Teacher professionalism in policy texts in the Republic of Ireland; A critical discourse analysis

Irish Education Studies

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In the Republic of Ireland, primary school teaching is a very attractive profession with pay being above the OECD average (Heinz and Keane 2018; Hennessey and Lynch 2017). This paper investigates how the Department of Education Inspectorate and the Teaching Council of Ireland position primary school teacher professionalism. The paper presents the findings of a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of two policy texts; Looking at our schools 2016 (2016) by the Department of Education Inspectorate and Cosán framework for teachers learning (2016) by the Teaching Council of Ireland. This paper is timely because the Inspectorate and the Teaching Council of Ireland, recently published the Cosán Action Plan (2021) and Looking at our Schools 2022 (2022), both of which describe how the Department intends to integrate Cosán more deeply into Irish education as a complementary policy to Looking at our Schools (2022). At this policy juncture, this research finds that the two organisations' understandings of teacher professionalism overlap in places but also sit in tension with each other.

Keywords; Critical Discourse Analysis, teacher professionalism, Department of Education, Inspectorate, Teaching Council of Ireland.

Introduction

This paper presents the findings of a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of two policy texts; *Looking at our schools 2016* (2016) by the Department of Education Inspectorate and *Cosán framework for teachers learning* (2016) by the Teaching Council of Ireland. This paper is timely because the Inspectorate and the Teaching Council of Ireland, recently published the *Cosán Action Plan* (2021) and *Looking at our Schools 2022* (2022), both of which describe how the Department intends to integrate *Cosán* more deeply into Irish education as a complementary policy to *Looking at our Schools* (2022). At this policy juncture, this research finds that neither organisations share a single vision for teacher professionalism in Ireland.

The lead researcher is the principal of a disadvantaged primary school in the Republic of Ireland and undertook this research as an act of policy activism. Policy activism is a position a person inside the system can take, a position which questions and investigates policy to identify its true values and priorities (Yeatman 1998). The paper begins by providing a context for the study in an overview of converging trends positioning teacher professionalism in contemporary systems. The policy context in the Republic of Ireland is then explained with an outline of the role of the Inspectorate and the Teaching Council of Ireland. The paper then progresses to outline the methodology, which combined Gee's (2014) building tools and theoretical tools to carry out the CDA. Following this, the findings of the study are outlined and how the Inspectorate and the Teaching Council position teachers is presented. A discussion of the findings highlights how difficult it is for teachers and school leaders to negotiate the shifting terrain that is teacher professionalism in the Republic of Ireland. The conclusion outlines a possible mindset teachers could adopt to assert their agency and professional responsibility (Solbrekke and Englund 2011).

The next section will set the scene for the analysis by explaining how the literature review was conducted and outlining the ideas and theories of teacher professionalism from the literature.

Teacher professionalism

The review of literature initially involved the identification of key ideas in the area of teacher professionalism. A keyword-focused search was conducted using Google Scholar, Research Gate, JSTOR, ERIC, Taylor & Francis Online, Elsevier, DORAS, DCU Library E-Books and Sage databases. The search involved electronically searching databases for pertinent, peer reviewed literature using a combination of key terms including: professionalism, teacher professionalism, teacher identity, teacher professional identity, teacher agency and teacher professional agency. 80 papers were identified in total. The review focused on authoritative literature which was referenced by others in academic journals and books. Having conducted a robust literature review the idea that there were different ways to interpret teacher professionalism became apparent.

Day and Sachs (2005) argue that in the 21st century there are two dominant discourses of teacher professionalism, democratic and managerial professionalism. These two discourses define and limit what can be thought and said about teacher professionalism. Managerial types of professionalism are associated with high levels of accountability and state control. They argue that managerial professionalism has been the more dominant discourse in recent years, as schools are expected to be more accountable and efficient. The managerial discourse is about external regulations, control of teachers who must be compliant and the measurement of pupils' achievements and constant improvement. The discourse of democratic professionalism is more interested in teacher agency, collaboration between teachers and collaboration with external stakeholders. Day and Sachs (2005) state that the democratic discourse suggests that teachers

have a wider responsibility than classroom teaching, that they are responsible for contributing to the whole school, other pupils and the wider community. These two discourses of teacher professionalism should not be understood as binaries and Day and Sachs (2005) suggest that both can exist together at the one time and teachers negotiate the contradictions and demands of both.

Evetts (2008) described two interpretations of professionalism (not limited to teachers) that have developed over time, organisational and occupational professionalism. Occupational professionalism originates from within professional occupational groups while organisational professionalism is generated by those in power, those with influence outside the profession. Evetts (2008) identified trust, discretion and competence as the three central attributes of a profession. When occupational professionalism is strong, close managerial supervision is not required. This is because professions are established and maintained by relationships of practitioner trust, autonomy and discretionary judgement and evaluation. Evett's (2008) occupational professionalism overlaps with Day and Sach's (2005) discourse of democratic professionalism where the teacher is autonomous and not subject to overbearing state control. Practitioners are guided by codes of professional conduct and are monitored by professional bodies and therefore externally imposed rules are minimal (Mausethagen and Granlund 2012).

Organisational structures change the language of professions from trust, competence and discretion to hierarchical control, organisational objectives, standardisation of work practices, performance targets and accountability (Evetts 2008). Organisational professionalism appears to be in the ascendancy in many developed education systems such as the UK, USA and Australia (Mockler 2013; Sachs 2016; Locke et al. 2005). Organisational professionalism tallies with the discourse of managerial professionalism where external forces drive the priorities and reforms and teachers are expected to comply and ensure their work is measurable. Professionalism should

not be understood as a binary where, for example democratic professionalism is good for teachers and managerial professionalism is bad for teachers. There is some research that shows that a more managerial approach to professionalism increased teachers' sense of professionalism (Carlgren and Klette 2008; Locke et al 2005). In Skerritt's (2020) research on teacher autonomy and supervision in the UK, he found that some teachers welcomed peer supervision as a form of CPD and improvement, as teachers received feedback from their peers after having lessons observed (Skerritt 2020).

