



GTCS Position Paper: Teacher Professionalism and Professional Learning in Scotland

Teacher Professionalism: A Scottish Perspective

Teachers have the potential to transform and have a profound impact on the learning experiences and life chances of our children and young people and have a critical role in helping them achieve positive outcomes, to thrive and flourish in life. At the heart of this are professional values and teacher professionalism.

There is a significant focus on Teacher Professionalism in current national policy in Scotland. The recently published National Improvement Framework identifies teacher professionalism as one of 6 key drivers for improvement, and states that “ensuring the highest professional standards for all teachers in Scotland will help to ensure the highest standards and expectations for all children” (NIF, 2016). The emphasis is clear: teachers and school leaders should be empowered, enquiring, collaborative professionals who are well informed to make the best decisions for our children and young people.

Teacher professionalism, as part of this significant educational policy reform, is about having clear aspirations for the profession. This focuses on developing the quality of our educators – all teachers and leaders within the education system in Scotland - with the highest levels of professionalism striving for the highest educational standards.

We are fortunate in Scotland that we already have a very strong foundation of teacher professionalism. This is underpinned by an “inspiring set of professional standards defined by the General Teaching Council for Scotland” (OECD, 2015:17). The Professional Standards, with professional values at the centre, support and promote collaborative professionalism, leadership, enquiry and professional learning.

Teacher Professionalism: Our ‘Way of Being’

Teacher professionalism informs who we are as professionals. It’s about our professional identity and ‘way of being’ education professionals and is firmly rooted in our values, beliefs and dispositions. The educational experiences of all our learners are shaped by the values and dispositions of all those who work to educate them. Throughout this paper we use the term ‘teacher’ and assume ‘teacher professionalism’ to include all registered teachers – those teachers and school leaders who work directly with young people in school; lecturers working in colleges across the senior phase; teacher educators in universities; and educational professionals working in central or national roles supporting and promoting the quality of teaching and learning in schools in Scotland.

In recognition of the centrality of professional and personal values they are at the heart of the suite of Professional Standards. A commitment to the values of social justice, integrity, trust and respect and professional commitment underpin the relationships, thinking and professional practice of teachers across Scotland.

It is these foundations which support and encourage teachers to see beyond the classroom or subject and to see the whole child and their particular needs. It is these values which develop in teachers an understanding of their role in collaborative working with a range of stakeholders, be that families, Police, Health, Social Work and to recognise the contribution that they can make to the GIRFEC agenda.

As part of teacher professionalism, professional values are required to be enacted and to live in the class, school and community everyday. They drive an individual’s unswerving personal and professional commitment to all learners’ intellectual, social and ethical growth and well-being.

Importantly too, it is these values which help develop and deepen teachers’ professionalism over the course of their career. Set in a professional context they encourage and support individuals to ask critical questions of policy and practice and to constantly and consistently challenge their own beliefs. It is through this professional and critical process that teachers develop their professional insight and skills and in doing so maintain/...

maintain their relevance to the education of the young people whom they serve. In an ever changing and challenging world teacher professionalism helps the young people of today become the thinking and responsible citizen of tomorrow.

Teacher Professionalism: What it Means for Teachers in Scotland

Teacher professionalism in Scotland is built on the following key principles (this is represented visually in the diagram below):

- Professional & personal values with an unswerving commitment to social justice and a moral imperative to 'get it right for every child' (see GIRFEC)
- The importance of promoting, developing and reinvesting in teachers' professional capital through human, decisional and social capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Specifically, this means developing:
 - Teacher-as-learner and their knowledge and understanding (human capital)
 - Collaborative professionalism (social capital)
 - Professional judgement and a critical stance (decisional capital)
- Ensuring the conditions are created to support & promote teacher professionalism through aspirational Professional Standards and high quality leadership at all levels



This/...

This kind of professionalism locates teachers as key agents of educational change. It highlights the importance of teachers, school leaders, clusters and local authorities working in partnerships and collaboratively to 'lead from the middle' (Lieberman et al 2017; Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016). Leadership at all levels of the system will need to support, develop and lead change, collaboration, learning and culture. It is about leading self and others.

