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# The eye of the storm: discursive power and resistance in the development of a professional qualification for adult literacies practitioners in Scotland

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## Abstract

*The claim to be a profession traditionally assumes the need for a University level qualification. In a previously unregulated area of practice, the development of a professional qualification is thus central to the professionalisation process. In Scotland, the development of a Teaching Qualification for Adult Literacies practitioners became the focal point for the tensions in the broader professionalisation project and a site of discursive contestation in an emergent field of practice. This paper explores the play of power and resistance, drawing primarily on two separate but related research studies – a policy analysis and an exploration of practitioners’ conceptualisations of practice. Whilst the first study explicitly used the methodological framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2003) and the second, Personal Construct Theory (Kelly, 1955), they are connected by their postmodern focus on language use and an interest in how practitioners are managed by and, in turn, manage and mediate managerial and professional forms of power; both aimed to examine ‘how discourse figures in the processes of change’ (Fairclough, 2003, p. 205). Brought into relationship with one another in the context of the nexus of power relations formed by the development of the new qualification, they illuminate the multiple ‘projects’ competing discursively in the space.*

**Keywords:** professionalisation; professional development; adult literacies; discourse

## Introduction

There are several overlapping terms related to the concept of professional which evoke different connotations; the noun ‘a professional’ carries a different set of meanings than the verb, ‘to be professional’; ‘professionalism’ suggests Goodson (2003, p.125 -126) is distinct from ‘professionalisation’. He defines the professionalisation project as ‘the pursuit of status and resources for an occupational group’. Professionalism, involves

‘teachers’ definitions of their peer group practices, their best ways of pursuing the art and craft of teaching.’

In discursive use the various terms are often used without such clear distinctions and the projects to ‘define and articulate the quality and character of people’s actions within a group’ and to ‘enhance the interests’ of that group (Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996, p. 4) are confused and intertwined in complex ways. It is worth noting that this earlier distinction uses the broad term ‘interests’, whilst the later distinction is clear about the more material aspect of those interests.

Within education, there is a body of literature which traces changes in understandings of professionalism historically (Clow, 2001; Hargreaves, 2000; Shain & Gleeson, 1999); illuminates competing conceptions (Downie, 1990; Sachs, 2003; Frowe, 2005) and proposes new models relevant to a contemporary context. Goodson and Hargreaves (1996) outline a postmodern model of professionalism, which has many similarities with Sachs’ (2003) model of the ‘Activist’ profession. Central to these contemporary models is what Goodson and Hargreaves call ‘occupational heteronomy’: working authoritatively yet openly and collaboratively with other partners. This idea is consistent with a political rhetoric of ‘joined up’ working but inconsistent with the advancement of discrete disciplines most often associated with the pursuit of professionalisation.

Much of this literature draws attention to tensions between projects of professionalisation, which are often pursued by the state and linked to reform or quality assurance agendas, and the commitment of practitioners to the pursuit of their peer values. Some authors go so far as to suggest that state driven processes of professionalisation can in fact diminish professionalism (Hjort, 2009). Whilst the distinction is still made between professionalism and professionalisation, professionalisation here is not so clearly linked to the pursuit of ‘status and resources’. Delineating professional boundaries may be more to do with bringing marginal groups under managerial control.

The idea of standards is part of the circulating discourses of both professionalism and professionalisation; the discourses of professional self interest and of control and ownership compete over *whose* standards will prevail. The pursuit of the material rewards of professional status may persuade practitioners to subject themselves to standards imposed by others (Hjort, 2009). Professional standards are often imposed by means of necessary qualifications. The mechanisms by which the providers of professional qualifications are held to account are often the means by which standards are imposed across the profession.

I have mainly drawn on the literature related to professionalism in teaching. Given that the language of teaching has been used in the specific context on which I wish to comment in this paper, I consider this literature relevant. The issues noted above are, however, further complicated by the fact that the practitioners under discussion are drawn from a variety of educational sectors in which discourses of professionalism, levels of professional status, expectations of preparation for practice and peer values are diverse. In different practice contexts called *teachers, tutors, lecturers, adult* or *community education workers*, their concept of ‘professional’ is mediated by the prevailing social norms of the contexts in which they work. For practitioners working within an explicitly adult education tradition, the informal nature of their practice can be at variance with their concept of a ‘professional’. The tension between the informal and sometimes subversive nature of adult education practice and the formalities of a profession are a dimension not adequately explored within the literature on teacher professionalism. For instance, the tendency for adult educators to identify more closely

with marginalised learners, can make for an ambivalent relationship with the overt status of the professional. A review of Adult Education across the European Union highlights the ‘deep philosophical differences about values and priorities’ (European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA), 2006, p.1) which characterise the diverse sector; these ‘philosophical divides’ must be understood if policymakers are to succeed in their aims in relation to lifelong learning (EAEA, 2006). This paper contributes to this understanding and to the literature on adult education and professionalisation with an examination of the tensions and contradictions in one contemporary setting.