Given the evolution of teacher professionalism internationally, the problem being posed in this research is; how are primary school teachers being positioned by the Department of Education Inspectorate and the Teaching Council of Ireland? This is important because primary school teaching in Ireland is an attractive profession with pay for experienced teachers well above the OECD average (Heinz and Keane 2018; Hennessey and Lynch 2017). How teachers' professionalism is being described by the DE and the Teaching Council is important as it may indicate if teaching will remain an attractive profession in Ireland or proceed down the international road of high levels of burnout and stress amongst practitioners (van der Want, et al. 2019). The research asked one research question; What types of teacher professionalism are implied by policy makers in Ireland? The next section will describe the policy context, outlining the role of the Inspectorate (*Looking at our Schools*) and the Teaching Council of Ireland (*Cosán*).

The Irish policy context

The inspectorate in Ireland was instituted in 1831 and has been in continuous existence ever since (Coolahan and O'Donovan 2009). The inspectorate is part of the DE and all inspectors are

experienced teachers, many have worked as school leaders, in educational support services and research (Inspectorate 2021). The inspectorate was made a statutory organisation by the Education Act (2008) and their core statutory remit was summarised as; managing a programme of inspection in schools, promoting compliance with regulations and legislation, playing an advisory role for schools and the Department and contributing to policy development (Coolahan and O'Donovan 2009).

Inspection of schools in Ireland aims to perform both accountability and improvement functions (Hislop 2017). The inspectorate states that they want partnership and collaboration through the participation of the school community in the evaluation process; and to engage in dialogue with school staff and the education partners (McNamara and O'Hara 2012). The inspectorate in Ireland followed the international trend of developing indicators of system effectiveness for schools (Dillon 2011). Inspection reports in Ireland do not grade schools as satisfactory or failing as in the U.K. The inspectorate in Ireland favours measurement and comparison to standards as documented in *Looking at our School* (2016). Hislop (2017) argues that although narrow measurements of data and performance can be problematic, schools in Ireland are not using data effectively and that this needs to be addressed to help inspections and School Self-Evaluation (SSE) be better informed and context specific. Having highlighted the inspectorate's dual focus on measurement of system effectiveness and their desire for co-professional collaboration with school communities, the Teaching Council of Ireland will now be discussed.

The Teaching Council was established on a statutory basis in 2006 and it advises the Minister on key areas of education. It differs from other bodies because it is funded by the teaching profession. This contribution must be paid annually for a teacher to remain registered with the Council. Twenty-two of the Council's thirty-seven members are practising teachers (eleven from

primary and eleven from post primary). Of these eleven members from both primary and post primary, nine are elected and two are teacher union nominees. In addition, there are two members nominated by colleges of education, two members nominated by specified third-level bodies, four members nominated by school management (two primary and two post-primary), two members nominated by parents' associations (one primary and one post-primary) and five members nominated by the Minister for Education and Skills, including one representing IBEC (Irish Business and Employers' Confederation) and one representing ICTU (Irish Congress of Trade Unions). Áine Lawlor (2009) was the first Chief Executive/Director of the Council and she explained that the Council's vision was 'to be at the heart of teaching and learning, promoting, supporting and regulating the teaching profession' (10). Coolahan (2017) states that the Council acquired extensive responsibilities and the profession took control of defining the continuum of teacher education. In 2007, the Council created its first policy document for the profession, the *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers* (2007) which set out the parameters for teachers' professional practice and behaviour (Coolahan 2017).

In 2011 *The Continuum* (2011b) outlined the Council's plans for ITE, induction and CPD in Ireland. *Initial Teacher Education: Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers* (2011a) was published the same year which for the first time, in Ireland, listed the dispositions, attitudes and competences all ITE providers needed to focus on and show evidence of in their program planning (Gorman and Hall 2023). The Council continued to legislate for the continuum of education and in 2013 it piloted its induction process, *Droichead* (Irish word for bridge). After a series of revisions the final policy was published in 2017. *Droichead* (2017) removes the Inspectorate for newly qualified teachers (NQT) induction and replaces it with an in-school

professional support team (PST) made up of three members of the teaching staff. *Droichead* is now the only pathway for NQTs to become registered teachers in Ireland.

Cosán Framework for Teachers' Learning (2016) is the Council's policy on CPD (*Cosán* is the Irish word for pathway). The *Cosán* document provides the key regulatory context in which to consider the development of CPD policy and practice for teachers in Ireland (Coolahan, Drudy, Hogan, Hyland, McGuinness 2017). It was devised using a bottom-up approach with stakeholder contributions sought online, and in face-to-face seminars (Eberhardt and Heinz 2017). Coolahan (2017) states that *Cosán* recognises teachers' learning as a formative process involving complex intermingling of dimensions such as formal, informal, school based and external. The Council has continued to legislate for the continuum of education and published *Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education* (Teaching Council 2020) and *Guidelines on School Placement* (Teaching Council 2021). Coolahan (2017) describes the last three decades of education in Ireland as being characterised by intense consultation, review and policy implementation, as well as cooperation with international organisations such as the OECD and UNESCO, to harness the economic benefits of education.

