



# HOW TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM STRUGGLES TO SURVIVE WITHIN THE GREEK SECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper the focus is on issues of professional identity of teachers in Greece, under conditions of significant change in government policy and educational restructuring. This restructuring actually led to a partition into two fragments, what we will call “balkanization”, of the secondary education system. The concept of professionalism between educational practitioners in each fragment of education, and the emerging need of a professional ethos will be presented in the following sections.

**Keywords:** professionalism, Greek education system, secondary education

## Introduction

### Societal Historical and Political Background

This initial part will refer to some of the key dimensions of the secondary education system before turning to what will be our principal focus. It also reviews the way it affects us as a teacher in a public secondary school and the issues we are going to explore. It also demonstrates the reasons this paper could be interesting to the readers.

The key date is 1981. It is the year the socialists' political party came into power for the first time in the political history of Greece (Kariotis, 1992; Spourdalakis, 1988). It was a significant political change as the previous political history of Greece comprised a dictatorship and many highly conservative governments (see e.g. Clogg, 2002; Couloumbis, 2003; Featherstone, 1987; Keridis, 2009; Miller, 2008). In this new reformative environment that followed (Petmesidou and Mossialos, 2006), directives and legislative initiatives were introduced to the secondary education system in the name of equity, social justice, and the fight against elitism (Chilcote, 1990; Featherstone, 2005).

The basic legislations are included in the Law 1320/1983, “*Hiring in the public sector and other provisions*” and the Law 1566/1985: “*Structure and Operation of Primary and Secondary Education*”. Reform measures introduced in the 1980's include among others: a) the increase of university students (Hill, 2008: 160), b) the ending of performance management of teachers (Tulasiewicz and Strowbridge, 1994: 98). In addition, a general notion of fondness for, or bullying of, teachers according to their political labelling was practised off the record by government officials (Spourdalakis, 1988). As a result school education was destabilised with a direct effect on the quality of services provided to students. Gradually the number of unemployed teachers increased, as the production rate of qualified individuals was greater than needed, (a), above, having led to a situation of oversupply. In response to these particular political, economic and social conditions a different version of schooling was ready to emerge.

In the 1980s a new pole, the private tutoring, was of necessity raised in an antithetical position to the public school<sup>1</sup>, serving both students and unemployed teachers. Private evening tutorial schools were supporting and progressively have been replacing the role of the public school. Their flourishing caused the balkanization of the secondary education system. This course of action, although in earlier years started as supportive to school, has undertaken the principal role in students' education. Nowadays the vast majority of students in secondary education receive private tutoring. It appears to be a socially acceptable and obligatory modus operandi, preparing students for the national examination required to enter higher education, under the pretext of public schools' incompetence to do so. Private tutorials are given by unemployed teachers as a remedy for unemployment. In addition

tutorial tutorials are given by public sector teachers as a remedy for their low income.

### Defining the different notions of Professionalism

“*We cannot develop theory if we are not certain what we are talking about*” (Freidson, 1994: 15). Professionalism and its different modes is the core of this paper. we agree with Freidson's (1994: 42) statement that “the very practice of seeking a definition is not dogmatically imposed as a compulsion of academic writing. It is essential in order to think systematically and analyse in depth a subject”. But what constitutes professionalism? As Sachs (2004: 25) argues “definitions of professionalism have been sites of academic and ideological struggle between academics”. Reviewing the literature, we confirmed Sachs statement as we discovered a huge bibliography of different approaches to defining professionalism, and great debate concerning its connotations (see Figure1). According to Jarausch (cited in Freidson, 2001: 131) professionalism is “an ideology, a set of values”. Sockett (1993: 9) adds practice, status and organization to the connotations of professionalism, which we find of great value for an integrated notion of the term. Also, Freidson (2001) speaks about competence of performing a task. In addition, Parson's “functionalism” as summarized by Hoyle, introducing a number of criteria by which to define professionalism, offers a very interesting perspective, although widely criticized. These criteria comprise particularly “...Knowledge, autonomy and responsibility...” (Hoyle and John, b1995:6) which in our opinion are highly significant to the concept of professionalism.