### A case study

A decade of reform in the Adult Literacy and Numeracy (ALN) sector in Scotland provides a case study of an attempt to professionalise a previously unregulated area of adult learning practice. In 2001, the Scottish Executive responded to the ‘shock statistics’ (Maclaclan, 2004, p. 200) of the International Adult Literacy Survey (*‘23% of adults in Scotland may have low skills and another 30% may find their skills inadequate to meet the demands of the ‘knowledge society’*) (Scottish Executive (SE), 2001, p. 8)) with policy statements, an investment of unprecedented levels of funding and a commitment to ‘drive up the quality of teaching and learning’ (SE, 2005, p. i) by the professionalisation of the workforce. Central to this initiative was the development of a professional qualification for Adult Literacies practitioners.

In 2005, a Consortium of Higher Education (HE)/ Further Education (FE) and Practice-based partners were contracted to develop the new qualification. Their experience, over the next 5 years, as they worked together and with the field to plan and pilot the qualification with 2 national cohorts, affords some insight into the politics of a process of professionalisation. The TQAL Project became the focal point for wider tensions and contradictions and a place of struggle and resistance.

The Scottish developments are broadly in step with European policy on adult learning (Commission of the European Communities, 2001/2006/2007) in the same period. This policy acknowledges the social as well as economic consequences of literacy issues and the importance of access to quality teaching and learning for adults with the lowest skills. The commitments in the Scottish strategy document (Adult Literacy & Numeracy in Scotland (ALNIS) SE, 2001) – to free and varied opportunities for learners and to workforce development for the sector - echo directives at European level. Brine (2006, p. 650) describes the ‘complex entanglement of policy making’ in European multilevel governance. And indeed there are knots in the ‘conceptual string’ (ibid) between European policy and the Scottish strategy. Whilst European policy is overt in its individualisation of the need to develop ‘employability’ for the ‘knowledge economy’, in Scotland, contradictions arose from policy rhetoric which espoused a distinctive approach to literacies education based on a ‘social practice’ perspective of literacies (for a summary see Papen, 2005). This perspective sees literacy as socially constructed; not merely personal but political. The radical tone of this policy rhetoric drew attention away from the economic interest of government (*‘The long-term goal of the strategy will be to exceed the literacy and numeracy levels of Scotland’s main competitors within the global economy’*) (SE, 2001, p. 18)) and concealed more pernicious managerial discourses of reform and professionalisation aimed at greater control and accountability (Maclaclan, 2006; Ackland, 2006).

The new funding for literacies work was channelled through partnerships, on the basis that reaching the most marginal learners required ‘collaboration and synergy of effort across all sectors’ (Leavey, 2005, p. 23). The broader conception of ‘literacies’ supported by the lifelong learning rhetoric of policy allowed for the redefinition of a range of educational provision as adult literacies work and therefore eligible for the resources. Organisations - such as Local Authority Adult Basic Education services, Community Learning and Development services, Adult Education voluntary organisations, Further Education Colleges, the Prison Education Service – which had previously operated in isolation and according to their own institutional objectives were induced into new social relations and identification with a newly conceptualised area of practice: Adult Literacies. The development of a professional qualification became the inevitable subject for struggles about how to define that practice as the different partners sought to appropriate the enterprise and to inscribe it with their own rationality and worldview.

### **Researching how discourse figures within processes of change**

Analysing the history of adult education in Britain, Williams (1990) brings cultural theory to an exploration of the contradictions and tensions in the relationship between adult education and social change. His analysis highlights the competing ideologies inherent in different curricula and pedagogies and the asymmetrical power relations in the field. Popkewitz (1997), in his attempt to understand the reform of schooling in the USA, undertakes what he calls a ‘social epistemology’ of curriculum change; although, like Williams, he is interested in historical and sociological questions, he acknowledges the ‘linguistic turn’ of critical social theory and draws on the work of Foucault to foreground the relationship between knowledge and power in discourse.

The discourses constructed about education in policy-making, reform reports and documents from other institutionally legitimate positions of authority are not ‘merely’ languages about education; they are part of the productive processes of society by which problems are classified and practices mobilized. (Popkewitz, 1997, p. 157)

Giroux’s argument for a critical pedagogy of teacher education (see for example, Giroux & McLaren, 1987) also exploits postmodern theories of discourse:

Understanding curriculum as part of a broader struggle between dominant and subordinate discourses has critical implications for the ways in which educators produce and ‘read’ curriculum, engage the notion of student experience, and redefine critically their own role as engaged public intellectuals (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991, p. 93)

All this work shares a view of curriculum as a form of cultural politics: ‘Curriculum is a social and historical construction that links knowledge and power in very specific ways’ (ibid, p. 96).

It is this tradition of critical social theory and specifically the linguistic turn of postmodernism which provides a theoretical framework for my study of the Scottish reforms. As the policy and practice of pedagogy and curriculum in ALN changes, I have sought to understand how that change is related to issues of power and ideology.

