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The end of 'strategic compliance'? Practice and professionalism in the English Further Education sector

**Kevin Orr
University of Huddersfield
UK**

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Abstract

This paper engages with the evolving debate on the nature of professionalism in English Further Education (FE) by considering three longitudinal cases studies based on interviews with teachers in an FE college who gained teaching qualifications in 2006 and 2007. It considers the influences on these teachers, one in construction, one in literacy, the other in sports studies, and the context within which they work. The period of these teachers' careers has coincided with a rhetorical emphasis on learning over teaching, made concrete in the recent architecture of colleges with large communal areas for students alongside cramped staffrooms. More significantly, their careers have coincided with a period of constant flux in the sector. The rate of policy change affecting English FE under the previous New Labour government was frenetic and this has continued with the new Coalition government's response to the financial crisis. In a process similar to what Klein (2007) termed Shock Doctrine, this crisis has justified and enabled significant attacks on the conditions of FE teachers. Through exploring these factors and how these three particular teachers have experienced them, this paper argues that the space for professionals to defend traditional educational values through 'strategic compliance' with organisational change (Gleeson and Shain 1999) has become highly restricted.

Introduction

Further Education (FE) in England is a “fascinating, turbulent, insecure but desperately important” (Coffield *et al* 2008: 4) sector with over three million students which has been described as what is not school and not university (Kennedy 1997: 1), though even those boundaries are porous. It is a heterogeneous sector where the majority of vocational training and adult education occurs, as well as academic study between the ages of 16 and 19. Keep (2006) described how the former New Labour government (1997-2007) treated FE like “the biggest train set in the world” with their constant initiatives and more than any other sector of English education FE has been subject to control, compulsion and codification from the centre. While the professional standards for Higher Education in England are set out in a four-page booklet, the professional standards for FE amount to forty pages. Since 2001 there have been two acts of parliament directly pertaining to the sector and more than ten government departments or agencies, often very short-lived, have had statutory involvement in the sector. Much of the content and assessment of initial teacher education courses for FE is mandatory as is, for example, the requirement for FE teachers to record thirty hours of continuing professional development each year in order to maintain their licence to practise. The implementation of these initiatives has involved a performative system of inspections and targets with which teachers must comply. In this paper, the impact of performativity on teachers’ comprehension of professionalism, their practice and on their agency more generally is investigated through the concept of “strategic compliance” (Gleeson and Shain 1999), which is discussed below.

Professionalism in general “is a construct born of methodological reduction, rhetorical inflation and universalist excess” (Stronach *et al* 2004: 109) and in particular Gleeson and James (2007, p451) have called professionalism in FE “an elusive and paradoxical concept”. Gleeson *et al* (2005, p 446) describe how much of the discourse relating to FE teachers considers them to be “either the recipient of external policy reform or as an empowered agent of professional

change” and they cite Bathmaker (2001) who has described how FE practitioners are discussed as both “devils” whose poor practice needs to be closely controlled and as “dupes” who have carelessly submitted to a new managerialist regime. Robson (1998) is amongst those to have discussed what has been termed the “dual professionalism” of FE teachers: that most teachers have entered FE having been established professionals in previous careers, as was the case of two of the participants in this study, and many maintain and prioritise that professional allegiance. This is because, as Robson *et al* (2004: 187) argue, their previous experience gives them the credibility required for their new teaching role. Furthermore, Gleeson *et al* (2005, p449) recognise that becoming an FE teacher “is, for many, less a career choice or pathway than an opportunity at a particular moment in time”. Their continuing identity with their former profession may prevent some from considering themselves as professional *teachers*. The notion of dual professionalism may tacitly reveal a significant aspect of the tradition of FE. English FE colleges like the one in this study very often find their origins in the mechanics institutes and technical colleges of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries where skilled craftsmen or artisans would pass on their knowledge (Simmons 2008: 367; Orr & Simmons 2009: 5). This emphasis on subject knowledge over pedagogy was carried into the post-Second World War FE sector (Bailey 2007) and the priorities associated with it are suggested by FE teachers not requiring any teaching qualification until 2001, in sharp contrast to English school-teachers. As a consequence, a distinctive culture of professionalism relating to teaching in FE did not emerge. Summing up the position of FE teachers Colley *et al* (2007, p186) accurately note how their professionalism:

faces a triple jeopardy: teaching *per se* is of low status in the hierarchy of professions; FE is of low status in the hierarchy of education sectors; and many FE teachers are also positioned marginally by their ‘accidental’ entry into the profession, and continued identification with their former occupations.