Fig.1. The concept of professionalism.

In our opinion, we would adopt Freidson's (2001: 199) perspective, and to put it simplistically, we would express the view that professionalism is based upon competence in performing a task, an activity. This competence is attested to by special education credentials. Furthermore, as aforementioned, professionalism as Jarausch (cited in Freidson, 2001: 131) maintains is "an ideology, a set of values". An ideology, as you see in Figure 2, which we would place between our commitment to the quality of work on our right and our economic self-interest on our left, in a balance encompassed by a notion of serving public interest, public good in general.



Fig.2. The concept of professionalism.

Moreover, in an attempt to define professionalism, we may initiate our endeavour with the general concept of profession. Especially, as it concerns professionalism in the two fragments of secondary education, a perspective which is suitable to this specific analysis is based on the concept of profession as "a limited number of occupations characterised by particular institutional and ideological traits with a kind of resemblance. This allows us to think of professionalism as a way of organizing an occupation and producing distinctive occupational identities" as Johnson maintains (cited in Freidson, 1972: 42). In this paper, two distinctive professional identities emerge, the teacher and the tutor. They share some similar traits like a) qualifications, b) students and c) specialist subjects, but differ on the concept of teachers' professionalism and the organizational framework of each occupation.

#### Professionalism in the public secondary school sector

Prior to the discourse concerning professionalism in the public secondary school sector, a brief account of the background to the Greek education system is presented. The deployment of the following facts is required to avoid any ambiguities by virtue of connotations or fundamentals which are obvious to the writer but not to the international reader.

Secondary education in Greece extends over 6 years from the age of 12 to 18. The percentage of the age group going on to upper secondary education is around 90% (Eurybase, 2008). The demand for higher education has increased dramatically during the 1980s and remains high until now. Although places in universities have been multiplied during this period (Hill, 2008: 160), higher education still cannot offer the number of places to satisfy the increased demand. The restricted admission to higher education is regulated by university entrance examinations administered by the state (Kazamias, 2009).

There is a general notion in Greek society that getting a university degree is a prerequisite for personal and social prosperity and a key to fulfilment in adult life. Parents make great sacrifices to offer their children any possible assistance and support to study in higher education. As a result almost all senior secondary school students receive tutoring throughout the year in examinable subjects.

The age rate that students start to receive tutoring declines each year. In the early 1980's the phenomenon was restricted to students of the final grade in post-compulsory secondary education. During the late 1980s and the 1990s almost all students of the post-compulsory sector were receiving tutoring.

Presently, students from the age of 12 attend tutorials in specific subjects, and this stance has become common even between primary school students.

For example, although teaching of two foreign languages is now compulsory in primary and secondary education, virtually all primary students receive tutorials at least for one language. This phenomenon restricts the family income, as a great proportion of parents' monthly remuneration is invested in private tutoring. There are almost no exclusions from tutoring. Even among the poor students, participation levels are high.

On the other hand, teachers working in the compulsory and post compulsory sector of secondary education acquire certain characteristics. Firstly, they have tenure according to the Law 1600/1986 "Granting of permanent tenure to teachers serving in public education on the basis of unlimited duration contracts ruled by private law" (1986). They cannot be dismissed for any reason. Even in cases of misconduct, dismissal is a rare possibility, and strongly opposed by the one and only, thus very powerful, teacher union. In case of weakness or incompetence of a teacher no material sanctions are imposed, as in most EU countries (OECD, 2009: 183). Secondly, there is a total absence of any performance management (opcit) or professional development. Teaching is seen as an intuitive activity. What is more, classroom events are perceived in isolation as nobody, not even the head teacher, can observe classroom practice.

#### Professionalism under attack

Teachers' professionalism in the early 1980s embodied by senior education staff (head teachers, external inspectors of performance management) from the political right was considered to be the cause of elitism and discrimination at schools (Mouzelis, 1979). As a result the directives issued by the government had targeted this "anomaly" of teachers' professionalism.