Alongside my role as Curriculum Leader for the Scottish TQAL Consortium, I have undertaken two separate studies. The first (2005 - 2006) was a Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2003) of Scottish policy at the time of the introduction of national

standards and qualifications. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) assumes that language is inherent to social life; language as a cultural tool, can establish, sustain or change power relations in social networks. As a methodology, CDA offers a checklist of aspects of 'text' that can be investigated and provides tools for linguistic analysis.

The research involved an examination of key policy documents, tracing the transmutation of one significant document – *Literacies in the community* (SE, 2000) – as it was used in practice, and dialogues with stakeholders at different positions in the field. I concluded that the powerful discourse of performativity was dominating and recontextualising the more radical discourses of social practices and lifelong learning circulating in the ALN sector. Recontextualisation involves 'the appropriation of elements of one social practice within another, placing the former within the context of the latter, and transforming it in particular ways in the process' (Fairclough, 2003, p. 32). The 'elusive power of performativity' (Ball, 2005, p. 9) was such that practitioners were being recruited to the regulation of themselves against standards imposed from above and in conflict with peer values and the differing principles of practice of distinct practice contexts.

To further explore this recontextualisation of the discourse of social practices, the second study (2008 - 2010) used the methodology of Personal Construct Theory (Kelly, 1955) to explore practitioners' understandings of 'the social practice model', which in the years since the articulation of policy in the ALNIS report (SE, 2001) had become the explicit doxa of practice. As critiques of policy (Maclachlan, 2006; Parkinson, 2006) and concerns about whether and how practice in Scotland was changing (Maclachlan & Tett, 2006) began to proliferate, I was interested to explore the relationship between espoused theory and implicit theory in practice. An investigation of pedagogical conceptualisations might reveal how far practitioner thinking had been influenced by other discourses.

There is a methodological challenge in exploring implicit understandings in professional practice (Usher & Bryant, 1989). What people say they do does not always accurately represent their thought processes and behaviours. In Scotland, most Adult Literacies practitioners claimed they were 'doing social practices'. Interpretations of what this means and the ways in which it determines pedagogy remain, on the whole, tacit. Tacit understandings are not easy to expose using standard approaches to research.

Personal Construct Theory (PCT) (Kelly, 1955) provided a qualitative methodology and techniques to investigate and understand the ways in which individuals are constructing models of the world which influence their future behaviours. Although Kelly was theorising in a different age and the terminology of his theory appears to privilege the individual, the theory's assumption about persons is that 'people are both fashioned *within* and fashioned *of* the complex interpersonal worlds they inhabit' (Kalekin-Fishman & Walker, 1996, p. 13). Kelly's recognition of the socially situated nature of individual construing combined with his central tenet of 'constructive alternativism' (1955, p. 72) – i.e. that there are always possible alternative interpretations and meaning making is an open-ended exploratory process in which there is no one truth – are congruent with a postmodern view. In this study, I sought to bring the use of Kelly's 1950s Repertory Grid Technique – a means of eliciting the implicit – into relationship with my previous study of discourse and Foucauldian conceptions of governmentality, in line with Carl's assertion that 'postmodernism brings to Kelly an understanding that the construal process of people is highly discursive and power-laden' (Carl, 1999, p. 19).

Both studies involved a close examination of language and are informed by Foucault's conceptualisations of power relations (1979; 1998): power is productive;

control is exerted not by repression but by the normalisation of certain attitudes, behaviours and beliefs through discursive practices. This pastoral form of governance 'enables individuals to actively participate in disciplinary regimes through investing their own identity, subjectivities and desires with those ascribed to them by certain knowledgeable discourses' (Usher & Edwards, 1998, p. 215).

Although this paper draws primarily on these two studies, it is also informed by the plethora of documentation associated with the TQAL project, including an external evaluation of the first pilot programme and research which explored the wider impact of the second pilot programme.

All discourse analysis is partial and has a pretext (Widdowson, 2004). As a participant in the discourse, I must declare my own power, position and interests. These are not without their own contradictions and ambivalences. Prior to joining a University as a teacher educator, I was a manager within an Adult Education Voluntary Organisation with a long tradition of critical pedagogy consistent with my personal commitment to the social justice objectives of education. At the outset of the ALN Initiative, I was involved in the formation of local partnerships and in attempts to position the work of my organisation prominently within the emergent sector. My own claim to credibility in the new field could not be based on formal credentials but on experience which could be reframed within new discourses. My interests at this time were not served by a requirement for formal specialist credentials. The move to a University setting was a repositioning within the field. An academic role has more overt 'professional' status and power can accrue from the role of the institution in professional accreditation. In a field, such as adult education, which has 'a pragmatic anti-theoretical tradition' (Shaw & Crowther, 1995, p. 206), academics are, however, regarded with suspicion. From the perspective of some practitioners my move from the voluntary sector to the University was paradoxically a move from the centre to the margins. Nevertheless, a key role in the development of the professional qualification, at the heart of the process of professionalisation, brought with it significant influence on the values and principles of practice to be enshrined in definitions of Adult Literacies professionalism.