Fundamental to this is professional trust. The foundation of this trust is built on teacher professionalism. Trust and belief that teachers and school leaders have developed critically informed professional judgment and are empowered to make the best-informed decisions about the learning and development of children and young people. Developing trust and mutual respect is essential for creating a collaborative culture for learning (OECD 2016).

Teacher Professionalism: Knowing Why, Knowing What, Knowing How

Adopting and developing an enquiring disposition is an important part of teacher professionalism and is embedded within the Professional Standards. This enquiring approach helps to ensure, as professionals, we really know the why, what and how of our professional practice and needs of learners. Enquiry "establishes and maintains a rhythm of learning, change and innovation" (OECD, 2016:5)

It is part of our professional capital, which involves developing:

- a critically informed depth of knowledge, skills and understanding about learning, teaching and education. It requires us to challenge our own assumptions, beliefs and values and how these influence actions. (our 'human capital')
- strong, purposeful collaborative relationships and partnerships, built on open and ongoing communication, learning with and from others, and sharing and co-developing knowledge. It's about having a shared responsibility for all young people, and recognising the positive impact we can have working together. This is needed to develop collective autonomy. (our 'social capital')
- effective, wise and informed professional judgement based on enquiry and informed by our values. (our 'decisional capital')

Engaging in these processes gives us the courage to lift our heads and ask critical questions of ourselves, our practices and the wider educational agenda. This sense of agency, Priestley et al (2011) argue, happens through the unique interplay of individual capacity and the influences and conditions in which teachers act. Locating teachers as 'agents of change' gives, as Priestley et al (2011) note, "explicit permission to exert high[er] degrees of professional agency within the contexts in which they work" and seeing "agency as an important dimension of teachers' professionalism" (see also Cochran-Smith, M & Lytle, S., 2009; Groundwater-Smith et al, 2013; Hattie, 2012; Sachs, 2016).

Teacher Professionalism: Creating the Conditions

To support the development of teacher professionalism for all, the necessary infrastructure needs to be in place. Teachers are very busy and face multiple pressures in school. Developing teacher professionalism is about the way we are as professionals; it informs who we are, how we act, what we know and do, and what we prioritise.

School and system leaders should examine their own practices to identify the ways in which they enact and enable teacher professionalism. The ways in which they lead and create the necessary conditions for teachers to engage in this way of working will promote the development of an 'enquiring stance' across the profession. GTC Scotland's Professional Update is an important part of the supporting infrastructure

Professional Update, the Professional Standards and professional learning

Professional Update is a key driver of teacher professionalism. The Professional Update process is built on high quality, sustained and reflective professional learning, professional dialogue and high quality professional review. Integral to this are the GTCS Professional Standards and the embedded focus on the values, an enquiring stance, leadership and collaborative practice.

Professional/...

Professional learning: the teacher-as-learner

Professional learning is a critical part of developing professionalism. The teacher as a lifelong learner is a clear commitment in the professional values within the GTCS Professional Standards.

To help articulate the kind of professional learning that will best serve teachers in Scotland to strive for the high levels of teacher professionalism described, GTCS have developed a strategic approach and model for professional learning.

Professional Learning Model

The strategic approach to professional learning provides coherent guidance on what high quality, effective professional learning looks like. At the heart of this approach is the professional learning model which outlines the core purposes and principles of learning and offers strategic guidance for leaders and teachers on how to support, structure and plan for professional learning. To be impactful, professional learning should:

- Be purposeful and focused on outcomes and impact
- Be aligned to the needs of the children and young people and their context
- Be sustained and high quality
- Be flexible and diverse
- Be relevant and meaningful for the individual
- Develop knowledge & expertise, enhance practices, build on strengths & pursue interests

The model of professional learning (see diagram below), captures the core features and processes of professional learning:

- The central focus is the teacher-as-learner and the deeply interconnected relationship with and impact on the learning and experience of children and young people.
- Professional learning should be:
 - The teacher-as-learner - challenging, and develop thinking, knowledge, skills and understanding [learning that deepens knowledge and understanding]
 - Underpinned by an enquiring stance and developing skills of enquiry and criticality [Learning by enquiring]
 - Interactive, reflective and involve learning with and from others [learning-as-collaborative]
- Professional learning is informed and supported by Professional Standards and other educational policy. The Standards are used to inform and provoke learning.
- Leadership of and for learning is essential to ensure it is well supported, promoted and sustained.