As mentioned above, teachers were given autonomy to perform their duties without any interventions from senior education officials. No one any longer had any authority over how teachers perform their duties; "how to teach" became the prerogative of teachers, but "what to teach" remained the state's jurisdiction as the curriculum continued to be highly centralized. The transformation of professionalism introduced at that point, destabilised educational standards and caused the balkanization of the secondary education system.

However, it is also argued by some that this strategy was a victory of egalitarianism over elitism, in that it actually enhanced teachers' professionalism and certainly it was not an attack on professionalism and the reason that caused balkanization as we maintained above. we concede that political strategies are among the most contentious issues. In the following section we will attempt to underpin our assertion, having in mind what Becker has argued: "the way in which we look at problems is clearly affected by the position from which we take our view" (cited in Goodson and Hargreaves, 1996: 23). we also realise that issues which we may see as so obvious as to be beyond argument, are highly contestable for others.

The paradigm we am deploying from the early 1980s is not the only one, in which teachers' professionalism was attacked. It is not uncommon for a profession to be accused by certain political parties according to Freidson (1994: 169). Education in general "has come under increasingly fierce political attack in recent years" (Socketk, 1993: 19). Elaborating on Socketk's statement, we would comment that governments introducing education reforms in Australia and the UK may have not followed the example of Greece targeting teacher professionalism; however, they have challenged traditional conceptions of teachers' professionalism in different modes (Sachs, 2001: 156). Almost at the same time that the political left was attacking teachers' professionalism in Greece, the political right was challenging the professional identity of teachers in the UK (Hoyle and John, 1995).

### Restricted Professionalism

Focusing on Greece, if we would be asked to describe the deprofessionalization of the public school teachers in two words, we would use “efficiency” and “commitment”. Why teachers are deficient in such essential professional and moral, we would add, values? Are we coping with deprofessionalized and corrupted teachers who erode a former healthy educational system? Or is it an educational system with corrupted infrastructures and intimidated teachers?

To begin with, at the level of practice, professional identity of teachers is contested. Teachers of the secondary education are restricted professionals (Goodson and Hargreaves, 1996: 14). Firstly, we would assert that teachers are restricted professionals because there are no pre-service development programmes established to prepare scientists who want to become teachers, in order to be competent in the classroom practice. The curriculum of the academic institutions (e.g. Art, Science) comprises a small proportion of pedagogical or psychological courses in the fourth year of study. These courses are considered to be adequate by the state to offer teaching competence to the graduates. Summarising, any graduate with a BSc or BA relevant to a school subject may be employed in the secondary education system after having succeeded in a highly competitive national examination for teachers. The subjects examined are obviously different for each speciality and refer to the knowledge the candidates acquired at the University.

Secondly and subsequently, teachers' skills are derived from experience. Their perspective is limited to here and now. Teaching is seen as an intuitive activity. Also, classroom events are perceived in isolation, as aforementioned nobody can inspect a teacher's classroom practice, nor intervene in the process of teaching. As a result collaboration, peer coaching, teamwork mentoring and professional development do not exist.

We would convey two key factors of the restricted professionalism of teachers: a) the absence of pre-service teacher training and b) the lack of any professional development programme. These two factors are not only inducing restricted professionalism; they are also implicated in the deprofessionalization of teachers.

### Deprofessionalization

In the new context of working conditions that emerged almost 30 years ago and still remains the same, the concept of teachers' professionalism is challenged.

Teachers are teaching students who are turning massively to private tutoring. There are several factors resulting from this and we would try to deploy the most important very briefly: a) examinations to higher education remain highly selective, b) the National Curriculum is demanding and overloaded, c) time constraints as official class hours not enough (tutoring provided during weekdays, weekends, holidays), d) larger classes comparable to those at the tutoring institutes, and last most fundamental e) poor teaching performance.

The massive participation of students in private lessons results in a vicious circle inside school as it is depicted in Figure 3. It causes a great lack of interest on behalf of the students as they feel no need to attend school classes. Also, if the students have covered the topics with the tutor they are often unimpressed by the teacher. Non participation leads to poor quality of teaching. In addition, there is a notion among the teachers that if all the students receive tutoring, teachers may not need to work so hard. Even more, as a significant proportion of teachers “transform into tutors in the evenings” to supplement their income, fatigue in both teachers and students makes them relax when at school for the after school classes.

