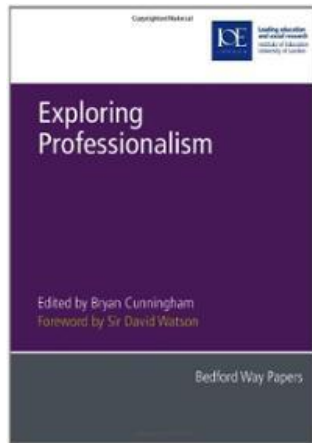


## Book Review



### Exploring Professionalism

Edited by Bryan Cunningham

Institute of Education; Bedford Way Papers edition (2008).

Paperback £18.99 (ISBN: 9780854738052)

Reviewed by **Anamaria Sakanoue**

*“Exploring Professionalism”* consists of a valuable and interesting collection of essays, focussing on a central and significant theme in higher education today. It provides several new perspectives on professionalism at a time when most professions are being questioned over their validity of being just that: professional or not. The perspectives, which the book addresses, are broad such as professional knowledge, institutions, power ethics, work-patterns and identities. The book also gives evidence of the emerging significance of the professional doctorate and considers its impact on professionals in higher education. It has been written with great emphasis on specific professional issues going beyond schools, universities and into the diverse fields of social work, educational psychology, health and law.

The first chapter opens with Deborah Andrews and Christine Edwards, two professional doctoral recipients in education (EdD), who explore their experiences during that time. Some of the reasons behind their doctoral choices were the emphasis on collaborative work and the opportunities to rethink and develop their own teaching careers. A professional doctorate enables the professional educator to become a practicing researcher in their workplaces. The chapter also highlights one main advantage of enrolling in a professional doctorate, which is having the opportunity for self-reflection. The authors point out that such a doctorate also enables educators to have the courage to air their opinions and stand by the values and principles that they feel are important in education.

In the second chapter, David Crook introduces a brief history of various perspectives on professionalism from the Middle Ages to the present day, which allows for further insights into the development of the concept of professionalism in the future. From the early 1900s onwards, professionalism has taken a different form, being applied to a wider range of professions due to changes in technology, communication, and the individual's life. The author also notes that there has been a shift from the traditional professionalism which came from socially-initiated trust to an expert who epitomises the modern professional, focussed more on customer satisfaction and company growth, though ironically overshadowed by the pressures of paperwork, overwork and stress.

The third chapter introduces various definitions of a professional educator, which change according to time and place. Geoff Whitty describes the most up-to-date developments in educational professionalism. The main focus of this chapter is that teaching professionalism  
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though such analysis can be applied to other educational professionals as well. The author explores professionalism from both sociological and political contexts in which educators operate. He contends that the various developments, which have taken place over the years, have significant implications for teaching autonomy and professionalism.

In chapter four, Stephen J. Ball describes three aspects of education policy such as performativity, privatisation and the state. Performativity allows educators to make themselves more productive and improve themselves as individuals. A teaching professional who is a self-managing and an autonomous individual has the chance to be better evaluated by their institution. The second dimension that the chapter discusses is the privatisation of the current education system. Through this, both the accountability and marketability of the teacher are emphasised, which lead the educator to “brush up” their skills and potential in order to meet their institution's standards.

In chapter five, Ingrid Lunt takes a look at ethical issues in a teaching professional's life, which have been threatened by the development of the digital age and the domination of the Internet. The notion of professional expertise has been questioned by major changes and reforms in the public and private sectors. These directly or indirectly have affected professional practices and have both supported and hindered the development of transparency and accountability in education.

Chapter six is significant for a number of reasons, one being Louise Morley's analysis of the micropolitics of professional life which points out the inequalities and disadvantages, resulting from ways in which dominance is achieved in institutions and organizations. The second factor is exploring several major research projects (conducted in Scandinavia and sub-Saharan Africa), which have yielded evidence that the micropolitics system has a “transitional” influence.

Chapter seven considers the challenges of widening participation (WP) for professional identities and practices in higher education. The author, Penny Jane Burke, also questions the debates of WP and its implications for the professional identities of educators and how they are able to change or adapt their teaching practices accordingly. By reading this chapter, educators will be able to engage in and analyse the implications of WP for their own professional identities and practices in higher education.

Sally Power presents in chapter eight to readers the idea of a “professional imagination” - a concept borrowed from the sociology of C. Wright Mills. The concept is that professionals, who are able to sense their own efficacy, will overcome their own professional crisis more easily than those who do not. A professional needs to understand the changes that may take place within their professional stance and respond to them with an optimistic and creative mind.

In chapter nine, Byran Cunningham, investigates significant dimensions of professional learning, focussing mainly on “critical incidents”, which are moments of reflection in the life of the professional, having the potential either to enhance or hinder the process of learning and development in respective situations.

The final chapter in this volume introduces one dimension of the modern life of the professional: an occurrence that Ronald Barnett, recounts as “supercomplexity”. He draws on the fact that professional life nowadays is “fraught with difficulty” where marketisation and regulation are significant components of this phenomenon.

As an educator in higher education and a professional doctorate candidate, I have been questioning my own professional stance and through reading this book, I have come to the conclusion that I am a learner professional at my workplace, who acknowledges various aspects and issues in education. The rationale behind this collection of essays is to make available to various audiences, a well-rounded selection of perspectives, offered by distinguished scholars in their own particular fields. Hopefully, it will raise interest not only for individuals concerned about or interested in their professional development but also curiosity about others in their current positions.