

Chapter 8

Professionalism, Teacher Education, and the Importance of Training and Development

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ABSTRACT

As a qualified school and certified language teacher the author is regarded as a relatively experienced professional educator, who accepts that identities evolve\). Both as a trainee and qualified teacher, the author felt that high standards of professionalism were expected in study and work, and that the author was a member of a collective profession of which the author was proud to be a part. In contrast, enrolling on a CELTA course and subsequently working as a TESOL and, more specifically and recently, EAP practitioner, the author has never experienced that same connection. This chapter thus sets out to explore what is meant by the terms ‘profession(s),’ ‘professionalisation,’ and ‘professionalism.’ It then considers the professionalism of the mainstream teaching profession, before moving on to examine the professionalism of TESOL and EAP. Additional attention is also paid to the problematic issue of TESOL pre-service education, in particular due to how inadequacies here can create numerous problems in due course.

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1. INTRODUCTION

As a qualified school and certified language teacher I regard myself as a relatively experienced professional educator, who accepts that identities evolve (Lorimer & Schulte, 2012). Both as a trainee and qualified teacher, I felt that high standards of professionalism were expected in study and work, and that I was a member of a collective profession of which I was proud to be a part. In contrast, enrolling on a CELTA course and subsequently working as a TESOL and, more specifically and recently, EAP practitioner, I have never experienced that same connection. I have certainly not felt as if I was part of a specialised TESOL profession, although I appreciate that efforts are being made in this respect, and unless TESOL is regarded as a sub-field of a broader teaching occupation, and EAP a sub branch of this, it is difficult to believe I am part of a profession which can lay claim to high standards of professionalism consistently across the board. In terms of EAP practitioners, this reaffirms a documented challenge as practitioners are deemed to hold a lower subjective view of their professional status than the profession's objectively recognized status (Sizer, 2019). Admittedly, some of the TESOL and EAP contexts I have worked within have felt professional, with high standards of professionalism expected and enacted, but this was usually born more out of institutional expectations than occupational ones. With these points in mind I also struggle to believe that in many cases pre-service TESOL and EAP teacher education is adequate given its default remit. Indeed, it often does little to help future practitioners survive (Xu, 2013), let alone thrive. From a pedagogic perspective, this is troubling because of the belief that teachers and teacher preparation can have a greater impact on student achievement than a student's background (Darling-Hammond, 2000). In light of all these considerations, and recognising that confusion and conflict can arise when there is misunderstanding or misplaced expectations regarding how terms such as 'professionalism' are understood and applied, this article sets out to explore what is meant by the terms 'profession(s),' 'professionalisation,' and 'professionalism.' It then considers the professionalism of the mainstream teaching profession, before moving on to examine the professionalism of TESOL and EAP. Additional attention is also afforded the problematic issue of TESOL pre-service education as I believe it to be, in particular due to how inadequacies here can create numerous problems in due course.

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