Introduction
Classical professionalism has been generally defined as consisting of three conditions: professional knowledge or expertise, autonomy and altruism. The definition has been subjected to a variety of criticisms in the last 20 years. In this paper, I revisit each of these conditions and indicate some of the ways in which they have been subject to critique. I then suggest ways in which I believe this classic definition is capable of being refurbished and put to use. In doing so, I look particularly at ways in which the conditions of professional knowledge, autonomy and altruism might be reconstructed as relevant to the current educational climate (as I read it). I will conclude by outlining some of the challenges an acceptance of this definition poses for English/literacy teachers and teacher educators.

Professionalism classically defined
The classic definition of professionalism I am discussing here arises from an idealist approach which posits an ideal for professional conduct or abstracts an ideal as a result of considering actual professions in action (Downie 1990, Hoyle 1982) Such a ‘criterion approach’ (Hoyle and John 1995) leads to a set of defining characteristics against which the conduct of a profession can be measured. Hoyle’s (1982) functionalist approach, for example, defined a profession in terms of its central social function, its length of training, a body of knowledge, high levels of skill, a code of ethical conduct, client-centredness, autonomy, independent decision-making and adaptability, self-governance and the requirement that it play a central role in relevant public policy-making.

An idealist approach to definition is inclined to be ahistorical and essentialist, a point I will be returning to below (Locke 2001c). In terms of this approach, while there might be disagreement on specific criteria, either because professions needn’t be like this or in fact don’t act like this, there is widespread agreement, according to Hoyle and John (1995), in respect of the criteria of knowledge, autonomy and responsibility. Both Hargreaves and Goodson (1996) and Sachs (1998) subscribe to a view of classical democratic professionalism as characterised by: expertise (the possession by an occupational group of exclusive knowledge and practice); altruism (an ethical concern by this group for its clients) and autonomy (the professional’s need and right to exercise control over entry into, and subsequent practice within, that particular occupation) (Sachs 1999, p. 1).

Difficulties with classical professionalism
The first and most obvious problem with such a definition is precisely its ahistoricity and essentialism. A critically social constructivist approach to the question of definition would view ‘profession’ as a relative concept
susceptible to different constructions according to time, place and the discursive disposition of its advocates and critics. Such an approach would be less concerned with generating an ideal against which conduct might be measured than identifying a range of historically bound descriptions, each with its own implications for professional practice.

In keeping with the pluralisation resulting from such approaches (‘literacies’, ‘knowledges’ and so on), Hargreaves and Goodson (1996), for example, in their analysis of the concept, identified five frequently overlapping discourses suggesting five different professionalisms: classical, flexible, practical, extended and complex, each historically bound and susceptible to critique.

More specific problems arise when the various conditions of classical professionalism are scrutinised separately. Professional knowledge for teachers concerns what should be taught and what needs to be known to teach it. Writing in the 1980s, Hirst (1982), argued that a teacher’s professional authority rested on a body of understanding, judgement and skills constituting a domain of what he called ‘discipline-refined common sense’.

It is the product of experience, research and training in successive generations working within and modifying existing institutions in our society. To the extent that this domain is concerned with activities not engaged in by the public at large and that the understanding, judgment and skills involved are matters acquirable only in relation to those circumstances, they constitute a proper domain of professional expertise. (p. 180)

There is a difference, of course, between talking abstractly about this domain and critically examining its construction in practice. Does the practice of teachers suggest that there is something worthy of being termed a systematic knowledge base? And if there is one, how worthy is it? In a caustic critique, Hargreaves and Goodson (1996) argued on the basis of the situation in England that the academic quest to develop and clarify a knowledge base for teaching tried to ‘build an edifice of teacher professionalism and professionalisation on a foundation of scientific certainty’ which worked counterproductively to undermine teachers’ ethical purposes (p. 6). As a case in point, they referred to schools of education entering into a devil’s bargain when entering the university milieu in search of identity and recognition. ‘Their mission changed from being primarily concerned with matters central to the practice of schooling, towards issues of status passage through more conventional university scholarship. Hence, faculties of education codified and created bodies of knowledge to maximise the terms of the devil’s bargain. Bodies of knowledge were created with two major functions: the creation of a corpus of “expert knowledge” with which to instruct trainee teachers; secondly, and closely allied to this, bodies of knowledge were designed to maximise status and esteem within the university milieu’ (p. 8). Critical of Shulman, whom I’ll be returning to later in this article, they argued that elaborations of pedagogical content ‘ignored almost everything that is specifically moral, emotional and contextual about teaching’ (p. 9).