In 2001 Clow (p417) concluded that “as it stands at the moment FE teachers are

unlikely to agree a definition of their professionalism without external support.” The official discourse demonstrated in the LLUK (2006) standards, which cover FE teachers and which may be considered as “external support”, equates professionalism not with autonomy or judgment based on specialist knowledge, but rather with adhering to a centrally controlled list of practices. Ten years after Clow, Lucas and Nasta (2011, p453) conclude that “all recent policy initiatives to regulate FE teachers have taken place within a fragmented and impoverished professional culture”. Likewise, Gleeson and James (2007, p451) are critical of the public discourse relating to professionalism in the sector, as exemplified in the LLUK standards, which “seeks to modernize FE professionals whilst, at the same time, displaying little understanding of their current practice or contexts in which they work”. In response, this paper, based on a small-scale instrumental case study of three FE teachers during the period 2006 to 2011, attempts to identify and evaluate the developing impact of policy on individual practitioners in FE. The lived experience of these teachers tells a story characterised by the disconcerting rapidity and constancy of change in the FE workplace, through cuts in provision; staff turn-over; promotion; or altered terms and conditions. So rapid and constant is change that these three teachers have rarely had time to establish patterns of work, let alone to act strategically.

The case study

Avis (2006) has criticised the use of local case studies in research into the FE sector, particularly in relation to the prodigious Transforming Learning Cultures (TLC) in FE research project (see James and Biesta 2007) because, Avis contends, such studies risk separating individuals from broader political circumstances which may determine much of their lives. In response, Colley (2006, p109) argues that a case study approach does not necessarily preclude critical theoretical analysis of society and, as is the intention in this study, the “unique ‘close-up’ experiences...offer a fractal expression of the whole set of social relations”, which analysis on a larger scale might ignore or distort. This resonates with Thomson et al (2010, p639) who argue that with regard to

schooling “policy sociologists might gain from ...research at the micro/vernacular levels” to illuminate how policy becomes “embedded” in the particular. This study has attempted to examine the “micro/vernacular” of how three FE teachers have experienced the sector over a period of five years of political flux and transition as an exemplar (Flyvberb 2006, p219) or an “examination of an instance in action” (MacDonald and Walker 1977, p181 in Merriam 1988, p11).

The three teachers, one in sports, one in plumbing and one in adult literacy, were initially selected from a larger cohort as being broadly representative of FE’s diversity and because all three were consciously committed to enhancing their teaching practice (see table below for more details of the participants). One, Danny, completed a one-year full-time pre-service teacher education course; the other two, Mark and Andrea, were trained ‘in-service’ whilst already employed as teachers, which is the usual route in FE. All were new to teaching in 2006 and by the time of the most recent interviews (in 2010 and 2011) all three teachers in this study were working in the same college, referred to here as City College, though one of the participants had previously trained and worked in different colleges. City College, situated in a major northern post-industrial conurbation, has recently merged to form, according to its website, a huge “super college” with 80,000 mainly part-time students at its many campuses around the entire city. Policy reforms have shaped the architecture of City College through a well-funded construction programme closely tied to the priorities of the former New Labour government. The college has had a Skills Zone devoted to basic numeracy and literacy; an impressive new Higher Education centre; and the college broadly divides adult from 14-19 provision on different campuses, all following national initiatives. The careers of the three participant teachers has coincided with the rise of a discourse that has emphasised learning and the learner over teaching; what Biesta (2009, 3) has described as “the translation of everything there is to say about education in terms of learning and learners”. This discourse, again associated with the former New Labour government (1997-2001), is made concrete in these new buildings with their huge communal areas

for students, warehouse-sized computer-based learning “workshops” and, in rather stark contrast, cramped staffrooms for teachers. This discourse of learning may also act subliminally to justify the poor conditions and status of FE teachers by marginalising teaching.