Discourse is a dynamic of which we are all a part and I have consciously played my part in different ways, at different times, to promote *my* educational projects and resist others. In bringing together material from this range of texts associated with the experience of the development of the professional qualification to explore how the professional identities and positions projected in the rhetoric of Scottish ALN policy are being adopted, adapted or resisted, I offer one possible interpretation of the data, which is inevitably partisan.

## Hybrid discourses

Different discourses are different perspectives on the world, ...[they] do not only represent the world as it is, they are also projective...and tied into projects to change the world in particular directions (Fairclough, 2003, p. 124).

Undertaken in the initial stages of the development of standards and qualifications in ALN in Scotland, my first study led me to argue that the hybridity of discourse in the articulation of Scottish policy acted as a Trojan horse, concealing the dangerous within the benign. The text of the ALNIS report juxtaposed the jargon of different social projects. For example, '*... a lifelong learning approach which focuses more attention on*

*the interplay between demands and opportunities that trigger and maintain voluntary participation*' (SE, p. 14) is contested by a vociferous discourse of 'managerialism' (Ball, 2005, p. 6) with its emphasis on holding to account those in receipt of public funds by means of targets, measurement and outputs: *'A rigorous system of quality assurance should be promoted by making available a set of performance indicators applicable to all sectors'* (SE, 2001, p. 34).

Despite the radical shift in theoretical perspective alluded to in ALNIS, the Section entitled 'Raising expertise through improved training and development' (SE, 2001, p. 36), again concentrates on processes of standardisation rather than change:

a national training strategy should provide national training standards for all staff and volunteers whose roles relate to literacy and numeracy tuition and a new qualification for specialist literacy and numeracy practitioners...staff and volunteers...should meet the national standards by 2005. ...Development of a professional qualification in teaching adult literacy and numeracy...is required to create a high quality professional level of service delivery across all sectors.

The introduction to the *Benchmark Statements* (SE, 2005) subsequently devised for the proposed professional qualification also exhibited a fusion of conflicted discourses. A deficit discourse – *'This is an important step forward in driving up quality in the adult literacies field'* (p. i) – undermined more developmental aspirations, *'to encourage the development of a confident and professional workforce'* (p. i) and the professionalisation agenda was made explicit: *'In order for adult literacies teaching and learning to be recognised as a legitimate, specialist area and therefore have the prerequisites to be recognised as an area of professionalism – the need for a Teaching Qualification: Adult Literacies... is pressing'* (SE, 2005, p. 5).

Contained within the commitment to develop a professional qualification were conflicting projects in which the different concerns of professionalism and professionalisation were often confused.

Practitioners' responses to the promise of the qualification were ambivalent. Dialogues with practitioners provided examples of perceived 'contradictions': training and qualifications as quality assurance evidence rather than for the development of expertise; the obligation to acquire specialist qualifications in a partnership culture that promotes shared approaches rather than discrete roles. One practitioner summed up the frustration, 'they're telling students that it's about distance travelled, it's not about getting bits of paper and then they turn around and say to tutors 'but you have to have this bit of paper' ...there's HUGE contradictions ...it's like 'do as I say but not as I do'.'

However, in my analysis of the dialogues the necessity of qualifications emerged as a major theme. The recurring verb phrase 'have to' expressed not just necessity, but obligation. It suggested an internalisation of the imperative. When the imperative was questioned, arguments tended to draw on the concept of 'professional' with the underlying assumption that the term brings with it an obligation of formal accreditation, and that to deny such a requirement would be *unprofessional* – the antonym was usually unspoken but its power implied in the taken-for-granted desire to be 'professional'. Practitioners had mixed feelings about the introduction of the qualification – they resented the implication that they were not already expert in their specialism, rejected an approach to professional development which seemed to them to be inconsistent with the lifelong learning values apparently espoused in policy, but at the same time were assimilating the seductive discourse of professionalisation with its invocation of professional standards and the implied promise of increased status more equal with other educational professionals.

Much of this ambivalence crystallised around the proposed title of *Teaching Qualification Adult Literacies*. The title signalled a connection with schooling which was an anathema to community-based practitioners whose values were invested in the term 'tutor' and who sought thus to distinguish themselves from what they perceived to be the authoritarian methods of the compulsory sector. The connection went beyond the title; the Benchmark Statements were derivative - adapted from the Initial Teacher Education standards applicable to the Scottish school sector. The expectations of the qualified teacher stipulated in this document are more consistent with a traditional model of teaching than one derived from a social practices perspective. The intertextuality of the Benchmark Statements suggests that in the pursuit of a model professional, equivalence with other established educational professionals was an important characteristic.