While Hargreaves and Goodson raises questions over the project per se of elaborating a body of teacher professional knowledge and expertise, a different set of questions is raised by the question: Whose knowledge? Whose pedagogy? And in whose interests? In the face of such critique, the concept of ‘a proper domain of professional expertise’ begins to appear considerably unstable.

The other two conditions are also problematic. The concept of ‘altruism’ does not sit easily with the sense that professions have a tendency to act out of motives of self-aggrandisement and self-interest (Hoyle and John 1995). In reality, teachers find themselves face to face with classes of students. How practicable is an expectation that teachers address themselves to the needs of individual students? The concept is also susceptible to cultural critique. What version of ‘altruism’ are we talking about? Where does altruism end and paternalism begin? What is the place, if there is a place, for something called ‘altruism’ in a culturally diverse society?

As early as the 1970s, Eric Hoyle (1975) was problematising the notion of teacher autonomy by noting that it is always constrained by the kind of organisation a teacher finds herself working within. Autonomy cannot be thought of as separate from control. Hoyle’s interest was in the way in which the autonomy/constraint pattern was susceptible to changes in society at large and in the educational context specifically. In respect of the latter, he saw the pattern affected by ‘changes in curriculum, pedagogy and the organisation of teaching and learning’ (p. 316). Hoyle’s response to this dynamic, as he described it, was to posit a trade-off. In subjecting themselves to collaborative teaching and decision-making, at whatever level, teachers might lose a degree of autonomy, but would gain in terms of teacher control over a larger context than the immediate classroom. He coined the term ‘restricted professionalism’ for a view of the profession based on the isolated
classroom teacher doing their own thing, and ‘extended professionality’ for teachers who embraced a wider, collaborative vision of teaching that involved networking beyond their own classroom.

At the start of the 21st century, and from the perspective of cultural critique, Hoyle’s carrot of increased control of the teaching context seems quaintly naïve. Certainly, words like ‘collaborative’ and ‘collegial’ have become buzz words for what a number of commentators have referred to as the ‘new professionalism’ of the 1990s (Evans 1997, A. Hargreaves and Goodson 1996, D. Hargreaves 1994, Locke 2001c, Robertson 1996). However, contrived collegiality can produce a loss of control for teachers (A. Hargreaves, 1991). And the notion of autonomy itself, as something (which as Hoyle suggests), might flourish in ‘isolated’ classrooms, is called into question by theories of the self which view human subjectivity as discursively produced. What Foucault has bequeathed to us is a sharpened sense that power pervades. Even where teacher autonomy is not overtly ‘regulated’ (Apple 1998), it is still subject to what can be termed ‘discursive colonisation’ (Broadfoot 1996, Locke 2001b). And no classroom is insulated from the relentless and surveilling panoptical gaze.

Rethinking classical professionalism

Despite such critique, I believe there are two grounds for arguing that this tripartite classical definition of professionalism is still useful. Firstly, it can provide something of a benchmark against which to measure what I have called elsewhere (Locke 2001c) the erosion of professionalism or deprofessionalisation. I have argued that there are a number of salients or markers a professional group desiring to defend its knowledge-base, autonomy and client-relationship might well have an interest in occupying:

- Determining what constitutes relevant professional knowledge
- Determining what constitutes appropriate and desirable professional practice
- Establishing the goals, processes, content and conditions of training
- Defining desirable conditions of work and service (including remuneration)
- Establishing the processes of registration, standard-setting, monitoring, appraisal and discipline
- Determining the appropriate processes and avenues of association and relationship.

The pragmatic adoption of the classical definition certainly raises questions about the contemporary status of teaching as a profession in respect of all of these salients.

The second ground, I would argue, is that the classical definition offers a useful focus for our energies as teachers and teacher educators as we consider what it means to be a professional at the beginning of the 21st century. It is precisely because of the questions raised by each of its three condition that the old definition is worth refurbishing. Questions of knowledge-base, autonomy and the client-relationship may never be finally answered. But they can’t be ignored.