These three teachers’ careers have also coincided with the election of the new Coalition government in 2010 and, perhaps most significantly, a severe economic recession, which has been used as justification for significant cuts in the public sector (see Jones 2010, p793) including funding of FE. As the data below shows, this has led to insecurity and disconcertedness that, arguably, has enabled hitherto unacceptable changes to be made to the sector. Looking at how neoliberal politicians and economists operate to manipulate circumstances at times of crisis Klein (2007, p21) states:

It is in these malleable moments, when we are psychologically unmoored and physically uprooted, that these artists of the real plunge in their hands and begin their work of remaking the world.

The account of an official of the UCU, the main trade union for FE teachers, suggests a comparable if less dramatic process in the sector. “We believe colleges are using the current environment, where they think people are fearful, to cut deeper than they need” (Education Guardian 28 June 2011 p 4). Newcastle College produced a surplus of £6m in the year 2010-2011 and awarded the chief executive of the group that runs the college a pay rise, including bonus and retention payment, of £73,000. At the same time the college was seeking 200 full-time equivalent job losses. The teachers at City College felt subject to similar threats of unemployment and, as described below, their lives have been directly affected by this general background of reductions in funding, what Jones (2010, p793) calls a “solution of massive shock therapy”, endorsed with little quarrel by the Labour opposition.

Initial data for this ethnographic study came from observations of the participants’ teaching and interactions in the workplace followed by extended semi-structured

interviews. Their progress has been followed through two subsequent interviews and observations of their work-setting. The interviews were transcribed and all data were analysed using both a priori and grounded codes broadly relating to control, agency, practice, flux in the workplace and workplace relationships. The trajectory of each of the participants is set out briefly below before considering how performativity has affected these teachers' practice and agency by interrogating whether the opportunity to strategically comply still exists. Gleeson and Shain (1999, p482) describe strategic compliance as "a form of artful pragmatism which reconciles professional and managerial interests", which they identified amongst staff in FE. Strategic compliers remain committed to traditional professional values but at least partially conform to managerialism in order to create space for manoeuvre and hence defend what they value in their educational practice. The concept recognises both that practitioners have agency and ethics, but that they are also subject to the circumstances within which they operate: within these circumstances strategic compliers do "not comply for the 'sake of their own skins'" (p460) but make decisions to conform or not based upon the needs of their learners. As Avis (2005, 211) puts it strategic compliance works on a notion of pragmatism to "wrest progressive possibilities from the conditions in which FE is placed." As shall be demonstrated, for all three of these teachers the reconciliation of professional and managerial interests, which is at the heart of the concept of strategic compliance, has been highly problematic as their careers in FE have developed. This case study suggests that while commitment to their learners and to traditional values of social justice through education remain, the encroachment of performativity on teachers' agency and specifically on their practice has meant any space for strategic compliance is small and threatened.

Mark

Despite ostensibly performing and being qualified as a teacher Mark would not describe himself as teacher. At first he explained this by referring to his contract as a trainer, his prior work as a plumber and also mentioned "issues of self-esteem". In the latest of the interviews he still would not call himself a teacher,

but neither any more would he call himself a plumber, though he continues to update his industry qualifications. As Roth and Lee (2007, p215) explain, “Whichever identities are salient for an individual during a particular context exist in a complex dance with one’s sense of agency and position within the social world.” Mark’s position was contradictory. He took on the role of trainer in the plumbing department in his early thirties having been a plumber since leaving a local grammar school at sixteen. His apprenticeship had involved day-release at FE college. In the first two interviews Mark was explicit about gain the social status of working in education despite a pay-cut that meant he had to continue to work in the evenings and at weekends as a plumber. He undertook initial teacher education (ITE) part-time at City College whilst employed there (most commonly referred to as the ‘in-service’ route) and had completed his certificate in education within two years of starting at the college. He immediately went on to gain a degree through part-time study and latterly was frustrated that this had not increased his opportunities at the college. After three years at City College Mark was made ‘zone leader’ but at the time of the second interview he was unsure of what this meant as regards responsibility or how it would affect his pay and conditions:

