

References

Whitty, G. 2009. Evaluating 'Blair's Educational Legacy?': Some comments on the special issue of *Oxford Review of Education*. *Oxford Review of Education* 35: 267–80.

Hugh Starkey

Institute of Education, University of London, UK

h.starkey@ioe.ac.uk

© 2009, Hugh Starkey

Exploring professionalism, edited by Bryan Cunningham, London, Institute of Education, University of London, 2008, 214 pp., £18.99 (pbk), ISBN 978-0-85473-805-2

This is a collection of 10 essays which sets out to explore key issues in professional life; the preface explains that the aim of the collection is to bring together a range of perspectives from which professionalism can be considered and to provide an introduction to the tools and discourses used in analysing the concept. Much of the material in the collection grew out of the Foundations of Professionalism module on the professional Doctorate in Education at the Institute of Education and, as a member of the last cohort to take that module without the benefit of this text, it has been interesting to read it and reflect on the extent to which it will have helped successor cohorts and might be of interest to a wider readership.

As would be expected, there is discussion amongst several of the essays of the nature and definition of a 'profession'. In particular, the essay contributed by Crook describes how the concept of a profession has altered over time and concludes that the concept is an artificial construct which remains contested. This is aptly demonstrated by contrasting the apparent disfavour with which he refers (23) to a postmodern view that 'we can all – dog-walkers and landscape gardeners no less than solicitors and archbishops – be professionals if we want to be professionals, and if we conduct ourselves in a manner that seems to be professional', with the view expressed by Watson in the Forward (vii) that 'the postmodernist spirit of the times' has added 'to the professional palette new domains such as capital markets, niche journalism, alternative therapies and call-centre management'.

The context within which much of the collection sits is a view that, however a profession is to be defined, professional life is now much more complicated than it once was and that professionals, rather than being left in peace once they attain professional status, to do more or less what they want, are now subject to many and often conflicting pressures and accountabilities. This is a view espoused with varying degrees of strength by the authors and it may be noted that, for example, Barnett (202) suggests that 'the more dismal accounts of the decline of professionalism may just tell us more about the commentator' than about professionalism and that Power (152) suggests that there is a tendency to 'over-romanticise earlier epochs of professional autonomy'.

Barnett describes the environment as being one of super-complexity in which professionals are 'caught amid multiple discourses that pivot variously around themes such as service, performance, marketability, client satisfaction, and knowledge and truth' (200) and notes that these discourses are in tension between themselves with the result that 'being a professional is not easy'. Lunt discusses the growing recognition of the provisional nature of knowledge and of the changing nature of the professional-client relationship. Whitty's essay considers how professional autonomy could best be balanced with the role of other stakeholders through an examination of what he describes as traditional, managerial, collaborative and democratic modes of professionalism in the context of developments in the professionalism of schoolteachers. Ball continues the theme of the sociological and political context of education professionals with an essay on performativity and privatisation. The essays by Morley on micro-politics in higher

education and by Burke on widening participation provide further demonstration of the complexity involved in professional identity and interaction.

Amongst the essays are suggestions as to how the modern challenges of professionalism are to be met. Power suggests, for example, that the best way forward is to develop a 'professional imagination', recognising the complexity of the relationship between individual, institution and society. Barnett's view is that the modern professional should be able to operate critically and creatively amongst the various discourses in order to be able to 'think morally on her feet' in working through options and dilemmas whilst acting within 'the boundaries of respect, knowledge and truth, and of faithfulness to epistemic and professional communities' (204). Lunt (88) argues the need for a 'modern ethical professionalism' based on an extended understanding of what she describes as the traditional ethical principles of competence, respect, integrity, responsibility and caring for others. She argues that professionals should have the humility to accept the provisional nature of knowledge, the need for continuous reflection on their practice and that they and fellow members of their profession do not necessarily know best.

This emphasis on the need for continuous professional development and reflection is pursued by Cunningham in his essay on the potential contribution of 'critical incidents' to continuous professional development. Professional learning is also the subject matter of the first essay in the collection which is a reflection by Andrews and Edwards on the experience of studying for a professional doctorate. The position of these two essays perhaps highlights a weakness of what is undoubtedly a thought-provoking collection since it seems, to this reader at least, that the order of the essays (which is rather different from the order in which they are mentioned in this review) does not represent the most coherent arrangement of the material. Essays concerned with continuous professional learning might, for example, more logically come after the essays dealing with the nature and challenges of professional life since this reflective activity might be seen as a way of dealing with those challenges.

Opening the collection with a reflection on the value of a professional doctorate emphasises, perhaps, that the primary audience for the work is expected to be doctoral students but this seems an unnecessarily limited view of its potential. Many of the essays are mainly or entirely located within the sphere of education and it is to an educational readership that they are likely to speak most loudly but it may well be the case that at least some parts of the collection will have resonance for readers from a range of other professions. Indeed, it could well be of interest to those from occupations which might not commonly be viewed as professions; arguably, for example, the ethical business person is now increasingly subject to the same ethical conflicts, competing stakeholder interests and regulation as the traditional professional.

In summary, this collection will certainly be helpful to those studying professionalism in the educational context and is likely to be of interest to others.

Fiona Tolmie
Kingston University, UK
f.tolmie@kingston.ac.uk
© 2009, Fiona Tolmie

Generational shockwaves and the implications for higher education, by Donald E. Heller and Madeleine B. d'Ambrosio, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar, 2008, 224 pp., £55 (hbk), ISBN 978-1-84720-748-7

TIAA-CREF is the organisation on which a significant number of American college and university employees depend for their pension and retirement benefits. Their 'Institute' promotes on an