The title also led to a challenge to this equivalence from the powerful institutional body representing the profession of teaching – the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS); they pointed out that the denotation of the qualification as a *teaching qualification* contravened legislation which limited the use of this terminology to specific situations. This challenge in turn incensed participants in the first pilot – who saw it as part of the mechanics of gatekeeping professional 'teacher' status; despite having rejected the connection to 'teaching' initially, they responded with anger to a perceived inequality when one of the validating institutions included the word 'teaching' in the award title and others did not (Hillier, 2008).

This paradoxical assimilation of imposed standardisation was further evidenced in my research as I traced the progress of a key document through a genre-chain of texts connecting policy with practice. The *Literacies in the Community* (SE, 2000) pack was published at policy level as a 'resource for practitioners and managers'; over time it mutated through different genres of texts becoming a 'cross sectoral set of *standards*' (SE, 2001, p. 33), and then a 'tool for *quality assurance*' (HMIe, 2005, p.vi). In the artefacts of partnership working it could be seen embedded in self-imposed management processes, used to legitimate the work of partners. Practitioners contributed to the document's translation from resource to quality assurance tool as they subjected themselves to regulation in an attempt to validate their practice using the only measures available.

It was in this contested territory, in which language was of critical importance that the Consortium embarked upon the development of the new qualification recognising that it was an important stage in the dynamic of policy implementation and represented a significant opportunity to influence the discourse in the emergent professional field.

### **Playing politics with discursive pedagogy**

Discourse both represents and constructs reality. Within discourse, ideologies are projected, contested and resisted. I have asserted above that within the text of Scottish policy, conflicting discourses were in competition. These discourses are reinforced, resisted or reframed (Fairclough, 2003) in a series of discursive moves and countermoves.

The TQAL Consortium was powerfully positioned within this discourse and acknowledging the inherently ideological nature of education, chose to align itself with the pursuit of professionalism as opposed to the professionalisation project and to found the design of the new programme on the rhetoric of a social practices perspective. By choosing to amplify one discourse over the variety of others in circulation, the

Consortium sought to resist the recontextualisation of the social practices discourse by a discourse of performativity and reject interpretations of professionalism as compliance and accountability (Goodson, 2003). Instead, it intended to offer an opportunity to negotiate a new form of professionalism. The programme sought to engage explicitly with the question of what it means to *be* a literacies professional in the new theoretical paradigm.

The idea of the ‘social practices model’ of literacies teaching has considerable rhetorical power in Scotland. Social practices theory is primarily a theory of literacies in society. It is not an educational theory. Articulations of the implications of this perspective for teaching and learning were beginning to proliferate (e.g. Papen, 2005) but in Scotland, the discourse was so powerful that these implications were assumed to be self-evident. It was the intention in TQAL to re-examine this concept and its meanings, including its meanings in practice.

Central to this intention was a design which took as its theoretical base ‘a socio-constructivist perspective on learning’ (De Corte et al., 2003, p. 25), which includes an emphasis on the situatedness of learning within a ‘community of practice’ (Wenger, 1998). Learning is seen to occur in a ‘network of relations’ (Felsted et al., 2005, p. 364) and ‘has personal, professional and political dimensions’ (Sachs, 2003, p. 31). It is not an accumulation of skills and information, but a process of becoming – to become a certain person, or, conversely (and significantly in this context) ‘to avoid becoming a certain person’ (Wenger, 1998, p. 215).

The position was epistemological as well as ontological. Bereiter and Scardamalia (2003, p. 55) suggest that most current education presents knowledge in belief mode with students being expected to accept and work with knowledge established by others. Instead the project adopted their concept of knowledge as ‘design mode’ (ibid) i.e. knowledge is contingent and co-constructed. All participants would be encouraged to interact in a ‘knowledge building community’ (Swan & Shea, 2005, p. 6) in which they could discuss, collaborate and negotiate new meanings of professionalism.

Sach’s (2003) ‘Activist’ professionalism was explicitly adopted as a model for adaptation to Adult Literacies. This model includes the responsibility to act collectively to challenge dominant ideas.

This epistemological and ontological position stands in sharp contrast to a competence model in which there is a narrow definition of tasks, tightly defined performance criteria and little consideration of personal qualities. In designing a professional development curriculum from these standpoints the programme development team were challenged to move beyond existing practices of professional development and in doing so to contest the worldview of some stakeholders.

### **Powerful relations**

One presentation of my initial research posed the question ‘whose project is it?’ Drawing from Gee (2003) the dual meaning of ‘project’ as both representation (as in ‘projection’) and a venture to advance particular interests, I wanted to draw attention to the power-laden social relations from within which different stakeholders competed. In this section, I will explore how the TQAL Project was a nexus of social relations in which the projects of professionalisation and professionalism were struggled over.

A discourse of collaboration was evident in ALN policy statements and managed by the mechanisms for distributing funding. As previously noted, the new paradigm of

'literacies' significantly increased the number and diversity of potential partners who had a stake in the development of a professional qualification.