The question of professional knowledge

This realisation of a wealth of knowledge that is difficult to account for, is clearly a significant moment in the development of mine and the other beginning teachers’ identities. (Wild 2003)

The epigraph for this section comes from a narrative written by a young PhD student who is now in her third year of teaching at a Melbourne high school. It highlights both the realisation of a ‘wealth’ of professional knowledge and her difficulty as a developing teacher in accounting for it. What steps might we help such teachers take towards the development of an account – what notes towards a supreme fiction (to quote Wallace Stephens again)?

I would want to start by accepting as a given that knowledge is plural, rooted in human experience and susceptible to discursive construction. I would want to deeply respect all knowledge traditions and yet accept their provisionality as systems and explanations. Specifically, I would want to cherish an unease with attempts to brand entire cultural epochs with terms such as Modernism. I would want to encourage a healthy suspicion of academic branding exercises that use the prefix ‘post’ to suggest that another way of thinking about the world can be safely put out to pasture and that we have somehow arrived at a superior vantage point conducive to an economy that encourages literature searches that confine themselves to 1990 and after.

As English/literacy teachers specifically, we can begin by recognising and valuing the various constructions (and interpretations of these constructions) of our subject that have characterised its history. We can recognise through a careful reading of our traditions the tensions and issues that have produced changes in the
identity of English as a subject and English teachers as professionals. I would raise questions over sentences like the following (from a recent article in *English in Australia*):

Hence, while the heritage and personal growth models of English, underwritten as they are by liberal-humanist concepts of the individual, should never be dismissed as worthless – they have produced teaching that has often been life-changing for students – they prove theoretically defective and political unpersuasive model for English teaching in schools and universities today. (McIntyre 2002, p. 37)

What I am advocating here is a pause to appreciate as opposed to the rush to critique. In dismissing such models out of hand we are, I would argue, in danger of denying to our students literacy practices and epistemologies that have the potential to enrich their textual practices and their capacity to engage meaningfully with their experiences. In would also argue that such acts of dismissal are ethically questionable.

In addition to adopting a more accommodating attitude towards the rich traditions of English as a subject, I believe it would be useful to recognise the various sources that can be viewed as having a constitutive role in the development of the professional knowledge of textual practice in society which I suggest is the core of our subject field or domain. I suggest there are three:

1. Textual practice as it operates in society and across cultures.
2. Textual practice as it is constructed in the context of undergraduate and graduate degree programmes in such ‘disciplines’ as English, Media Studies, Drama, Professional Writing and so on.
3. Textual practice as constructed via curriculum designs, qualifications systems, high-stakes assessment practices and resource production.

The virtue in keeping these sources distinct is that it allows for scrutiny of the relationship between each of them. For example, one can ask questions such as: To what extent does the construction of textual practice in a system’s intended curriculum reflect textual practice in the wider social context? The ability to ask such questions, as I will show in the next section of this article, is of immense strategic value.

I am suggesting that the professional knowledge of the English/literacy teacher develops as a result of a balanced and deliberated uptake of these three sources. Such an uptake, I would argue, provides the basis for a response to a question Lee Shulman asked back in 1986: ‘Where did the subject matter go?’ (p. 5). It has the added potential of providing a basis for revisiting Shulman’s schema for categorising teaching knowledge in terms of content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and curricular knowledge and its forms in terms of prepositional knowledge, case knowledge, and strategic knowledge (Shulman 1986).

**The question of altruism**

‘Don’t cry, poor little thing,’ she said. ‘Don’t cry.’ And she gave the other her lace handkerchief.

*(Mansfield 1945, p. 413)*

Katherine Mansfield wrote “A cup of tea” in one sitting in January, 1922. It is about a pampered young wife named Rosemary who takes home a young girl who has solicited her in the street for a cup of tea. The girl is never named, but among other things the story offers a caustic portrayal of patronage that appears to insist on the inexorable and even tragic otherness of the other.