The Professional Learning model would be used by those leading, providing and supporting professional learning to provide a shared language and aspiration informing the provision, structure and nature of professional learning. It is a tool to help planning the development of and engagement in professional learning. Individuals would use the model to help plan for and understand their own professional learning needs and expectations.

GTCS supports and promotes this professional learning in a number of ways:

- Guidance packs that support the Professional Learning model will provide a range of resources, tools and information to support individuals and schools.
- The development of the skills and dispositions of enquiry and research are also well supported through the guidance provided by GTCS as well free access to educational journals and eBooks.
- Professional Recognition programme which celebrates enhanced accomplished professional practice of individual teachers.
- The newly developed Excellence in Professional Learning Award for schools and learning communities which recognises excellence in the provision and leadership of professional learning environments.
- The future development of Professional Learning Awards for organisations which support and promote teacher professional learning.

The Role of GTC Scotland

GTC Scotland plays a significant role in supporting and promoting teacher professionalism at all stages in a teacher's career. This is manifest not only in the development of the Professional Standards, through Professional Update and professional learning as identified above, but also through other key areas of work. The principles underpinning teacher professionalism inform and are embedded in:

- the expectations for registration with GTCS;
- the requirements for and accreditation of programmes for initial teacher education;
- the Teacher Induction Scheme;
- it also informs the GTC Scotland's approach to Fitness to Teach as part of its regulatory role

Accountability/...

Accountability: A Collective Responsibility for Children and Young People

Of course, an important part of teacher professionalism is the need for accountability. In this vision of teacher professionalism, accountability begins and ends with the children and young people. All education professionals in Scotland are accountable to the young people they work with and the communities in which they work and part of this is also developing a shared responsibility for learners amongst colleagues. Teachers do not operate in isolation but as part of a community of learners and as such have an accountability to that community and to the wider public. Fullan, Rincon-Gallardo & Hargreaves (2015) refer to this as a model of 'professional accountability'. They emphasise the importance of promoting and nurturing internal accountability, in other words the collective accountability of individuals and groups of colleagues who take a shared responsibility for learning and learners.

National Policies and Curriculum

Policies and initiatives at both a national and local level not only inform and influence us as professionals but are interpreted and enacted by us through our professional lens. The enquiring and collaborative teacher professionalism described will enable teachers to engage with, question and address educational policies in critically informed ways.

How Good is our School (HGIOS 4) and Curriculum for Excellence

Self-evaluation is a core part of professional learning in the Professional Update process and it is also a fundamental part of school self-evaluation as described in HGIOS (4). Developing professional capital and taking an enquiring approach to practice provides strategies and approaches that support the culture of self-improvement, effective self-evaluation and the Quality Indicators identified in *How Good Is Our School (4)*.

It also provides the necessary knowledge, understanding and strategies to enable and empower us as teachers to:

- work together to make best decisions about curriculum, learning and teaching
- meaningfully develop curriculum and use the flexibility of CfE
- understand impact and learner outcomes, using assessment and other data to inform our professional judgement and use this to plan high quality learning for children and young people

In practice, for teachers and leaders this means:

- developing deep knowledge about learning and enhanced pedagogical knowledge
- asking questions about the progress of learners
- critically examining how, why and what we are teaching
- analysing a range of sources of information to understand and know the impact on learners
- using this evidence to critically inform teacher professional judgement
- share knowledge and together construct new knowledge to inform teaching and learning

These processes will enable teachers to make informed judgements about learning, teaching and the progress of all learners.

Teacher Professionalism: The Impact

Teacher professionalism is one of the six drivers for improvement. It is arguably the one driver that will inform and help to develop all other drivers. It is teacher professionalism more than any other factor that will deliver the aspirations for a Scottish education system that is characterised by equity and excellence. This enquiring and collaborative professionalism is a powerful force in developing teachers' agency and the individual teacher is committed to engaging young people, their families/ carers and the community in the education process. It is built on professional trust that our teachers are best placed to make the most informed decisions to meet needs of our children and young people. It's about empowering not only teachers and school leaders but also learners and their families as active agents in shaping their educational experience. Through this, teachers recognise their accountability to learners and the collective responsibility of the profession, working for the common purpose of improving outcomes for all and contributing in informed ways to "closing the attainment gap".

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