It becomes obvious that declining teaching standards and poor teaching quality in the public sector are conducive to private tutoring which subsequently is embedded in the secondary education system and hastens the deprofessionalization of state school teachers.



Fig.3. The vicious circle of secondary education.

It seems that one essential ethical principle, the necessary relationship of trust between a client (the student in our case) and a professional (the teacher) is missing from public schools according to Thompson (1997: 6). We would concur that teachers' professionalism is based on this ethical principle of trust. Both parents and students seem to have lost this trust in the teachers, and they turn to private tutoring in order to receive professional teaching.

The notion of deprofessionalized public school teachers among the community is underpinned by the poor teaching quality offered at school.

My opinion is that an adequate number of teachers, although they allege the opposite, perform their duties with a minimum of efficiency and commitment. These two principles, efficiency and commitment, are strong bases of professionalism. As a result their absence from classroom practice subverts teacher professionalism, and diffuses the notion of deprofessionalized teachers in society.

We would contend that the Achilles' heel of teachers' professionalism in the public schools is the abolition of inspectors, the abrogation of teachers' appraisal and in general of performance management. Their abrogation was a depredation to classroom practice; it induced the negligence of duties, it consented to inertia and deprived eminent teachers of endorsement and admiration. It was a clear method of deprofessionalizing teachers.

On the contrary, others would oppose the importance we attach to the end of performance management, arguing that other factors such as the aforementioned (a), (b), (c), (d) are equally or more significant to the flourishing of the private tutoring and the proletarianization of public school teachers.

We do not allege that e.g. the lack of pre-service training or the overloaded curriculum does not subvert teacher professionalism. However, we disagree with this rationale and we would contest the resonance of the above examples to the deprofessionalization of public school teachers. Our argument is that tutors or even public school teachers who provide tutoring face the same problems, but are considered to be professionals by the community as we will exemplify in the following paragraphs.

### Professionalism in private tutoring teachers, “the tutors”

Teachers, who we will call tutors, provide private tutoring lessons. They are employed in the second fragment of the secondary education system. It consists of private tutoring schools or centres and is successfully named by Bray as “the shadow education system” (2007: 17). Tutors hold the same credentials as the public school teachers because they graduate from the same universities. They also receive no pre-service training. Their skills derive from experience too. Paradoxically, although they share the same credentials with the public school teachers they are considered to embody teacher professionalism in contrast with those in the public sector. The contestability of teachers' professionalism seems to be restricted only to the public sector.

The notion Greek society retains for tutors, that they are the only professionals in the educational domain, is evoked by a number of reasons. The devaluation of public schools and the deprofessionalization of their teachers is the one. The other reason is the organisation and the operation of the tutoring system.

In particular, private tutoring is currently a vast enterprise in Greece. Tutoring Centres are actually corporations as they are funded only by students. There is stiff competition between these institutions. Great endeavours are made each summer by the institutions to attract the most qualified tutors for the new academic year.

Tutors on their behalf, work hard, produce publications, write notes and publish books and advertise the achievements of their clients-students. The objective is to raise their professional status and receive better offers from tutoring centres, or demand higher remuneration from parents. We would assert that portfolio or entrepreneurial professionalism is shaping the professional identity of tutors. The reason is that tutors work in a demanding and competitive environment created partially by virtue of the oversupply of university graduates. To earn a living they work on a contract basis, usually renewed every summer, with a range of different employers (parents, owners of tutoring centres).

In addition, extended professionalism integrates tutors' professional identity. Exemplifying that, we would say that tutors extend their teaching boundaries, as they engage in activities such as writing, editing, publishing, and advertising; their aim is to enhance the quality of teaching and student learning and most vitally to promulgate their professional competence.

