Democratic Professionalism in Higher Education: Myth or Reality?

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Introduction
The poster reports on partial findings of my thesis project. 12 English language instructors teaching foundation programme students at a university in Saudi Arabia were interviewed to explore their perceptions of professionalism, specifically about:
- teaching.
- professional development.

To what extent do English language instructors have voice in decision-making pertaining to their teaching and professional development?

Methodology
Interpretative research
- Semi-structured interviews
- Document analysis

Critical postmodern inquiry
- Micro-discourses (institutional)
- Macro-discourses (global)

Purposive sampling
- 12 Lecturers

Findings
Lecturers voiced negative views about being professional as professional development was perceived to be top-down and teaching was over- scrutinised. Policy document analysis confirmed the managerial rhetoric which was perceived by instructors to be de-professionalising, disempowering and disappointing. Macro- and micro-discourses played greater role in shaping the managerial orientation of professionalism.

Models of professionalism

With this dichotomy over professionalism dominating the literature, a recognition for a new-professionalism which calls for in-betweenness appears to be necessary (Evans, 2008)

Conclusion
- Managerial professionalism still dominates higher education reforms despite the reported failures of this polarity in the literature.
- Democratic professionalism, on its own as a panacea appears to be a myth. Given the postmodern world we live in, the question should not be which model of professionalism to follow, but rather creating conditions which enhance an ‘in-betweenness’: between managerial and democratic professionalism.
- Teachers are the cornerstone in the reform process; failure to recognize them highly contributes to disparity over implementation.

Significance
Research indicates that marketization drives contested reforms in higher education to meet certain standards (Johnstone et al., 1998). As a response to this, managerialism dominates in universities as check to quality.

Questions abound as to whether professionals still have voice in providing service to students. The study bridges this gap and contributes to our understanding of professionalism within a growing global competition in higher education.

References