Methodology

This paper takes a critical discourse analysis approach (CDA) to analyse the two policy documents: *Looking at our Schools 2016* (DE 2016) (*LAOS*) and *Cosán Framework for Teachers Learning* (Teaching Council 2021). The central point in CDA is that analyses are linked to a theory of the social world and a theory of language that is coherent (Rogers 2011). CDA provides an approach to closely analyse texts that are influential to a given society, particularly texts that are deemed politically or culturally influential (Gorman and Furlong 2023). While there are a number of seminal frameworks to conduct CDA (Fairclough 1993, 2004;

Taylor 2004), this paper exclusively adopts Gee's approach. Gee's (1999) seminal work *An introduction to Discourse Analysis Theory and Method* describes the multiple factors and tools of inquiry necessary for analysing discourse. It presents Gee's integrated approach which incorporates both a theory of language-in-use and a method of research. Gee's *How to do Discourse Analysis: A Toolkit* (2014) provides the tools necessary to work with discourse analysis. Each tool is explained, along with guidance on how to use it. The analytical process used in this CDA will now be outlined including how Gee's (2014) tools for CDA were significant to the research data.

Analytical process

The goal of this CDA was to identify categories of teacher professionalism and identify the relationships between them. The analysis was in two phases, the first used Gee's (2014) seven building tools for CDA to dissect the language used in the text. The second phase used Gee's (2014) six theoretical tools to reveal how the language used creates categories of teacher professionalism, and how the language potentially acts on the social world. Gee (2014) states that whenever we talk or write we always build or destroy one of seven areas of reality and we often build or destroy more than one area simultaneously with the same words and actions. He describes these areas as the seven building tasks of language. An analyst can use the seven building tools to ask seven different questions of a piece of language in use.

The seven building tools are; (1) the activity building tool, (2) the connections building tool, (3) the identity building tool, (4) the politics building tool, (5) the relationship building tool, (6) the significance building tool and (7) the sign system and knowledge building tool.

Table 1 shows each building tool with a sample of coded text from *LAOS* and the rationale for coding the text in that way.

Insert table 1 here

Each tool has a guiding question that enables the analyst to examine the language and ask seven questions of each piece of text. The building tools were significant for the research data because they allowed a neophyte researcher to ask specific questions of the language used and provided a systematic way to analyse the text. By constantly comparing the data under each building tool and refining codes, consistency of application of what an activity was, what a connection was, what a relationship was and so on was achieved. The text was constantly reread to ensure the data was not being misinterpreted. The building tools gave a clear picture of how teachers were being positioned by the text under the seven headings. However, the building tools did not generate categories of teacher professionalism or illuminate the relationships between categories. So, while the idea of teachers being subject to external evaluation may be understood more clearly after analysis using the building tools, its relationship with school self-evaluation for example is not clear. To generate categories and identify relationships between them the data from the building tools analysis was scrutinised using Gee's (2014) six theoretical tools.

Gee's (2014) six theoretical tools are drawn from a wide range of disciplines such as cognitive psychology, sociolinguistics and literary criticism. They are tools of inquiry, designed to examine 'how language ties to the world and culture' (Gee 2014, 156). The seven building tools are; "Big C Conversations" (189) these are the ideas that recurred in *LAOS* and *Cosán* and in the international literature on teacher professionalism and are identified by researchers as central to understanding teacher professionalism. The figured worlds tool attempts to identify what assumptions have been made by the policy makers about the Big C Conversations and what

picture of reality they present as taken for granted in the text. The "Big D Discourses" (181) provide the detailed descriptors of who teachers are expected to be and what things they are expected to do. The social languages tool focuses on what socially situated identity is being ascribed to teachers from the words and language of the text. The situated meaning tool examines what specific meanings listeners have to attribute to the words and phrases used given the context and how the context is construed. The intertextuality tool was not used to identify the categories and relationships in the analysis, but it did add a valuable insight into the context that *LAOS* and *Cosán* was written in. Texts are seen as part of a chain, so particular discursive acts are difficult to understand without knowledge of what went before it (Vaara, 2015). The theoretical tools were significant because they allowed for the creation of categories of teacher professionalism, in other words how the language used in the text might manifest itself in the world as versions of who teachers are and what they do.

Table 2 summarises how the six theoretical tools were used to identify the category teacher as conforming professional in *LAOS*. The table should be read from left to right.

Insert table 2 here

The categories of teacher professionalism were devised through a combination of engagement with the literature and more organically from the language used in the text itself. For example the work of Codd (2005), Grappa (200) and Rhoades (1998) informed the category of managed professional, whereas the category teacher as conforming professional was devised solely through the analysis of the data. The findings of the CDA will now be outlined followed by a discussion of teacher professionalism in the Republic of Ireland.

Findings

This section focuses on the analysis of the two selected policy documents, the analysis is guided by the approach to CDA put forward in the methodology, specifically focussing on the types of teacher professionalism implied in each text.

Looking at our schools 2016

Looking at our schools (LAOS) is a glossy, magazine type policy document; it is thirty-two pages long and presents a quality framework for primary schools. The framework offers two dimensions; 1) teaching and learning and 2) and management. Each dimension is subdivided into four domains, sixteen standards and numerous statements of effective and highly effective practice. Three types of teacher professionalism were identified in *LAOS*; teacher as managed professional, teacher as conforming professional and teacher as instrument of change.