That’s to be negotiated but we don’t know what is going to happen and my hours are about to be reduced so I can take on some of the responsibility and we’ve had a lad who has handed his notice in yesterday so that might be on the back burner a bit and I might have to carry on... I’ll still have to do the zone leader responsibility but I’ll probably not get my teaching hours reduced just yet.

Mark appeared largely passive within these putative changes, which may be explained by his prior experience of relatively short-term contracts whilst ‘on the tools’. He was used to jobs changing or ending and to moving onto other employment. Even as zone leader Mark’s role was mainly as a trainer and he taught long hours while also being expected to fulfil many management and administrative duties over which he had little influence. He described his typical day in 2006:

I'd come in at twenty to nine or something like that and if it was a theory session I would have done some preparation the night before... If it was a practical session it would be a case of getting out there ten minutes before the lesson starts just to get my stuff out and looking at the tracking document that we use so that I know who is doing what.

After teaching until late afternoon he would be: *“doing paperwork or sorting out a few schemes of work or lesson plans for certain individuals that are being observed in the next few days. That's about it.”* During the first encounters Mark was happily isolated within the college; he described feeling *“uncomfortable”* if he had to visit other parts of the college. This situation had transformed by 2011 as he had been promoted to a slightly more senior middle management role:

Now the principalship know my name ... which I am not quite happy about... As a consequence obviously there are people who e-mail me or phone me up who I've never heard of, or I have heard the names but never had any contact with or ever needed to. Now all of a sudden I do.

Changes in roles, burgeoning early-career responsibility within relatively low-level positions were also experienced by Danny (see below) and with it increasing administration. Mark said in 2011:

I am sat at a desk all day doing paperwork, I am sat in pointless meeting after pointless meeting, meetings about meetings about meetings and it's just not what I signed up for.

Cuts in funding were also having consequences:

...everyone is under more stress than they were. We are getting told obviously, we need more students in, we need more success rates but you're not getting as much resources, you're not getting as much manpower to do all this with and obviously that is causing a lot of stress.

Mark has still been able to set his own timetable and maintains significant control over his work. He was, nevertheless, frustrated by the reduction in his teaching, which had *“kept [him] sane”*, and he believed strongly that the quality of his teaching had suffered.

so I'm quite an unhappy bunny in the role that I am in. I have told my management exactly that; I've had meetings [but] there doesn't seem to be any way out of it other than me to go.

Yet fear of unemployment would keep him from going:

That is why I am staying put for now because ... you have to think yourself lucky to still have a job as it stands. So I'll cling onto it for now with a view to do something else, but for now I need to pay the bills.

Mark's plan, however, was to move to another organisation, and possibly into teacher education, when he could.

Danny

Danny exudes a broad-shouldered self-confidence and easy charm. He had been educated at a prestigious grammar school in Northern Ireland before going to university in England and called his background socially and economically '*privileged*'. In 2006 at the age of 21 he went straight on to a full-time pre-service FE initial teacher education (ITE) course at a different northern university; prior to this course he had had no experience of FE. He trained to work as a sports and leisure teacher and his college placement during his ITE course had been very challenging. He was quickly given great responsibility for several difficult groups and although he thrived, others might have felt abandoned. At the end he said, "*I've had a fantastic placement in quite a few ways even though at times I felt I'd been eaten alive.*" Danny explained how he had learned to restrict what he referred to as "*creativity*" in teaching during his placement. He graphically demonstrated his transition from a horse ("*trustworthy and friendly, perhaps too friendly*"), to a hippo ("*cute but dangerous*"), then to a pig ("*selfish*") and finally to a cross between a tyrannosaurus rex and a security guard ("*ferocious*"). Though he retained a commitment to developing his teaching, he recognised what was apparent in observations also, that his practice had narrowed when he was faced with the pressures of difficult and disaffected learners and the bureaucratic demands of the college. Danny explained that he had returned to the didactic and less interactive methods of his own traditional education.