Collaboration is increasingly perceived to be necessary to professional development processes. Sachs and Goodson (2003) both make an explicit link between collaboration and contemporary constructions of professionalism and assert that new forms of teacher education must be evolved collaboratively if they are to be effective in contributing to teacher professionalism for a 21<sup>st</sup> century context. With respect to workplace learning, University/employer partnerships are encouraged to ensure that 'projects reflect the needs of the workplace' (Boud et al., 2001, pp. 3-17). In partnership, the University comes to understand the needs of the employing organisation and hence meet the 'needs' of employees. Persuasive as the calls for collaboration are, they perhaps play down the sometimes conflicting 'needs' of different stakeholders.

In the trail of project documentation from the original specification through the notes of meetings of various combinations of partners to the evaluation and research reports can be seen some of the competing interests operating in the apparently collaborative space.

At the outset, the contracting body, Learning Connections (LC), indicated their intention that the development should involve partnership and should engage with multiple stakeholders. To respond to the tender, a Consortium was formed which included 3 Universities, 2 Colleges, the Scottish Further Education Unit and 2 Practice Managers. In addition, LC insisted on a management structure which established a steering group made up of representatives of powerful professional bodies such as the GTCS and a separate practitioner reference group.

There were, then, several interconnecting partnership arrangements: between the Consortium and the governing body and its various reference groups; between the Consortium and local employers; and between the various institutions and individuals represented in the Consortium. The complex interrelationships created by these levels of partnership were characterised by dynamics of power.

The relationship with the funder was established by formal contracts which were negotiated in a competitive bidding context. Communication with local employers was for the most part filtered by the Consortium's more overt relationship with the governing body. The establishment of a complex management structure with a steering group and a practitioner reference group meant that the Consortium related to other powerful stakeholders within mechanisms controlled by the governing body. Those communications sometimes seemed to have more to do with the ambivalent relationship between local practice and national policy than with the specific work of the Consortium.

Although the contract for TQAL stated that the qualification should be 'substantially practice-based', there was, however, an assumption that the programme would involve higher education institutions. The validation of academic institutions is deemed to be a necessary aspect of a 'professional' qualification, whilst these same academic institutions are seen as distant from practice and focused on theoretical concerns. The legitimacy of the programme development team was called into question (note of meeting 08/04/08), their perceived status as academics obscuring their recent experience as literacies practitioners. The power dynamic between the field and the Consortium was a complex one in which the institutional partners were held to account by various groups whose interests were not aligned.

## Different conceptions of professional and professional development

The stakeholder groups represented in the management structure came with competing conceptions of what form the qualification should take. As a result inconsistencies proliferated in the specification. At the outset, the specification contained elements of differing models of professional development without an explicit rationale for their fusion. For example, the contract stated that the qualification should be ‘substantially practice-based’. This contained assumptions about processes of professional development, which were at that time more in line with a Community Education model rather than teacher training, from where the Benchmark Statements had been derived. It implied a separation of theory and practice which was further reinforced by the requirement to involve a cadre of experienced practitioners as ‘*Practice Tutors*’ – a model in evidence in Social Work in Scotland but seldom in Education. In the construction of the Benchmark Statements and the subsequent tender document, Learning Connections had relied heavily on existing models of ‘the professional’, combining elements from distinctively different models without a cogent argument for their appropriateness to the specific context.

The size, level and shape of the programme may be seen to have been determined not by educational rationale but by competing agendas. The status dimension of the professionalisation project drove an insistence that the qualification be equivalent in size to a schoolteacher’s postgraduate training. This quest for equivalence was in tension with the commitment to allow access for practitioners with a non-traditional educational background unable to meet the strict academic entry requirements of teacher training. The tension between rigorous standards (professionalisation) and a value set (professionalism) of wider access (in tune with the discourse of Lifelong Learning and CLD principles) led to a requirement that the qualification be available at two academic levels (initially Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) 8 and 9), despite Benchmark Statements linked to the SCQF framework by language reflecting a single and higher level of study (SCQF 10 – the level at which school teachers’ initial training is set). Calls from Practice Managers for a flexible modularised programme contrasted with the governing body’s rejection of an initial design which included elective courses on the grounds that all students must cover all aspects of the prescribed standards. Representatives of discrete disciplines called for the programme to be linked to, or even incorporated into, the initial qualifications relevant to their sector – for example, CLD or Further Education teaching. An expectation that the programme would be scrutinised for approval and thus legitimated by both the CLD Standards Council and GTCS against substantially different criteria contributed further tensions.

As in the hybrid discourses of policy, different interests competed. Hjort (2009) defines three distinct strategic interests in competence development: political, administrative and professional. In the Scottish situation, the political interest was fundamentally economic (Maclaclan, 2006) and a professional qualification must show a return on the investment in terms of measurable impact on quality of service. Administratively, the standardisation provided by a qualification would help ‘*to provide assurance that the national initiative is having the effect that Ministers intended*’ (HMIe, 2005, iii). Professionalisation can be linked to both these agendas and the interests of professionals may be both progressed or undermined, as Hjort (2009) argues, in the process. If practitioners are co-opted into a project of legitimation and self regulation in their ‘pursuit of status and resources’ (Goodson, 2003, pp. 125-126), they may give up the autonomy of their ‘professionalism’.