Teacher as managed professional

Applying Gee's theoretical tools the Big C Conversations in this category are; external accountability and school self evaluation. Codd (2005) uses the term managed professional to describe how teachers are managed so their productivity can be measured in terms of pupil's test results. Managed professionals are typically associated with a reduction in autonomy and control of their working conditions (Gappa 2000; Rhoades 1998). One of the Big D Discourses informing this category is; external evaluation will be shaped by the framework, consistent, complement SSE and be improvement focused. The teacher as a managed professional in *LAOS*

is described as being held to account and influenced by the inspectorate who will use the quality framework in *LAOS* to "monitor and report on quality in schools" (6). Internally the same framework of standards scaffolds the teachers work on SSE focusing on measurable targets for improvement by helping teachers in "gathering and considering evidence" (9) and adapting their practice through "the statement of highly effective practice (which) will also help identify specific areas that teachers should focus on in order to bring about and sustain improvements" (9). The framework moves beyond being advisory or an exemplar to being the definition of what effective practice is and defining what the outcomes of SSE should be. The framework offers "clarity regarding what effective teaching and learning" (11) looks like. A Big D Discourse identified for SSE is; The framework will help guide and define excellence in teaching and learning. It enables all stakeholders to measure the work of a school and "to arrive at evidence-based evaluative judgements about the quality of aspects of a school's provision" (8). Teachers are instructed to "work purposefully and very effectively to ensure that actions implemented lead to measurable and identifiable improvements in learner outcomes" (26).

The inspectorate holds schools to account publicly through published WSE reports. Part of the inspectorate's role is to complement the SSE process by combining their "external perspective with the reflective and collective insights of school leaders, teachers, parents and pupils" (7). *LAOS* enables accountability by being "used to inform the work of inspectors as they monitor and report on quality in schools" (6), by guaranteeing "consistency" (6) of external evaluation and by offering "support" to teachers to be accountable to their community (11). On one level the text positions teachers as engaging with stakeholders, especially parents "very constructively" and collaborating with them in "meaningful" (20) relationships. At the same time the text extends an accountability role to the community (11) and the framework is suggested as

a “transparent guide” to “support” (11) teachers in being accountable.

Teacher as Conforming Professional

Teacher as conforming professional presents teachers as accepting and prioritising the ways of working outlined by the text without critical examination. It is made-up of two Big C Conversations; Continuing Professional Development and collaborative improvement of teaching and learning. *LAOS* promotes teachers as reflective and collaborative professionals in terms of their work in the classroom and describes teachers engaged in “self-reflection where professionals question their actions and examine the impact of those actions as a way of improving both. It may also involve structured reflection with others in seeking to enhance teaching and learning and leadership in their school” (10). However, it simultaneously positions teachers and their view of collaboration and *CPD* when it states “teachers recognise and affirm continuing professional development (CPD) and collaboration as intrinsic to their work” (20) and “teachers’ value and engage in professional development and professional collaboration” (20). This led to the social languages tool being identified as; the teacher is a conforming member of a collaborative community of improvement. The contradiction here is that the framework encourages teachers to reflect on their work while simultaneously telling all stakeholders how teachers should feel about CPD and collaboration and inviting teachers to assimilate that view themselves. Teachers are expected to conform to the ways of working described by the standards and statements of effective practice. Teachers are positioned as valuing a school based, collaborative CPD that culminates in pre-defined ends. The teacher must accept that the framework defines what is best for their pupils and their classroom practice and teachers must

conform to CPD in these terms. The text positions teachers as working together to achieve one overall goal; "continuous improvement in teaching and learning" (7). The text could be seen to engage in a narrowing of teacher collaboration to pupil learning and a potential narrowing of learning to achieving defined outcomes. In fact, pupils' enjoyment of learning is described through the lens of achievement; "Pupils' enjoyment in learning is evident and arises from a sense of making progress and of achievement" (13) This is an instrumental value of education with the processes and outcomes limited by the framework; the ultimate good of education is reduced to ideas of quality, improvement and achievement (Biesta 2009). These are not negative things in and of themselves, but when teachers must conform to them and limit their reflections and aspirations for their pupils and themselves, to be in line with these standards they may be a limiting factor. A constant desire for continuous improvement of teaching and learning and the goal of proving continuous pupil improvement through measurable interventions permeate the text.

Teacher as Instrument of Change

Teacher as instrument of change has one Big C Conversation; teacher centrality to pupil outcomes. Teachers are positioned through *LAOS* as affecting significant changes in pupils' lives. These changes move well beyond the realm of classroom teaching and *LAOS* describes the outcomes teachers should aim for. Instrument is used to describe teachers in this category because they are positioned as realising an expansive array of changes for pupils as prescribed by the framework and because of the possibility of being used to address the priorities of the system above their contextual priorities. *LAOS* describes a broad sweep of outcomes which the teacher will enable; pupil "motivation" (13), pupil "reflection" on their behaviour and learning (16), pupil "autonomy" (16), pupil "wellbeing" (15), transfer of learning and skills to unfamiliar

experiences (19) “enable and empower pupils to see learning as a holistic and lifelong endeavour” (20), and make pupils “active agents in their own learning” (7)**.**

The figured world for this category is; including context and dispositions teachers and teaching are the most powerful influence on pupil achievement, this is because *LAOS* positions the teacher as having more influence than any other factor in a pupil’s life, when it comes to achievement. *LAOS* "recognises the importance of quality teaching and draws on a wide body of research that suggests that excellence in teaching is the most powerful influence on pupil achievement” (6). This statement is in keeping with other jurisdictions where teachers and teaching are identified as the most powerful determinants of pupil achievement (Connell 2009; Larsen 2010; Mausethagen and Granlund 2012; O’Doherty and Harford 2018). The situated meaning for this category is; teacher attributes and skills surmount external factors because teachers are said to create an environment that mitigates a pupil’s context, socio-economic background or family dynamic. The structural factors of pupils’ lives, which are out of the teacher’s control, can be countered by a “cooperative and productive learning environment” (15). The framework positions the teacher as addressing “any limitations” (19) presented by a child’s opinions, dispositions or context and “empower(ing) pupils to exploit these opportunities and overcome their limitations” (19).