A typical dictionary definition of altruism calls it the principle of living and acting for the interest of others. Taken at face value, it is consonant with sentiments of teachers who enter the profession with a view to ‘making a difference’. It also connects with the public expectation that teachers exercise a duty of care towards their students, though they may not exercise this in the same way with all students. I take it as a given that professions and individuals are as likely as not to be self-interested and that an altruistic disposition can co-exist with self-interest. I also take it as a given that the concept of altruism will be problematised differently according to one’s discursive frame. It will raise different problems for the sociobiologist than it will for the social constructionist.

I take it as a given, too, that as teachers and teacher educators we have to get beyond the realm of warm fuzzies and to see our relation to the other as raising hard yet inescapable ethical questions – questions such as ‘Who is the other I teach?’ and ‘What kind of covenant with the other does teaching imply’ are not easy ones to answer.

One possible starting point is Nel Noddings’ notion of ‘fidelity’ in the context of an ‘ethic of caring’ (Noddings 1986). Noddings views fidelity, not as faithfulness to duty or to principle but as a direct response to individuals with whom one is in relation. Natural caring – the sort of response made when we want to care for another – establishes the ideal for ethical
caring, and ethical caring imitates this ideal in its efforts to institute, maintain, or re-establish natural caring. From this perspective fidelity may be interpreted as a precondition for subjectively satisfying relations and a continuing condition for their maintenance.’ (p. 497)

According to Noddings, teachers guided by an ethic of caring ask questions such as ‘What effect will this have on the person I teach? What effect will it have on the caring community we are trying to build?’ (p. 499). Such questions serve to condition a teacher’s way of thinking about the place of relational goals within a wider context of institutional goals and responsibilities. She is the first to acknowledge that the balance is often a tricky one. This centrality of care is echoed by Hargreaves and Goodson (1986) in their definition of post-modern professionalism, where they call for ‘A commitment to active care and not just anodyne service for students. Professionalism must in this sense acknowledge and embrace the emotional as well as the cognitive conditions of teaching, and also recognise the skills and dispositions that are essential to committed and effective caring’ (p. 20).

Noddings’ phenomenological standpoint is unlikely to be shared by Emmanuel Levinas, a philosopher viewed by some has having put ethics on the agenda of deconstructionism. According to Neyland (in press), Levinas viewed the fundamental ethical relation between human beings as an attitude of responsibility for the other person. Despite philosophical differences from Noddings, it is interesting to find Jacques Derrida almost ten years later using the same word ‘fidelity’ in his Adieu to Levinas at the latter’s funeral where he refers to Levinas’ notion of uprightness as ‘original fidelity to an indissoluble alliance’ (Derrida 1999, p. 3).

Such a viewpoint, arising from a different philosophical tradition, also calls for a focus on the quality of one’s encounters with the other and attention to those factors that militate against one’s capacity to respond adequately. As a prior and fundamental ethical relation it is only too susceptible to erosion in the context of social institutions and norms.

The question of autonomy

Although Shulman (1986) doesn’t use the term autonomy, it is clear that he sees the development of professional knowledge as the sine qua non of what he calls ‘professional judgment and decision-making’ (p. 13). So, I would argue, is the process of reflecting on one’s relationship to the other.

The value of raising questions about autonomy is that it inevitably raises questions about agency, the status of various stakeholders in educational decision-making and the nature of collaborative action. The view I am arguing here is that autonomy has always been constrained. Teacherly option-taking has always been limited by professional knowledge, ethical demands (however defined), the discursive frames one subscribes to and a network of obligations to colleagues, institutions and systems. Indeed, if we think of students as being enrolled by schools rather than classrooms, then it would follow that teachers are bound to operate collaboratively in order to address the educational and social needs which the child and her parents are asking the school to meet.

In their move towards a definition of ‘post-modern professionalism’, Hargreaves and Goodson (1996) identify a number of features which touch on issues of autonomy. For example, they refer to the need for:

- Commitment to working with colleagues in collaborative cultures of help and support as a way of using shared expertise to solve the ongoing problems of professional practice, rather than engaging in joint work as a motivational device to implement the external mandates of others;
- Occupational heteronomy rather than self-protective autonomy, where teachers work authoritatively yet openly and collaboratively with other partners in a wider community (especially parents and students themselves), who have a significant stake in the students’ learning;
- A self-directed search and struggle for continuous learning related to one’s own expertise and standards of practice, rather than compliance with the enervating obligations of endless change demanded by others (often under the guise of continuous learning or improvement). (pp. 20–21)

The second part of the first bullet point is a reference to what Hargreaves has elsewhere (A. Hargreaves 1991) termed ‘contrived collegiality’. The second part of the third bullet point alludes to the ‘new professionalism’ of efficient compliance with state-mandated reforms referred to earlier in this article.