Competing ideas of professional development are associated with these different interests; Hjort (2009) contrasts an idealistic view, in which competence development is understood as knowledge creation, increased self management and ethical commitment, with a functional view which advocates a technical-instrumental approach to ensuring that practitioners provide more effective service. Hjort claims that this second view is linked to the new public management agenda and contributes more to a deprofessionalising process than to professionalism.

Arguments about the nature of the programme continued throughout the life of the project. I contend that these arguments are not to do with the programme itself but reflect the different projections of practice, professionalism and professional development in competition in the field. The struggle over the academic level of the programme represents a more fundamental struggle over the nature of professional competence. In the most recent research report, the programme is described by some sceptical managers as 'too academic'; they 'contend that tutors were looking for more practical skills rather than exposure to increased theoretical understanding'. This is resonant with what Hjort (2009, p. 112) calls the technical-instrumental model of competence development and consistent with the tradition of 'competences' in the Scottish CLD sector. It is significant that the claim that the programme is too 'theoretical' and that tutors instead need instrumental skills came from managers and not the tutors themselves. The research reports a different view from tutors and managers who had participated in the programme: 'Prominent across the case studies was a recognition of the ways in which the TQAL course provided participants with a new confidence in their practice'. This perhaps reflects their more 'idealistic view' of competence development which acknowledges the importance of 'knowledge creation, increased self management and ethical commitment' (Hjort, 2009, p. 112). Despite the value placed on these outcomes of a process-based model of developing understandings in practice, evidence of the 'content covered' and the 'course materials' were requested for scrutiny by the funders and their reference groups at regular intervals. Despite the Consortium's insistence on a socio-constructive model of professional development, the assumption of expert transmission and commodification of knowledge is implicit in the contracting body's requests for 'the programme materials' on the basis that they were 'owned' by the funders (management meeting minute).

These were then struggles to 'define and articulate the quality and character of people's actions' whilst also to 'enhance the interests' (Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996, p. 4) of specific groups. Non - participation was as powerful as participation as some managers acted as gatekeepers for sessional staff. The interests were not always about the advancement of Adult Literacies practitioners as some institutions sought to protect the hierarchical position of other professionals which might be unsettled by the claims to professional status of ALN practitioners. For example, in one college the possession by the Adult Literacies 'tutor' of a professional qualification equivalent to the teaching qualification of FE lecturers was seen as potentially leading to a challenge to their marginal status as support staff and thus had wide reaching implications for college staffing structures and finances (personal communication, College Principal, 09/10).

These power-laden social relations provided the context for the study of practitioners' conceptualisations of practice.

## Arguing the professional self

As competing definitions of practice circulated, the term most often used to legitimate and defend particular positions was the one of ‘social practices’. Anecdotally, some of the ways in which it was invoked as part of the struggle over forms of practice are as follows: ‘social practices’ was used as a defence against the need for a ‘teaching’ qualification (school literacy teaching does not explicitly draw on social practices theory) and for the legitimacy of Community Educators to do Adult Literacies work (without further training) on the basis that the tradition of empowering group work was just the same as ‘social practices’. The pressure to introduce formal accreditation was resisted on the basis that assessment was inconsistent with a ‘social practices’ approach. As were games-based approaches to numeracy teaching and greater use of IT. In the period prior to the second TQAL cohort it seemed to crop up in many different contexts as either a defence or criticism of practice. The variety of practices to which the term was applied, combined with evaluative research which questioned the extent to which practice exhibited the criticality implied by a social practices perspective of literacies (Maclaclan & Tett, 2006) led me to wonder about the discursive use of this term.

The study therefore set out to explore practitioners’ understandings of the ‘social practice model’ utilising Kelly’s Repertory Grid Technique – a method of structured dialogue which aims to elicit the implicit theory behind a person’s judgments about practice. At the core of this process is the requirement for respondents to articulate their distinctions between instances – or ‘elements’ – of practice. Presented with triads, they must explain how they perceive two elements to be similar and the third different. The characteristic shared by two elements becomes one pole of a construct, how the third differs forms the contrasting pole. By eliciting bipolar constructs, this technique goes beyond what a person *affirms* about practice and explores the delineating alternatives that they tacitly hold. In the patterning of elements and constructs, the grid technique attempts to map the personalised meaning each individual is making of concepts of practice.