By the time of the second interview in early 2008 Danny had been for five months working as an agency-employed teacher in a suburban college. Though ostensibly employed part-time, at twenty-seven or twenty-eight hours a week he

had more contact time with students than college-employed full-time teachers, and he was a personal tutor which, “*far outweighs any other responsibility*”. Though he really enjoyed his role and he felt well supported, Danny was well aware of his vulnerability as a part-timer:

Ideally I would love to stay here because I've established myself and I put eight hundred percent into everything I do anyway even though there is no guarantee that I'm going to be here [next year].

Danny's fears were well founded. In the summer of 2009 after two years at the college he was given notice that he would not be re-employed in September and told, “*Yeah bye, we can't afford you anymore.*” After what Gleeson et al (2005, p451 described as “the long interview”, Danny did not get the job. He considered himself lucky to find a position as a trainer earning less money at City College having looked nationwide. He soon took on a junior management role:

To now being in a management position after three and a half years of teaching it's caught me a little bit by surprise because I've never been out of education.

The transition has caused him some disenchantment:

The transition ... has opened my eyes...quite a bit. Not only just as going from a teaching role to a management role, seeing the intricacies of how the education system currently prioritises and works, which can be disillusioning. ... The bottom line for a lot of things is money especially in this college... A lot of decisions in this college are made by the higher-ups as I call them. For example I have never met the principal ...I don't think [I've] ever been in the same building when he's been there.

The example of a decision made by a ‘higher up’ which ignored consequences “*on the ground*” was open enrolment: *to get a student to pass a course... after having missed the first twelve weeks of class is nigh on impossible, but yet the doors are still wide open.* His teaching had, moreover, further narrowed, though he remained very confident that he could still teach innovatively if he were being observed. Danny said:

My actual teaching has lost its momentum and its vision. My lessons are less creative; they are less focused around the grade one, outstanding, think outside the box lessons that they used to be and they are more focused around knowing that the majority of students just need to know the pass criteria.

Yet, like Mark, Danny has retained conscious control over significant aspects of his work as demonstrated by how he defends his staff:

any time I get any hint that a member of staff in my staff room is running a course that might not be viable, I do anything I can to try to make sure that it becomes viable or that they become un-missable for the college.

He feels secure in his own job because his section attracts many students and is therefore generally viable, but he is highly pressurised and is frustrated and bitter at the limitations on his influence; his *“future planning ability for the department is minimal”*. For Danny, City College is a *“stepping stone”* and within five years he plans to be elsewhere, *“still in a management role, still in sports, hopefully a few more grade one level observations and hopefully get my creativity back.”*

Andrea

Andrea's position had changed enormously over the five years of the study and was, in 2011, paradoxical; although she apparently had the least secure role at the college, she was the most positive about her position and her practice. Andrea was from an aspirational working-class family. She had left school at eighteen and her training and professional background were in youth work but concurrently she had worked part-time at the college for several years in various ancillary to teaching roles such as teaching assistant and placement organiser. In her early forties she was appointed as Skills For Life teacher to young students with special needs, often linked to their challenging behaviour. Out of twelve boys in one of her groups three had Anti-Social Behaviour Orders served on them; *“it's always on the verge of kicking off”*, Andrea said. Like Mark she followed the in-service route to gaining a Certificate in Education and she found the course engaging and inspirational. Again like Mark in his first position, Andrea's role kept her isolated from the wider college. In 2007 she said:

I know we're a massive institution but it boils right down to the people you are with and I just care about the students and the colleagues I work with. The rest is that it's almost like we are working within a little bubble within a massive bubble.