It expands the desired outcomes for pupils to the relational, interpersonal and psychological aspects of their lives. The text places the responsibility for profound and illusive constructs such as agency and autonomy at the feet of the teacher, who is positioned as creating a productive learning environment (15) to reach these outcomes; “pupils negotiate their learning thereby increasing their autonomy and effectiveness as learners” (16). The text emphasises the importance of relationships “between pupils and teachers (which) are very respectful and positive, and conducive to well-being” (15). The teacher is presented as nurturing and assuring a

pupil's wellbeing through their interactions, their practice, and how they manage their in-class time with pupils. Therefore, the teacher is seen as working in a way that creates, maintains and renews each pupil's sense of wellbeing. *LAOS* does not refer to teachers' wellbeing except to say "leaders in the school attend successfully to their own wellbeing, as well as that of others" (28). *LAOS* states that "it emphasises the need for pupils to develop a broad range of skills, competences and values that enable personal well-being, active citizenship and lifelong learning" (6). These are dispositions that the pupil should assimilate from the productive classroom environment and in the case of lifelong learning should put into practice upon leaving post-primary school and then for the rest of their lives.

The teacher cultivates a set of skills, dispositions and ways of being that go onto form significant parts of the pupil's psyche and identity. Teachers are positioned as creating a learning environment that overcomes external factors of socio-economics or context to empower pupils to be self-motivated agents of their own learning, who share in the learning process and achieve without the external control or coercion of the teacher or other external agents. The teacher is cast as the central figure in this universe. Their work practices and ways of being in school should have the effect of producing this broad spectrum of achievements for all pupils.

Cosán framework for teachers learning

Cosán reads as a more dynamic and free flowing text when compared to *LAOS*. It has lots of information packed into each sentence. Teachers and academic research are quoted regularly. It is twenty-eight pages long and full of colourful diagrams and charts which illustrate the Council's vision for teacher learning. *Cosán* is the name of the policy text but it is also the name of the framework for teachers' learning which the text describes. Three types of teacher

professionalism were identified in *Cosán*; teacher as managed professional, teacher as (potentially) agentic professional and teacher as instrument of change.

Teacher as managed professional

Using Gee's theoretical tools the one Big C Conversation in this category is external accountability. *Cosán* positions teachers as managed by external stakeholders such as the Teaching Council of Ireland and by policies such as *Cosán*. The fifth sentence in *Cosán* emphasises that the Council is "the statutory professional standards body for teaching… (and is) mandated in law to both promote and regulate the profession". The council regulates teacher registration, initial teacher education, teacher induction and through *Cosán* they intend to regulate CPD. The text positions the Council as guaranteeing standards of CPD and teacher learning through "a range of quality assurance processes" (27). The most striking aspect of this statutory regulation is how Cosán provides a tool to withhold a teacher's registration unless evidence of CPD is supplied. The removal of a teacher's registration in Ireland would mean that a teacher could not be employed in a state school. Twice in the text, *Cosán* outlines the intention to link CPD to registration; once under the subheading "Link to Registration - to explore how an appropriate and sustainable link to registration would be developed, which would reflect the values of the framework and not result in unnecessary paperwork" (25) and a second time when it says "the development phase will also explore how engagement in ongoing learning can be supported by structures, resources and processes at national, regional and local level, and linked with registration in a way that is appropriate and sustainable" (3). After the publication of *Cosán* in 2016 and objections from teachers' unions, the Teaching Council changed its position on linking registration to CPD and in a press release, now available as an FAQ on their website they

state, “The Council has decided that at this time, renewal of teachers' registration will not be subject to engagement in professional learning” (The Teaching Council, 2020). This led to the situated meaning in this category being; external stakeholders such as the Teaching Council can hold teachers accountable.

Cosán does not contain a list of prescriptive statements of practice but the text identifies professional standards as “central to all of the Council’s work” (22). The text identifies two professional standards; “As learning professionals, teachers demonstrate a commitment to: quality teaching and learning for their students and themselves, and continued professional growth for enhanced professional practice, to support that quality teaching and learning in a sustainable way” (22). The text states that the Council hopes the development period following publication will “explore the use of the standards in guiding teachers’ learning, their reflection on learning, and the relationship between their learning and their practice” (25). As well as guiding “teachers’ learning journeys” (23) the standards will also help teachers by facilitating them in “demonstrating their ongoing commitments as learning professionals” (22).

The Council highlights reflection as part of teacher learning but that reflection must be recorded or documented somehow, “perhaps via a mediated online forum” (24) or in a “portfolio” (21). The Council mandates the use of a reflective journal/portfolio through ITE and induction which they call a teacher’s Taisce (Irish word for treasury). *Cosán* repeatedly emphasises “the flexibility” (9) required when measuring the impact of teachers’ learning and how “in line with the flexible approach that underpins all aspects of Cosán, it is acknowledged that there will be no “one size fits all” model for reflection on learning, and teachers will be encouraged to develop approaches that work best for them” (31). While emphasising flexibility and freedom of choice the text side-steps the reality that engaging in continuous CPD, where the outcomes are assessed

by teachers and then documented, is a radical new approach to professional learning in the Irish context. One of the Big D Discourses identified in the text is; teachers to document how CPD has improved their practice to reassure the profession and public. A teacher demonstrating their professional growth for others in the profession, the public or for the Council's satisfaction is not how CPD has occurred in Ireland previously and is a new dimension to teacher's professionalism, one which the text may be underplaying or not fully acknowledging. Teachers are positioned as undertaking new tasks of measurement and assessment by identifying "from their own practice, examples of their teaching that will help them to determine the impact on practice" of CPD (20). The text offers flexibility or independence when describing how to carry out these new tasks, "relevant aspects may be shared (at the teacher's discretion) to inform and support professional conversations with others" (20). This is an example where the text camouflages new ways of working for teachers in Ireland in the language of choice and flexibility.