Initially I was interested in the extent to which the meanings that practitioners were making were, or were not, consistent with a social practices theory of literacies in society. My own understanding of those implications focused on the shift from an ‘autonomous’ to an ‘ideological model’ (Street, 1985) of literacy, and the subsequent requirement for criticality. My reassurances that in the dialogues with practitioners I was not judging as right and wrong versions of ‘a social practices model’ were to some extent disingenuous. Certainly the expectation was that I *would* make such judgements: ‘*How ultimately are you going to analyse whether a particular person’s view of social practices approach is the right one?*’ My powerful position, as the apparent arbiter of meanings, could not be wished away. Instead, I began to attend to the power dynamics; to the way in which, in the construing of this thing ‘the social practice model’, ‘identity claims’ (Maclure, 2003, p. 10) were asserted through the division of self and other, and legitimated by reference to authoritative texts. The question became not ‘what is a social practice model’ but how is it talked about and what discursive work is it doing.

In the practitioners’ discourse of a ‘social practice model’ the recurring themes were learner-centredness and relevance:

My understanding of the Social Practice of literacies is that it's directed by the needs of the learner...

Learner-centred....making the learning process relevant...

Creates a relevant link to the learner's life. It individualises learning...

It's taking the learner's perspective into account and, if appropriate, adapting my practice to their social norms.

Within this discourse, the learner (singular) tends to be isolated in the learning environment but linked to their individual everyday life, which is seen as unquestionable. The relationship between teacher and learner may be interpreted as one of service. When I examined the bipolar constructs (from the repertory grids) associated with these concepts, however, discriminations emerged that might imply distinct teaching practices. For example, in relation to curriculum, *'relevant'* is contrasted variously with: *'directive'*, *'treating everybody the same'*, *'ignoring the learner's interests'*, *'decontextualised'*.

To summarise, a number of contradictions emerged in my analyses of the data. As well as the variety of different interpretations of key concepts, constructions of practice were often defined in opposition to the practices of other professionals – in particular school teachers or English ALN practitioners: a social practice model is *'flexible'*, *'not prescriptive...like Skills for Life'*. The data, however, pointed to principles and values of teaching and learning practice which are similar to those identified in research with teachers in these sectors (e.g. Hattie, 2003); the claim to distinction through 'othering' (MacLure, 2003, p. 3) is discordant with the pervasive sense of feeling obligated to conform to the distinctive Scottish model: *'... in this day and age you'd get stoned to death if you're not doing the social practice model.'* (Paradoxically the notion of 'doing the social practice model' suggests inflexibility whilst the metaphor invokes the spectre of ideological fanaticism.)

The dissonances led me to conclude that the term 'social practice model' may be considered a *'floating signifier'* (Foucault, 1977, cited in Hjort, 2009, p. 114) detached from what it appears to *signify*: 'a phrase the most important meaning of which is that it does not mean anything' (ibid). Sufficiently slippery, it can be co-opted in support of diverse practice; the term is used as a way of 'arguing' the professional self (MacLure, 1993) in a complex discursive space. MacLure concludes from her study (in which teachers also defined themselves by defining what they were not) that to lay claim to an identity in this way is 'to engage in a form of argument...to defend their attitudes and conduct' (ibid, p. 320). The delineations in the constructions of a 'social practice model' made by the practitioners in my study suggest that the 'definitions of their peer group practices' are still diverse but that they have colonised the discourse of social practices first introduced in policy to argue their own interests. These interests may not be as narrow as status and resources; conversely they may be about the desire to retain the autonomy of their previous marginal status. The claims to the exclusivity of practice are not so much about advancing material interests as a form of ideological resistance, consistent with Sach's idea of 'disruptive work' and Ollin's (2005) 'constructive subversions'.

## Conclusion

The clear distinction made by Goodson (2003) between professionalisation and professionalism fails to take account of the contestation between the project of managerial control on the one hand and the pursuit of professional status on the other, as well as the competition for the definitions of professionalism in a sector in which

demarcation itself is a matter of struggle. 'Interests' are contingent and are not restricted to the more obvious markers of status and financial reward.

Contemporary conceptualisations of professionalism which emphasise 'heteronomy' run the risk of merely promoting managerial projects of efficiency unless they adequately theorise power in the relationships they advocate. Consistent with the findings of Ollin (2005), this research suggests that professional power is exercised by discursive tactics at the margins and the micro-level as well as in collective action.

A project which was part of a process of professionalisation and the imposition of standards but deliberately promoted a model of professionalism which incorporated the explicit use of power was fertile ground for discursive resistance. The rhetoric of social practices was appropriated by Scottish policy for legitimation of change (Ackland, 2006). Subsequently recontextualised by a discourse of performativity, it recruited practitioners to a process of professionalisation in which standards were imposed and assimilated in the pursuit of professional legitimation. It was invoked in the design of the professional development programme as a means of resisting the power of performativity, narrow definitions of practice and to create a space in which peer definitions of practice could be negotiated. The amplification of one key discourse may have encouraged the adoption of the language of social practices within the practitioner group as a hegemonic strategy to appropriate legitimating rhetoric in support of their own established practices and socio-political interests.

The case study of the process of professionalisation of Scottish ALN tutors provides a clear illustration of the management and mediation of professional forms of power through discourse.

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