Even within her section there was little interaction beyond a small and diminishing core of long-term staff. Andrea's then manager, with a list of things to do "as long as her arm", had changed from being a friend to being a subject of Andrea's suspicion. She nevertheless enjoyed her job and had none of Mark's reticence in calling herself a teacher: "I can feel the reward and the satisfaction that I'm getting and they outweigh anything that I've ever done before, to be honest." Andrea could shape her own teaching, too. Though she had to follow a set national curriculum with her special needs students Andrea modified it based upon her judgement of their personal record files before entering the course, "otherwise it's a bit dry, looking at telephone directories and things like that." Her sessions displayed, above all, Andrea's warmth towards the learners. In 2008 Andrea gained a specialist qualification in literacy teaching but in the same year she lost her job in the first sweep of redundancies, which, significantly, preceded both the election of the Coalition government and more widespread public-sector cuts by at least two years. This sweep was connected to a reorganisation after the merger of the two colleges mentioned above, which also brought in new contracts that divided those who taught sixteen to nineteen year-olds, who kept their holidays and were paid slightly better, from those who taught adults, with fewer holidays and poorer pay. Mark and Danny had found themselves on either side of this divide, Mark with adults, and though they were resigned and even content with this, they both mentioned how it had left many unhappy. Andrea was only without work for a few weeks when she was telephoned while on holiday in France to be offered a job in the 'Train to Gain' team as an adult literacy teacher going out to work with employees in their workplaces. She consequently found herself on one of the poorer 'adult' contracts.

I was one of those people who would have been a little bit better off in many ways because I was already on a shit contract. It couldn't get any

worse for me, shit contract, shit hours, no child care, I had to sort out my own child arrangements.

Even though the college had a well-known history of sacking those prominent in the union over the previous decade Andrea resisted this change to contracts as a union activist.

It is incredibly divisive and I think it is wrong to have to tolerate that. I think ultimately [the college] are exploiting the economic crisis and they almost make you feel that you should be grateful that you are in a job and ... some of the messages that you read from the principalship, that was the inference and that is how we interpreted it as a union.

Although the changes were eventually pushed through, Andrea still spoke out at one of several meetings where management explained the changes to staff.

They were not meetings, just a monologue of them telling us how it was and how lucky we were. I was seething inside... I just said I know what you said and that this is the way it is and I know we should be grateful but you can't account for how unhappy everybody is. You can't account for how divided you have made us feel and how the morale has never been so low..., [the vice principal] was really affronted.

Andrea also drew attention to the well-publicised ten percent pay rise that those in the principalship had awarded themselves:

how that was a complete poke in the eye and how affronted [staff] felt about that and did [senior management] not realise what idiots they were for bringing, doing that at such an insensitive time?

Her name was taken at the end of the meeting and although she remains in her job, she believes it unlikely that she could ever be promoted. The union, once again, has been broken and with it the resistance to the changes:

people are more despondent and distrusting now and unfortunately are just recoiling now and are just burying their heads and trying to forget about it. It is almost like we almost had an opportunity to make a difference or make an impact and it didn't work out.

Nonetheless, Andrea “really [loves] coming to work” and enjoys being part of a well-motivated and supportive team who have the interests of their learners to

the fore. Here she has been able to develop her teaching practice as never before:

it is almost like this is the way it needs to be and how it should be....

I feel like I can be a kind of text book teacher in a way and some of the things that we were taught and learnt about [on the ITE course], you can almost put into play, you have that autonomy to do that.

That autonomy may at least partly be attributed to her entirely teaching off site and alone, (“*we kind of lay low on Train to Gain*”) but also partly to having “*a very open-minded manager*”. Unlike Mark and Danny, Andrea has no management duties. Train to Gain was, however, an initiative created and promoted by the previous New Labour government with whom it is closely associated. Andrea considered it to be beneficial for learners but described it as “*like a money pit. It is just not an economically viable programme at all*”, so it is vulnerable to political change. Andrea remains, though, sanguine believing that within the area of basic skills for adults she will always have work, possibly in new apprenticeships. Andrea is keen to get a better paid job and like the other participants she sees her near future beyond City College and would like to gain ESOL qualifications to work in that area.