Cosán states that because of the Council's quality assurance measures "the profession and the public can be assured as to the quality of teachers' learning" (27). The text links the profession and the public several times in this way; "the Council will play a key role in assuring teachers and the public as to the quality of that ongoing learning" (9), "provide reassurance to the profession and the public that teachers are engaging in life-long learning" (23), "enhance the public's understanding of the importance of their (teachers) learning" (3). This aspect could be read as an attempt by the Council to enhance public trust in teachers as a profession, to bring teachers in line with ideas from traditional professions such as the law and medicine where professionals operate with high levels of public trust (Darling-Hammond 2009; Evetts 2008). However, if public trust is not matched with other features of traditional professionalism such as

autonomy and independent decision making (Locke et al. 2005) then teachers or the Council assuring (9) and reassuring (23) the public about the quality (9) and life-long nature (23) of teacher learning could become a paperwork exercise teachers are forced to engage in to document and justify their professional learning for public perception and accountability reasons.

Teacher as (potentially) agentic professional

This category is made up of two Big C Conversations; teacher autonomy and continuing professional development. *Cosán* describes itself as respecting the "professionalism of teachers and allow(ing) them to exercise autonomy in identifying, and engaging in, the types of professional learning opportunities that benefit them and their students most" (6). Teachers are positioned as having "choice and autonomy" (7) as "responsible professionals" (20). Teachers and stakeholders are often described in the text as influencing the development of *Cosán* through a "consultation process" (5). (Potentially) appears in brackets because teacher autonomy is a tentative idea that could be undermined by more organisational tendencies within the text and system.

One Big D Discourse in this category is; teachers are responsible professionals who are trusted to act individually and collectively in the interests of others regarding teacher learning. Teachers are seen as acting altruistically where their decisions benefit their pupils, other stakeholders and themselves. The text offers "a significant measure of choice and autonomy" (7) to teachers around CPD. This autonomy is coupled with a belief "that teachers should take personal responsibility for sustaining and improving the quality of their professional practice" (14), by engaging in reflective and critical evaluations of practice, knowledge and CPD. Teachers are positioned as being "intrinsically motivated to take ownership of their professional development and steer the course of their own learning journeys" (7). Teachers are positioned as assuring the

quality of their own learning for their benefit and for the benefit of other stakeholders; "Cosán also recognises teachers' important role in assuring the quality of their own learning" (9). The text states that it is following international best practice as "the best systems would appear to tend increasingly towards more teacher-led and less provider-driven CPD" (4). The text identifies context-specific CPD as the most effective type of teacher learning "when it is continuous and sustained… when it fosters teacher professional collaboration, and when it coherently relates to broader school reform efforts" (7).

Cosán stresses how "the teaching profession is not a homogeneous group and the text takes account of teachers' individual career patterns, their priorities and their stage in life as well as teachers' values, emotions, motivation and professional confidence" (7). *Cosán* is also flexible in how it hopes to measure the impact of CPD as it "is not necessarily something that is readily measurable or limited to observable outcomes" (9). The Council stresses how consultation with teachers before the creation of *Cosán* put "the shape and content of the framework in the hands of the profession" (5).

Cosán describes teachers engaged in research such as "action research, member of a research group, research carried out as part of an academic programme" (16). Another aspect of the text which endorses engagement in professional learning is that teachers need dedicated time for CPD. "The Council believes that all teachers are entitled to dedicated space and time for individual and collaborative learning and reflection on same" (8). The text states that with extended sabbaticals "teachers might engage in research, exchange programmes or other types of professional learning activities, which would support them as researchers and reflective practitioners" (8).

Cosán appears to offer an opportunity for teachers to assert their voice through their professional standards body. Through the text the Council insists that teacher's engagement in the development of the final Framework for Teachers' Learning will be essential. Teachers are invited to take up action research and use it to engage in the development process. Although the text positions the Council as an external body who can wield accountability mechanisms and potentially withhold teachers' registration if they do not engage in CPD and document their engagement satisfactorily. It simultaneously offers an invite for teachers to take up and attempt to exert their own agency and voice through *Cosán*.

Teacher as Instrument of Change

The one Big C Conversation in this category is; teacher centrality to pupil outcomes. Teacher as instrument of change is used to describe teachers in this category because they are positioned as realising an expansive array of changes for pupils and because of the possibility of being used to address the priorities of the system above their contextual priorities. This professionalism describes how teachers through engagement in CPD and collaboration can cause change. This change is seen in their own practice, pupil outcomes and at a systems level. Instrument is used to describe teachers in this category because they are positioned as realising an expansive array of changes for pupils and because of the possibility of being used to address the priorities of the system above their contextual priorities.

Cosán positions the teacher as "responsive to emerging needs" (4) and responsible to meet "higher social expectations of schools" (4). Teachers engaging in CPD to meet schools' expanding and diverse responsibilities, is an aspect of this professionalism, which positions teachers as handymen for society's problems. The social languages tool identified an identity for teachers as; the nucleus of pupil achievement.The teacher is at hand with the correct tool to fix

and patch society's latest concerns or what the text calls "new types of responsibilities" (4). The expansion and diversification of school's responsibilities speaks to the way policy makers attempt to address issues by identifying the solution within schools, what Lingard (2008) identifies as schools acting as garbage bins where complex issues are dumped for teachers to manage. This approach shifts responsibility from other stakeholders who can avoid tackling systemic problems of poverty or inequality by locating the solutions in schools and within the remit of teachers. This also places teachers in the firing line when complex issues are not resolved after they have been moved on to the curriculum as a reflection of the "higher social expectations of schools" (4).

