

The textual representation of professionalism: problematising professional standards for teachers in the UK lifelong learning sector

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Abstract

The problematisation of the professional standards for teachers in the UK lifelong learning sector tends to focus on the discourses that the standards embody: discourses that are posited as being based on a restricted or technicist model of professionalism, that fail sufficiently to recognise the lived experiences of teachers within the sector both in terms of professional knowledge and competence, and professional development. This paper takes a different approach, drawing on social practice theories of literacy in order to shift the locus of problematisation away from what the standards might mean, to how the standards are physically assembled or instantiated in documentary form. The paper concludes by suggesting that a first point of problematisation rests not in the discourses that the standards embody, but in the inherent fragilities of any text-based material artefact that has the intention of carrying meaning across spatial, institutional or temporal boundaries.

Key words

Further education; professionalism; professional standards; literacy studies; teacher-training.

Introduction

In 2006, Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK), a quasi-autonomous government-funded body, published a set of professional standards that were intended to provide a framework for the 'professionalisation' of teachers in further, adult, and community education in the UK, a broad and disparate area of provision that is usually referred to as the lifelong learning sector. (LLUK has now been disbanded: the standards have survived, and at the time of writing, are maintained/managed by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS), which itself is to be wound up in the near future). The LLUK standards themselves replaced an earlier set of standards, which had been introduced seven years before by the Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO). The earlier FENTO standards had been criticised for not adequately meeting the needs of trainee teachers and for failing to reflect the developmental nature of initial teacher education (ITE): they were seen as prescriptive, imposing too heavy a regulatory burden on the ITE curriculum and focussing on what might be termed the desirable attributes of qualified and experienced, rather than trainee, teachers (Elliot, 2000; Lucas, 2004). Similarly, the LLUK standards have been criticised for positing a restricted, technicist discourse of professional knowledge within the learning and skills sector, akin to a competency-based approach to learning (Finlay et al., 2007; Gleeson and James, 2007; Lucas, 2007; Lucas and Nasta, 2010). Tensions such as these represent the broader critiques that are to be found in the sociology of standards more generally, which differentiate between *policy* discourses, *academic* discourses and *practitioner* discourses (Mulcahy, 2011; Timmermans and Epstein, 2010).

This paper takes a different approach. Rather than problematising the LLUK standards through an exploration of the discourses relating to teaching, to teacher knowledge or to the pedagogy of initial teacher education that they might – or might not – promulgate, I wish to focus on what at first might seem more mundane or even prosaic matters, but which are, I shall argue, fundamental to an understanding of how a body of professional standards might do their 'work'. I am interested in analysing the LLUK standards not from the point of view of embodying a particular set of discourses or of encouraging – or discouraging – the critical use of particular bodies of professional or technical knowledge, but rather as a reification of a series of conversations, ideas and concepts into a material form: a *textual artefact* that exists either on paper or on screen, that can in turn generate *intertextual hierarchies* through being quoted and cited (by students in their essays, in textbooks for trainee teachers or in ITE curriculum documentation, for example). What I mean to highlight here is that before academics critique the standards, before university programme leaders embed them within their initial teacher education curricula, before the authors of teacher education textbooks list them at the beginning of a book chapter or before trainee teachers cite them in their assignments, all of these people actually have to get hold of a copy of the standards – in full or in part – and read them.

Thus, it is the processes of firstly reifying the standards into a material form and then distributing or transmitting that reified form across social, geographic or institutional boundaries that I wish to problematise here. I shall begin by providing some brief details regarding the empirical data on which this article rests. After this, I shall offer a generalisable definition of professional standards, before moving on to provide a brief outline of the *literacy studies* theoretical framework that I have used to inform my argument. Following a discussion of two examples drawn from my data, I shall then go on to problematise professionalism as it is represented in the LLUK standards. I shall conclude by addressing three overarching questions regarding

the LLUK professional standards, which – it is argued – are also applicable to similar standards in other professional contexts.