Discussion

How can you have a business plan for a college that doesn't take into account qualifications?... that is the way it is turning (Mike 2011). There is a depressingly familiarity to the themes that arise from this case study which mirror those that Avis (2005, p210) identified from the literature on FE following the incorporation of colleges in the early 1990s:

- Loss of control
- Intensification of labour
- Increased administration
- Perceived marginalization of teaching
- Stress on measurable performance indicators

Similarly, Randle and Brady (1997, p237) drew on Derber's (1983) notions and described the proletarianization of FE teachers and identified their

“powerlessness to define the final product of one’s work”. This chimes with Orr (2011) who has used the Marxist understanding of alienation to analyse the circumstances of FE teachers and the regular complaints of too much paperwork are indicative of that. The circumstances of constant change have come to characterise FE: *plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose*. The impact on these individuals has been stark, especially as regards their teaching. Mark regrets the loss of his teaching and described his practice as having regressed as a result of spending so little time in front of students. In early interviews Danny spoke of his own inspirational if unorthodox schoolteachers in Northern Ireland. That Danny in 2010 repeatedly equated a good session with what Ofsted consider to be a grade 1 suggests that these arbitrary performative measures had now even determined what he considered a good teacher to be. Yet obvious in both their accounts was both a commitment to teaching as being valuable and an articulated desire to foreground this. Danny’s description of these contradictions is vivid:

It is kind of like a cattle herding system, fantastic right, milk you, do this, do that, fantastic, fine and at the end of it you’re thinking what have you really achieved how many lives have you actually changed. I’ve managed to convince or rather push people towards university that never considered the thought. So those are my little get ups and I need these kind of things to know I am making a slight difference but because of all the things, the infrastructure currently in place my level and ability have stayed the same it is just I’ve not allowed myself to shine because I have all these other things in the back of my head like the elephant in the corner saying well you could spend the three hours doing that or you could spend the three hours doing paperwork that you haven’t been able to do yet. Usually the paperwork wins.

Arguably, Mark and Danny’s professionalism as teachers has diminished. Colley et al (2007: 174) state:

While a great deal has been written about *becoming* or *being* a professional, competing versions of professionalism almost invariably entail—as do ‘common sense’ understandings—an implicit assumption that professional status is permanent once it has been attained.

Colley et al describe the trajectory out of the profession of their participants through “agentic exits” (p185), that is, a decision to leave FE teaching based

upon unwillingness to comply with unconsensual changes to educational priorities. Mark and Danny have perhaps not left the profession, but they have partly left teaching, even though they both identify some control over the organisation of their work. Nevertheless, Colley et al's concept of "unbecoming professionals" is helpful as it recognises flux in the situation of teachers who may not necessarily remain where they started. Andrea's story is different. Due in part to working outside the college campus and due to her supportive manager and colleagues, Andrea fulfilled what was required but still defended her own professional values. Her teaching was thriving in the space to make autonomous professional judgements. She completed the extensive administrative aspect of her work while also creatively finding extra time to teach her students. Andrea's freedom from surveillance was, though, contingent on being part of a specific and highly vulnerable initiative and whether she can be said to be acting strategically, that is for the long-term, is at best moot. In the long-term Andrea is unlikely to have that role or the freedom it allows. This raises the question of strategic compliance. Gleeson and Knights (2006) have questioned the dualism of seeing professionals either as victims of reform or strategic operators working around the obstacles. More specifically, Avis (2005, 217) argues that the concept of strategic compliance concedes the right to manage to managerialist managers:

Within this framework activist professionalism becomes impoverished and is reduced to a mechanism of continuous improvement.

This case study suggests that the notion of strategic compliance does not describe the situation of Danny, Mark or Andrea. They are coping, within the constraints they have, by taking advantage of short-term opportunities as they arise whether that is when Andrea finds extra time for her students or when Danny defends his staff from redundancy. This cannot, however be considered as strategic as it has no ultimate goal. Perhaps 'tactical compliance' is a more useful term in this instance.

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