethical domain, we believe that altruism and a commitment to the greater good need to be balanced with a commitment to teacher wellbeing and mental health in order to make teaching more sustainable and improve teacher retention.

Finally, we propose that authority, prestige, esteem and status sit outside the Venn diagram itself as we perceive them to be outcomes of the mechanisms described within the model rather than mechanisms that are restricted to the social and legal domains. If teachers receive high-quality initial and continuous training opportunities, are encouraged to engage critically with research evidence and collaborate with their peers and given the autonomy to take the decisions that work best for them and their students, teaching will likely develop into a prestigious, highly-esteemed profession where professionals want to stay. The final Venn diagram we propose is depicted below.

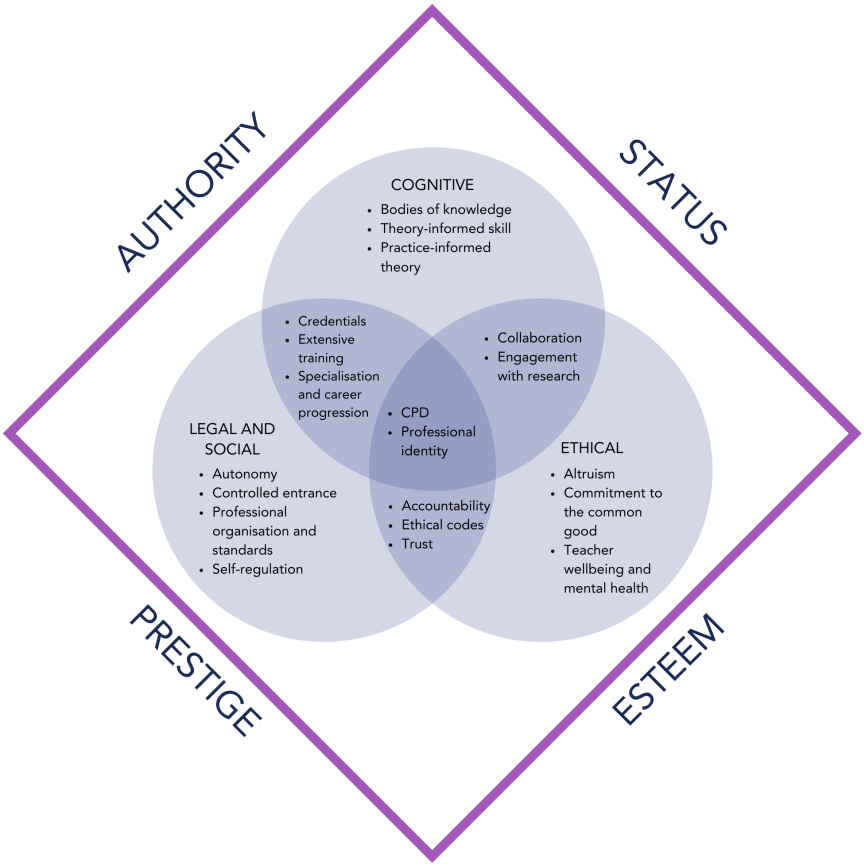

Figure 5: Working definition of professionalism (adapted from Mezza, 2022)

This figure is an adaptation of an original work by the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed in this adaptation are the sole responsibility of the Chartered College of Teaching and should not be reported as representing the official views of the OECD or of its Member countries.

This working definition will form the basis of future work for the Chartered College of Teaching, including our research activities, our offer for members, and the perspectives we take on education policy. Naturally, as a working model, our definition may be updated over time to reflect changes in policy, research and practice.

Conclusion

This report has outlined the importance of teacher professionalism and a collective teacher identity for teachers' self-efficacy, job satisfaction and retention. A focus on developing and sustaining teacher professionalism should lie at the heart of any efforts aiming to address ongoing teacher shortages. Without it, we risk only scratching the surface of what lies at the core of the current teacher recruitment and retention crisis. If the best and brightest are to be attracted to and retained in the teaching profession, we have to recognise and value teacher expertise and accord teachers more autonomy and agency over their teaching as well as a voice in policy decisions.

Punitive, high-stakes accountability systems curb teacher professionalism and should therefore be reconsidered in favour of more inclusive systems that put a stronger focus on peer learning, feedback and trust. While high standards are undoubtedly important to drive teaching quality and student attainment, imposing them top-down, without consultation with the profession risks perpetuating a system in which teachers and school leaders do not feel that they have any ownership over their decisions, which can negatively impact their motivation, ultimately driving them out of the profession.

The same is the case for evidence-informed practice. While it can absolutely improve teaching quality and student outcomes, we should be careful about creating a system in which top-down decisions and strict guidelines are favoured over context-specific implementation. Teachers' role in adapting and implementing research evidence and generating their own from observations and action research should not be underestimated. We therefore advocate for three-way communication between research, policy and practice in which teacher expertise is considered as highly as evidence generated from randomised controlled trials and experiments. Teachers should also be encouraged to become critical research consumers who question and adapt research evidence before adopting it for their contexts.

We believe that these factors are paramount in raising the status of the teaching profession and ultimately improving teacher recruitment and retention.

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