Empirical data: brief details

The empirical data used here is drawn from a larger data set collected during the period 2008 to 2010, exploring assessment practices on one programme of initial teacher education for the lifelong learning sector at an English university. Interview data was collected through a series of semi-structured interviews with both tutors (n=8) and students (n=22) on the course. The narratives produced were analysed both as a form of retrospective meaning making, and also as a form of presentation of the narrator's (that is to say, the interviewee's) point of view (Chase, 2005; Kvale, 2007). Other data was collected through content analysis (Rapley, 2007; Tight, 2003), drawing on a range of documentary sources including course handbooks, module specifications, internal moderation reports and external examiners' reports. All data has been rendered anonymous through the use of pseudonyms and the disguise of other signifiers such as locations, module titles and the exact names of management groups or committees (Christians, 2005). Data storage, coding and analysis was carried out using Atlas-Ti (Lewins and Silver, 2007).

Professional or occupational standards: towards a common understanding

Why do professional organisations – teachers, architects, accounting technicians or sports and exercise professionals to name just four examples – seek to establish codes or sets of occupational or professional standards? Occupational or professional standards such as these can be seen as performing three main functions. Firstly, they inform the public about the claims to specialist knowledge and/or competence of the profession; secondly, they inform the development of relevant professional qualifications, including the ways in which such qualifications are delivered, mentored and assessed; and thirdly, they form a series of benchmarks against which the performance of members of the profession (satisfactory or otherwise) in question can be evaluated (Bourner, Katz and Watson, 2000; Eraut, 1994: 211 ff.; Taylor, 1997). Both the current LLUK standards and the FEto standards that preceded them share these characteristics. That said, there has been and continues to be a rigorous debate about the ways in which these two sets of standards have satisfactorily embodied a model of professionalism that positions practitioners, rather than policy makers and employers, at the centre of the process – in direct opposition to those models of professionalisation that position autonomous professionals at the heart of the processes by which an occupation seeks to advance its status (Eraut, 1994; Lucas, 2004). Notwithstanding the disputed model of professionalism that the LLUK standards embody, a more fundamental concern can be identified in the assumption that “it is possible to capture in written statements – codified knowledge – the richness and complexities involved in the process of teaching” (Nasta, 2007: 3) – an assumption that may not stand up to scrutiny.

Theorising the LLUK standards: a literacy studies perspective

How do people find out about the LLUK standards? Or, to put it another way, how do the LLUK standards make themselves known to all of the different constituencies who need to know about them? Certainly, the

work of 'getting the standards out there' would – must – need to consist of both things (for example: the standards themselves, in print or pdf format; textbooks written for trainee teachers; curriculum handbooks for appropriate teacher-education courses) and people (for example: teacher educators; trainee teachers; authors). And, at the same time, we need to account for the nature of the interrelationships between all of these. More accurately, we need to account for the ways in which the people within this web of social relations and the objects – specifically, textual artefacts – move and work within and around each other, making each other do things in particular ways.

In order to investigate the professional standards more fully, a theoretical framework is therefore needed that allows for a critical analysis of the standards as a written document, a text. Such a framework is provided by theories of literacy as social practice, also known as *literacy studies* (Barton, 1994; Gee, 1996; Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Barton et al, 2000). A literacy studies approach offers several key theoretical concepts for the critical analysis of text-based *literacy artefacts*. Such artefacts are conceptualised as being employed within *literacy events*, which are any activities where literacy has a role. Events such as these arise from *literacy practices*, which are those general ways that people use written language in all sorts of social contexts, whether at work or at home or elsewhere:

Practices are shaped by social rules, which regulate the use and distribution of texts, prescribing who may produce and have access to them.

(Barton and Hamilton, 1998: 7)

Literacy events are relatively straightforward to observe. Literacy practices are not, however, and this is because they involve how people feel about, or the extent to which they value, the literacy in question (Barton, 1994: 7). Thus, "literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts" (ibid: 8). At the same time, it is important to remember that literacy is not the same in all contexts. There are different literacies, enfolded in different literacy practices, which are identifiable and which belong to different social contexts or domains. Examples include *academic literacies* (Lillis, 2001) and *workplace literacies* (Belfiore et al, 2004). However, such literacy domains, and the discourse communities associates with them (Swales, 1990), are not entirely discrete, and there can be movement between and across them. Such movements can therefore impact on how a literacy artefact is used or interpreted, because the artefact has been removed from the social and cultural context in which it was originally found.