The result is that tutors have gradually acquired characteristics of a profession such as: a) the general notion of tutors' professionalism diffused in the society, b) the necessary relationship of trust between the provider (tutor) and the consumer (student) underpinned by tutors' vigorous teaching practice. However, (a) and (b) were not sufficient to transform tutoring from a semi-profession (Etzioni, 1969) to a full profession. Hence, tutors-owners of tutoring centres have founded an association, the Association of Tutors of Greece. Most of the tutoring centres in Greece are currently members of this association in order to be publicly represented by a prestigious body. It is a state independent professional body which emphasizes building public trust in tutoring. We tend to believe that this aim of the Association has been achieved, as parents, students and the media acknowledge the contribution of the Association to schooling.

On the other hand, tutors working as employees at tutoring centres have founded their own union. One of the main generative reasons that led to the formation of tutors' union was the attempt to remove the sense of isolation that many tutors experience in their daily work in highly competitive tutoring centres. Although registration is not obligatory, and participation of tutors is poor, the foundation of a union underpins the professional identity of tutors and establishes their professional community in society.

### Reprofessionalization- Towards Ethical Professionalism

Education reforms and the associated changes in working conditions have deprofessionalized state sector teachers as described previously. A sense of inadequacy and worthlessness of teachers is widely diffused in the society. This notion has a pernicious impact not merely on teacher's professionalism, but on the fundamental values of the society. The reason is that free education is a human right. It is the entitlement of every child in a democracy. Because of this axiomatic idea, a teachers' role and contribution is of key importance to the society.

As a result the deprofessionalization of teachers not only subverts teacher status and professional identity, but also constrains democracy. Therefore it is crucial that teachers develop a professional ethos, mainly characterised by efficiency and commitment and eradicate this ossified sense which has obscured teacher professionalism over the last two decades.

In order to stimulate and support such an endeavour "a culture of professionalism must be built in schools and school districts" as Devaney and Sykes note (cited in Goodson and Hargreaves, 1996: 17). To amplify that, we would claim that reprofessionalization of teachers is needed. The question is in what direction? We believe that the issue is

not how to build a strong sense of professional competence amid teachers. They already feel professionally confident, either because of their tutoring background, of their credentials or even as a sense of self worth, mistaken or not. Exemplifying this hypothesis, the deprofessionalized teacher in public schooling, transforms into a professional tutor in private schooling in the evenings. What is more, eminent tutors characterised by a strong sense of professionalism, when employed in the public sector become deprofessionalized teachers. No one admits performing inadequately, albeit all concur that public schooling is incompetent and degenerated.

The pivotal issue is that a true professional ethos is deficient in schools. Public school teachers need to regain their legitimacy in society and the only way to achieve it is to develop professional ethics. Ethical professionalism needs to be identified, codified and applied to teachers.

To define ethical professionalism is even more complicated than the general concept of professionalism because ethos is a highly contentious issue. As it concerns ethos in correlation with the concept of profession, "ethical" mainly refers to "responsible". However, this is not an axiomatic opinion, but an opinion asserted by Hoyle and John (1995: 17), which also reflects our opinion. Responsibility is also a crucial issue of ethical professionalism according to Lunt (2008). The responsible professional establishes a 'trusting relationship' (opcit) between the professional and the client. Thompson (1997: 18) referring to professional ethics in teaching, suggests that its basis should be the purposes of teaching and its related characteristic actions. It seems to us that if we scrutinize the purposes of teaching and its activities, the idea of responsibility will evoke. The rationalization is that a prerequisite for the purposes and activities of teaching is the trusting relationship between the teacher and the student; and it is the sense of responsibility that underpins this relationship. All these "standards that teachers expect of themselves and others expect of the profession" (GTCE, 2009) can be encompassed in a code of ethics. Consequently, a code of practice needs to be established.