What underpins these criteria, is a new version of autonomy which draws on Hoyle’s idea of extended professionalism. It offers a view of teachers acting collaboratively and reflectively in networks which acknowledge the rights of other stakeholders in educational decision-making. At the same time, an authority based on teacher expertise is acknowledged, and with this authority, the right of teachers to be agents in decision-
making that affects the nature of their work and their relationship with their pupils. Looked at in this way, it is a version of teacher autonomy which is consonant with Judyth Sachs’ concept of activist professionalism characterised by:

• ‘active trust’ … which involves the negotiation of shared sets of values, principles and strategies between a number of sectional interests in ‘new kinds of social and professional relationships’, requiring new forms of collaboration between various groups, and

• ‘generative politic’ which ‘allow individual and groups to make things happen rather than to have things happen to them in the context of overall social concerns and goals. (Sachs 1999, p. 7)

As I have argued elsewhere, activist professionalism needs a fourth category to added to Shulman’s list of content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and curricular knowledge. I have called this ‘strategic knowledge’ or critical savvy.

Identifying some challenges
Using this refurbished version of the classical professionalism triangle as a kind of touchstone, I would like to conclude by identifying some of the challenges I see facing English teachers and teacher educators as they address issues of professional identity at the beginning of the 21st Century.

Professional knowledge
I feel I am playing someone else’s silly game in following the detail of the English Curriculum in this way. It doesn’t allow me to use my own experience and judgement in the way I’d like to, keeping in my sights the value of the subject and the needs of the students before me. (Locke 2001a, p. 17)

English teachers in New Zealand will find on p. 23 of the national English curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1994) a planning cycle (see Figure 1). On the face of it, the cycle is a natural extension of a curriculum that has been constructed around the stipulation of hierarchies of achievement objectives at four or eight levels. However, a teacher abiding by the practice advocated in this planning cycle would find herself doing two things.

Firstly, she would be couching her learning outcomes in a particular form (behavioural, pre-determined) and drawing them from a particular set. Secondly, she would be conducting a needs assessment of her students in terms of these same outcomes. Measured against the three potential sources of content knowledge discussed previously – textual practice as it operates in the wider society, textual practice as it is constructed in degree programmes, and textual practice as constructed via curriculum statements, qualifications systems and so on – the recommended practice constructed via this diagram appears designed to confine teachers within the bounds of only one of these three sources of content knowledge.

A less than remarkable feat of critical discourse analysis has exposed the limitations in this practice. But I offer it as an example of the kind of critical savvy that English teachers need to develop as they grapple with the task of defining their professional knowledge. The

![An Approach to Planning](image)

Figure 1
following are just a few questions that I believe we need to find answers to as we go about this task:

- What version of English is being constructed by the current national curriculum statement or state profile?
- What version of English is being constructed by high stakes assessment regimes?
- To what extent is pedagogical practice being shaped by versions implicit in widely disseminated teacher resources?
- What sorts of disjunction exist between the diffuse textual practices of the wider society and school-based textual practices?
- To what extent is current professional knowledge informed by conversations about the technological mediation of textual practice?
- To what extent is current professional knowledge informed by conversations about the social constructedness of textual practice?
- To what extent is current professional knowledge informed by conversations about the relationship of language and power?

I am aware that these questions are very much in the content domain – Shulman’s ‘content knowledge’ category – rather than concerned with ‘pedagogical content knowledge’

Altruism
The epigraph to this section comes from a comment made by a respondent in the course of a project aimed at studying the response of New Zealand secondary English teachers to 1990s curriculum and assessment reforms (Locke, 2001a). It illustrates neatly the nexus between the constraints on curriculum content in a state-dominated system and the constraints on teachers wanting to address the needs of their students. Clearly this teacher ‘locates’ the needs of her students outside the curriculum framework and is thereby at odds with the practice encouraged by Figure 1 (discussed above). This teacher views herself as wanting to keep a balance between ‘the value of the subject’ and ‘the needs of the students before me’.