First example: the place of standards in student assessment

Let me provide an example, informed by the empirical data that I referred to above, specifically, to the data that I collected from trainee teachers whilst carrying out interviews and observations on the teacher education programme (as detailed above). During their period of study, each student completed eleven assignments of various kinds: essays, portfolios, teaching observations and such like, all of which are typical of professional courses such as those that trainee teachers follow (Brown, 1999; Klenowski et al., 2006; Taylor, 1997; Tummons, 2010, 2011).

So, enfolded within all of these different kinds of assessment practice, where were the uses or readings of the LLUK standards made visible? Only in the work of one of the students was any explicit reference to the LLUK standards made. This student had not actually read the LLUK standards in their original published form, however: rather, they had used references within a teacher-training textbook to quote them, a textbook that does not contain references to all of the standards, but just to a selection of them. All of the students demonstrated what might be termed at best a technician understanding of the standards: an awareness of the practices that teachers in the lifelong learning sector were required to do, although without inhabiting any of the discourses of the 'professionalisation' of the sector that the standards were designed to espouse. But the other students had not read them and when reading textbooks, tended to gloss over references to or lists of the standards as they appeared in the text, concentrating instead on the 'substantive' content of the books. Only one of the tutors made explicit use of any reference to the standards in their feedback practice, encouraging students to draw on the standards when writing their reflections (although only a few of their students actually did so). The other four tutors did not use the LLUK standards as part of their teaching repertoire. The one exception to this is found in the final module that students are required to complete on the course, which places 'teacher professionalism' and the LLUK standards within the module content, although the assessment for the module is predominantly concerned with reflective practice and quality assurance.

What I want to foreground here is that within the curricular practices of this teacher-training course, the LLUK standards inhabit what might be termed a relative material invisibility. The LLUK standards are 'there', receiving the occasional mention, straightforward to look up and make explicit reference to should a tutor or student choose/wish to do so, but the status or condition that they occupy is transient and mutable. They are capable of being foregrounded or of being left behind, of being quoted or being ignored, of being discussed or of being forgotten. However, it is important to remember that the LLUK standards never completely 'go away': they are always present, even if they are only whirring away in the background in a manner akin to the operating system on my laptop that supports the graphical user interface that I actually work with, and always shaping, sometimes subtly and sometimes not, the work that both the trainees and the teacher educators do.

Literacy studies theory tell us that different people would read the LLUK standards in different ways, and consequently would take different meanings from them. Texts do not have a single intrinsic meaning; rather, the meanings that we as readers take from and ascribe to them are diffracted through our own prior experiences, ways of knowing and *positionalities* (Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 1996). Academic authors who have written critiques of the LLUK framework will 'read' them rather differently to a teacher training student who is preparing their final assignment and wants to cite one or more of the standards in their reflections on practice. But any conversation about how people might read them and how they might make or take meaning from them is predicated on the fact of the standards having actually been accessed in some sort of physical form. That is to say, before we can begin to think about how people respond to the standards, we have to make certain assumptions about how those same people actually get to the standards in the first place. Have they read them in full after downloading a pdf to their laptop? Have they picked up a hard copy at a conference? Have they had the standards introduced to them or placed in front of them by somebody?

It seems obvious to state that if the LLUK standards are going to be distributed across the lifelong learning sector, they need first to be written up into a document that can actually be circulated or distributed. Or, to put it another way, they need to be *reified* into a physical form (Wenger, 1998). Before we can read the standards and then do something with them (quote them in the textbooks that we write, draw on them to shape our teacher training curricula, refer to them in our essays) we have to have them presented to us in a reified form that we can prop up on our desks or open in a window on our laptop computers. Reifications such as these are commonplace in the social world, and are used to capture and make concrete all sorts of more-or-less complicated concepts. As well as professional frameworks (which are numerous), other easily recognisable reifications include text-based artefacts such as course handbooks, textbooks, websites and academic journals. Reifications do not necessarily need to be made out of physical stuff, although they may necessarily involve and even create physical stuff: a conference is a reification, and so is a meeting – so are the published proceedings from a conference (whether in book form or on line) and the minutes that are typed up by the secretary after the meeting has finished. Similarly, if a reification is going to travel across institutional, geographic or spatial boundaries, then it needs to be made out of stuff that can be moved, posted, carried or emailed: reifications need to be physically robust. And the boundaries that these LLUK standards have to travel across are impressive. The standards are designed to be ‘read’ (although we have to be mindful of the fact that from a literacy studies perspective, ‘reading’ might mean different things to different people) by college lecturers, teacher-trainers, curriculum designers, endorsement officers and students, *inter alia*. This readership is vast and diffuse, spread across institutions (universities, colleges of further education, adult education centres). Only a reified form is capable of making this journey: if the standards relied solely on voices when travelling, such a journey would be unfeasible (Latour, 2005; Law, 1994). The standards have to be assembled into a material form: a text-based artefact.