But, who is going to develop an ethical code of practice? If we search for similar projects of professionalization in other westernised parts of the world we will discover some examples like: in the USA the National Board of Professional Teaching, in England and Wales the General Teaching Council, in Australia the Council of Teachers and in Canada the Teacher's Council (Goodson and Hargreaves, 1996: 2). Monitoring and scrutinizing the structure and organization of such councils, a similar Teacher's Council can be adjusted and established in Greece. It should be intimately self regulating and autonomous with a core responsibility to enhance the quality of teaching practice and develop an ethical code of practice. Council's strategy should be to promote teacher professionalism focusing on actions which aim: a) to define professional standards, b) to inspect and certify skills and knowledge, c) to monitor standards of practice and d) to expose malpractice.

The challenging issue is that ethical professionalism cannot be imposed on teachers. The only way an ethical code could be accepted by the teachers is for it to be internalised and embodied conscientiously by them. In our opinion, to develop a widely acceptable ethical code, autonomy and self regulation of the teachers must be a prerequisite of such a project. We consider autonomy is fundamental, as any political interventions into the formation of the ethical code of practice may prevent it from being adopted by the teachers.

As far as it concerns the state, it should play a significant role to preserve the autonomy of teachers and underpin the development of ethical professionalism of teachers. A main concern of the Ministry of Education's policy could be to promote a systematic debate on education-related issues at a national level. Those issues should concern teacher professionalism, the formation of a Teacher's Council and the implementation of an ethical code of practice. Consequently to utilize this national debate and the various proposals by focus groups such as the Teacher's Union, parents, students or even tutors, in shaping educational policy towards the empowerment of teacher professionalism. Subsequently, in an attempt to empower teachers' professionalism any draft code developed, should be scrutinized publicly.

Furthermore, supplementary initiatives can be scrutinized and implemented. For instance, Rees (cited in Sachs, 2001) correctly

observes that practices of private sector enterprises, like tutoring centres we would add, can also be applied to the state sector. We are not advocating, nor shifting to managerial professionalism (Sachs, 2005) from ethical professionalism. Even so, we believe that a managerial approach in certain classroom practices could be beneficial for schooling, if this is what students need or request. For example, teachers who teach in the final grades of public schools can focus their effort on examination preparation as tutors do. Moreover this statement is, in our opinion a democratic approach as according to Preston (cited in Sachs, 2005) "the core of democratic professionalism is an emphasis on collaborative, cooperative action between teachers and other educational stakeholders" like students we would add. Nevertheless, the use merely of techniques used in tutorials is not going to be effective and increase student participation in the classroom, if it is not inspired by a strong sense of ethical professionalism.

Additionally, partnerships between schools in Greece and those in EU countries have the greatest impact when teachers from different countries actually meet each other, exchange experiences, reflect on others practices and challenge their own professional identity. There are already many projects implemented e.g. Comenius, in which a large number of schools in Greece participate. However they are focused on exchange and participation of students rather than teachers. If similar programmes focus on teachers they can promote professional development; in a sense that state school teachers from Greece, experience alternative classroom practice, broaden their professional spectrum, self-evaluate and reflect on their own notion of teachers' professionalism.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, we would maintain that the balkanization of the secondary education system is a prevailing subject of debate in Greek society as it has encompassed major social groups, over approximately the last three decades.

Paradoxically, it is not a main concern of educational practitioners and education authorities. It echoes mainly among parents and students as they are the most affected both economically and socially. The state is a plausible proponent of this situation as it defuses the unemployment of young university graduates and keeps public school teachers' remuneration at low levels.

The teachers show condescension as they work less, are paid less but can support their income by providing tutoring. The tutors deliberately maintain and underpin this situation as an alternative to unemployment. This situation has a direct impact on teachers' professionalism. Teachers have become deprofessionalized in contrast to tutors who have been reformed from semi-professionals to entrepreneurial professionals.

There is no doubt that traditions of teaching cannot be altered rapidly. Optimistically, there are a growing proportion of teachers who defy the balkanization of the secondary education system and promulgate their dissent. They are inspired by the vision of reprofessionalization focusing on the need for a true professional ethos. This vision hopefully will reshape teachers' professional identity, regain public schooling's genuine character and rebuild public trust in the teaching profession.

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#### **Note**

40. In this context the term "public school" means state school. Whereas in UK context, public school can also connote private school.