The expression ‘before me’ is interesting. It suggests the image of a teacher face-to-face in a direct encounter with the students in her class. In the New Zealand setting, this class is becoming increasingly multicultural and multilingual in a society with a growing gap between rich and poor. At the risk of extrapolating too far from a few comments, I want to suggest that this teacher is already practising a form of ‘fidelity’. She has the other in her sights, not because she has designs on her or him, but because she is wanting to be responsive to the place where the other locates her or himself. To the extent that she engages in ‘needs analysis’ she will let herself be informed by the recognition of difference underpinned by a shared humanity.

The key question for her, as an English teacher, will be, as Noddings suggests, ‘What effect will this have on the person I teach?’ (1986 p. 499), not just as an individual, but as a member of one or more discourse communities, some of which I may be barely acquainted with. As English teachers and teacher educators, then, there are two pressing questions:

- How does my recognition of the different Other impact on my construction of content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge?
- What strategies can I employ to protect my fidelity to the Other who is my student in the context of a network of institutional and other stakeholder claims?

One solution to the latter question is offered by my colleague, Alan Hall (2001), in a conference paper entitled ‘What ought I to do, all things considered? An approach to the exploration of ethical problems by teachers’. One of Hall’s starting points is a recognition that the ethical problems confronting teachers include ‘curriculum decision-making and the selection and implementation of teaching methodology’ (p. 3).

Autonomy
Central to professional ethics, according to Hall (2001) ‘are the notions that a professional teacher is a member of an historical community of practice with a telos, or general purpose, to which one must be committed in order to be professional, and that membership of that
community constrains the freedom of the individual practitioner by committing him or her to ethical principles and standards and the telos’ (p. 6). Autonomy, then, as discussed previously, is always constrained autonomy.

Taking this constrained nature as a given, we can observe that the quality of the constraints on a teacher varies. The teacher whose comments I discussed earlier clearly accepts the ‘needs of the students’ as a constraint on her option-taking, but sees the willing acceptance of such a constraint as strengthening her right to make judgement calls. Some constraints undermine this professional right of teachers and weaken their ability to influence events. Others involve teachers in formal or informal networks of relationship that foster their right to make judgement calls and their ability to influence events both inside and outside the classroom. It is this latter form of constrained autonomy that we need to foster.

Developing ‘collaborative cultures of help and support’ – to use an expression of Hargreaves and Goodson quoted earlier (1996, p. 20), may well be the most important challenge facing us as English teachers and teacher educators. Professional knowledge and a developed ethical attitude may well be the sine qua non for the right to exercise professional judgement. But they don’t happen magically.

My own view of the English teaching profession, based on my New Zealand experience, is that it is being worked too hard. The attrition rate is extraordinarily high, especially among younger teachers. The introduction of performance management systems has been accompanied by a raft of accountability measures at the vary time that teachers have been asked to implement a range of state-mandated curriculum, assessment and qualifications reforms that have marginalised the voices of many teachers (Locke 2001a). For over a decade professional development has been replaced by what I would call induction into ideological compliance. Never has teachers’ work been so controlled, and at all levels, as deprofessionalisation has begun to work hand in hand with work intensification. It should come as no surprise that teachers raise their eyebrows when visionary educators invite them to engage, in true postmodern style, in ‘the restive problematisation of the given’ (Dean 1994, quoted in Pennycook 2001, p. 8).

In conclusion, then, I would argue that addressing the following challenges is a priority:

- developing networks that act genuinely as collaborative cultures of help and support
- identifying the structures that serve to produce contrived collegiality and diminish opportunities for teachers to exercise professional judgement in respect of the domain of their professional knowledge and ethical conduct
- fostering the strategic knowledge that will empower teachers to discover avenues for activism and contestation.

In general, I am suggesting a need to embark on a program of professional reclamation. Central to such a programme are the conversations we engage in with one another – conversations that are willing to address the hard questions and underpinned by a respect for where we have come from as a profession, courage and an attitude of humility and compassion before the other.

References