Teacher wellbeing is an area that the text introduces but links directly to pupil learning."Council recognises the importance of care of self so as to be able to care for others and, in that context, teachers' well-being is vital if they are to effectively lead learning, and support and facilitate students in this endeavour" (18). At first glance this could be read as a positive placing of teachers' wellbeing as a central concern within *Cosán*. Teaching can be considered a high-stress occupation with rates of teacher burn-out and attrition higher than other professions, across many countries (van der Want, et al. 2019). The linking of teacher wellbeing to pupil wellbeing and learning in the text could be seen as a minimising of teacher wellbeing, where teacher's health and wellbeing is only relevant as it serves to empower pupils' learning. Teachers need to stay well so that pupils can stay well and learn. It is possible that teachers staying well could be a legitimate policy goal for the Teaching Council, for its own sake, without linking it to pupil learning or wellbeing. Teachers' learning is at the centre of pupil achievement; "the quality of student learning depends as much on teachers' learning as on their teaching" (6). Teachers must

meet “the challenges of expanding fields of knowledge” (4) and accept “new types of responsibilities” (4) which are handed down by policy makers to address wider issues of concern in society. The teacher is positioned as being able to integrate these new elements into their practice by selecting the appropriate CPD*; “*CPD, in particular, is perceived as critical in ensuring that teachers are prepared to meet the challenges” (4). *Cosán* seems to present the opportunity for teachers to act out their agency when it comes to CPD. Through CPD the teacher is positioned as enabling changes in a broad spectrum of pupil outcomes which are not defined in the text but are seen as “diverse” and “expanding” (4). While teachers’ agency may be seen in choosing CPD, the “higher social expectations of schools and new types of responsibilities” (4) which schools may be forced to adopt are more likely to come from external power brokers and not as a teacher’s choice.

Table 3 below illustrates the overlaps and divergences between the two texts. It attempts to map the terrain between *LAOS* and *Cosán* which has been outlined above. Table 3 summarises how each of the texts addressed a recurring aspect of teacher professionalism. These findings will now be further analysed as a discussion about teacher professionalism in the Republic of Ireland.

Insert table 3 here

Discussion

The CDA of *LAOS* and *Cosán* identified four different understandings of teacher professionalism between both policy texts, as summarised in table 4. Although the findings may give the impression of being an either/or dichotomy, the interplay, overlaps and diversions within and between the categories should be understood as fluid and shifting.

Insert table 4 here

There is a tension within *LAOS* and *Cosán* which mirrors the wider tension evident in Irish education between organisational and occupational discourses of professionalism (Evetts 2008). The primary school teacher in Ireland has traditionally experienced a lot of freedom in interpreting the curriculum and adapting programs to reflect the local need (Coolahan 2017). At the same time, the language of neoliberalism is deeply rooted in Irish education which has followed the global trend to a more accountable, individual and market driven system (Lynch and Grummell 2018). While it may not be surprising that the Teaching Council and the Inspectorate take a different view of teachers and teaching, what is surprising is that within their own policy text each organisation positions teachers at various points along a continuum between managerial and democratic types of professionalism (Day and Sachs 2005). To illustrate this, the negotiation between democratic and managerial discourses of professionalism can be seen within and between the categories identified through this CDA. The CDA of *LAOS* identified the discourses of democratic and managerial professionalism in both the categories teacher as instrument of change and teacher as conforming professional. Through teacher as conforming professional, teachers are described as working collaboratively with fellow teachers and external stakeholders, they are positioned as being engaged in school based CPD and concerned with citizenship and issues of care and wellbeing. However, within the same category of professionalism the teacher is positioned as a conforming professional assumed to engage in ongoing CPD that will lead to pre-defined ends, outlined by the standards of effective practice. They are described as being focused on pupil's constant improvement which is measurable and data backed.

Through the category teacher as instrument of change, the teacher is positioned as having a wider responsibility than their own classroom. Their responsibility extends to the needs of their school and their community. While this broader understanding of teaching as a profession tallies with Day and Sach's (2005) democratic professionalism, it also positions teachers as being responsible for issues well outside the remit of their classroom, overcoming external issues in pupil's lives. *LAOS* states, that excellent teaching is the most powerful influence on pupil achievement and that teachers can mitigate the complex and challenging socio-economic backgrounds of all their pupils. These expectations come from the Inspectorate in *LAOS* and may not tally with the professions understanding of its remit or what it is possible for teachers to achieve.

The discourse of managerial professionalism is most clearly seen in *LAOS* through the category teacher as managed professional. In this category, teachers are positioned as being subject to external evaluation, partaking in mandatory, evidence based SSE which is assessed by an inspector, working in data driven schools, and prioritising measurable achievement. Within *LAOS* which is the guide for self-evaluation, external evaluation and leadership interviews in schools, teachers have to negotiate complex versions of themselves and their profession which are both democratic and managerial in nature. In addition, the Teaching Council presents a version of teachers which is similar, but they prioritise teacher agency, which the Inspectorate does not.

The CDA of *Cosán* found that it also positions teachers along a continuum between democratic and managerial types of professionalism. Unlike in *LAOS,* teachers are described in *Cosán* as autonomous professionals. They are described as being active researchers and learners defining their own contextual needs, identifying their own CPD and influencing the outcome of Council

policy by engaging in the development phase of *Cosán*. The text calls for teachers to be given time to pursue CPD and research for the benefit of all stakeholders. In the category teacher as instrument of change, the Council, like the Inspectorate, describes teachers as being responsible for a broad range of pupil outcomes; from learning to pupil agency and wellbeing. The discourse of managerialism also exists within this category of professionalism, as teachers are positioned as continuously upskilling to meet society's demands of schools and addressing societies needs. Teachers may be seen as being responsible for mitigating and solving complex social problems and prioritising external needs over their own priorities in school.

The discourse of managerial professionalism is also present in *Cosán* through the category teacher as managed professional, where teachers are described as measuring and documenting CPD's impact on their practice. Teachers must assure the Council, the profession and the public of the ongoing and quality nature of their learning. These new tasks for teachers in Ireland where professional learning is measured in terms of improved practice and accounted for publicly, could be tools of external control which dictate how and why teachers engage in CPD and to whom they must justify themselves.

The expectation of both *LAOS* and *Cosán* that teachers will comply by making their work explicit and transparent against policy standards, is typical of accountability regimes (Sugrue and Solbrekke 2017). Both texts also place the teacher at the centre of pupil's overall development, as the most important factor in pupil achievement (*LAOS*) and ready to upskill through CPD to meet society's increasing expectations of teachers (*Cosán*). The Council and the Inspectorate share this organisational understanding of teachers, where schools must assess, measure and document improvement in order to be assessable and inspectable. Primary school teachers in Ireland appear to exist between democratic and managerial versions of themselves where Day

and Sachs (2005) suggest teachers learn to move between the two and negotiate the contradictions and demands made on them. Recent policy developments illustrate how teachers in Ireland work in a system that on the one hand promotes agency, while on the other attempts to manage them, their work and their learning.The discussion that presents itself is how do teachers in Ireland fluidly negotiate the complex versions of teacher professionalism prescribed by policy makers.

In May 2021, the DE published their *Preparation for teaching and learning - guidance* (2021) for all primary schools. It outlines a significant change in how the Inspectorate expects teachers to plan and prepare for pupil's learning. It appears to give teachers significant independence and creativity in how to prepare and document planning. This offers a glimmer of hope that the DE may see teachers as responsible professionals (Solbrekke and Englund 2011) who are trusted to rely on their own judgements and agency in executing teaching and learning in their schools. It might be an acknowledgement by the DE that the logic of 'highly effective practice' (*LAOS*) can often be very different when understood in context and seen in action in a classroom (Solbrekke and Sugrue 2014). Teachers in Ireland have traditionally experienced independence to interpret the curriculum (Coolahan 2017) and for some time have been negotiating the shifting sands of organisational and occupational versions of who they are and what they do. It is possible that Solbrekke and Englund's (2011) idea of professional responsibility could help teachers in Ireland to negotiate their own version of teacher professionalism. Professional responsibility is an occupational understanding of professionalism where the individual is trusted to make decisions in their own field (Solbrekke and Sugrue 2014). While accountability mechanisms create a focus on answerability, compliance with rules and regulations and making your work measurable compared to set standards, professional responsibility highlights the moral and social aspects of

professionals' work, where they rely on their own professional skills to form a holistic approach which combines expertise and moral purpose (Solbrekke and Sugrue 2014). The seeds and shoots of this type of responsible professionalism can be seen in both *Cosán* and *LAOS* and the tradition of primary school teaching being a respected and sought after profession in Ireland lends itself to empowering teachers to be decision makers in their own context.

However, in the summer of 2022 the DE made a policy decision that was contrary to the Teaching Council's focus on teacher agency around CPD. The DE limited all new summer CPD courses in Ireland to numeracy, literacy and special education. The democratic ideas of collaboration and responsibility were undermined by the DE's imperative that teachers should focus on state level priorities (Sugrue and Mertkan 2017). There appears to be a struggle ongoing within the Inspectorate and between the Inspectorate and the Teaching Council when it comes to teacher professionalism and who they expect teachers to be. The Inspectorate has eleven (DE 2022) different types of external inspection it can use to influence how teachers work and what teachers' come to believe should be the priorities for them and their school. The Teaching Council has no such instrument to influence teachers on the ground and in their classrooms. The Council's independence from the DE and its ability to enact its vision, if it is contrary to the DE's vision, is something worthy of its own research paper.

Conclusion

This CDA uncovered four distinct understandings of teacher professionalism in two policy texts. It is evident that both the DE Inspectorate and the Teaching Council are themselves struggling to find a clear understanding of who teachers are and what they do. Both embrace their oversight

and regulatory roles by positioning teachers in a managerial system; creating paperwork and evaluations that can be assessed for accountability purposes. The Teaching Council in particular promotes teacher agency and choice, while the Inspectorate mentions ideas such as teacher as researcher and school based CPD. This research was undertaken as an act of policy activism (Yeatman 1998) and is seen by the researcher as part of an activist professionalism as promoted by Sachs (2003), that asks critical questions of policy makers and interprets policy through a moral lens of professional experience and responsibility. We acknowledge that this research has been a desk-based process and we recognise that schools do not simply implement policies, but enact and translate in relation to the context (Ball et al., 2011). That said, given the findings of this research and the inconsistencies in the texts concerning how policy makers in Ireland position primary school teachers, we conclude that teacher's need to embrace a critical mindset when translating, interpreting and enacting policy in Ireland and challenge the contradictions and diversions presented to them. This mindset is part of a professional responsibility (Solbrekke and Englund 2011) where teachers see themselves as autonomous educators who work with moral drive and collaborate with all stakeholders to collectively take responsibility to address the needs of the system and the pupils.

Words: 8915

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