Once the standards have been collected together in a concrete form (and this might be a hard copy or a soft copy), they rely on people to circulate them, to talk about them and to champion their use. It is in the interplay between people and things that the use of the artefacts in question becomes established. Interplays such as these can be highly effective. The mutual symbiosis of people and artefacts can allow messages, ideas and practices to travel across significant geographical, temporal or institutional boundaries. But such interplays are tentative constructs at best, prone to breaking down if links are put under stress or insufficiently nurtured (Brandt and Clinton, 2002; Latour, 2005). Texts do travel well, and they can be highly resilient: but they can also be lost or misinterpreted; people can travel but they can only reach so far, and once out of sight, you cannot be sure that they will do what you have told them (Law, 1994). Or, to put it another way: we cannot be sure how people will respond to the standards, whether people will indeed tell other people about them in the ways that they are supposed to, whether they will pay lip service to them or simply abandon them.

Second example: the place of standards in curriculum documentation

Let me provide a second example that foregrounds the role of other things – other text-based artefacts, to be precise – in circulating and thereby promulgating the LLUK standards (based on content analysis of previously collected documentary data that I discussed above). In the earlier example, I highlighted how the

two 'main' groups of people involved in teacher-training – the teacher-educators and the trainees – did, or did not, talk or write about the standards, and I made reference to the fact that there was just one module or unit on the course where such a discussion might be foregrounded.

I have already discussed the ways in which a literacy studies approach provides researchers with a conceptual framework for the close analysis of how literacy artefacts are used (see above). At this time, however, two further elements of a literacy studies approach need to be drawn on. The first of these relates to the meanings that different readers might – or might not – make or take from the same text. Within any literacy event, readers will bring their own prior understandings and opinions to their reading of a text. As a result of this, they may interpret or take different meanings from the text. Texts – textbooks, academic journal articles or LLUK standards – do not have, indeed are incapable of having, single or uncontested meanings (Tummons, 2008). The second element to be introduced relates to the power relationships that shape literacy practices. It is important to recognise that much literacy learning takes place within relationships of unequal power, where some literacy practices and events are acknowledged and encouraged (these are referred to as *dominant* literacies) and others are marginalised, ignored or otherwise deemed inappropriate (these are referred to as *vernacular* literacies). In this sense, reading becomes political: how we respond to a text will depend on whether or not we feel that we are being *obliged* to adopt the discourses that it inhabits (Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 1996).

As such, the work of distributing the LLUK standards can be further problematised. From a literacy studies perspective, the standards can be seen as coming under strain simply because the ways in which they will be read, and the ways that people will make meaning from them, are unpredictable at best. In part this is because each person who reads the standards will always approach that reading from a somewhat unique point of view, based on their own history, their own experience, their own prior study and so forth. And in part this will be because no single text is capable of capturing or containing a single or unambiguous meaning or set of meanings (see also Wenger, 1998: 62ff.). This problematisation can be extended to any of the text-based artefacts that have already been referred to, in addition to the actual standards themselves: teacher-training textbooks; teacher training curricula; feedback sheets. These, and perhaps other, artefacts are all wrapped up within the LLUK discourse of teacher professionalism. That is to say, they are all, in different ways, enrolled in the project of ordering the LLUK standards, of getting the standards 'out there'. But these objects are in themselves the products of another text – the original standards.

The ways in which the curriculum documents for a teacher training programme, a teacher-training textbook or a feedback sheet firstly come to be as they are and secondly align themselves – to some extent – with the LLUK standards, are therefore far from straightforward. Take the writing of a textbook. Many of the textbooks that are to be found on the reading lists for teacher training programmes within the lifelong learning sector make reference to the LLUK standards. By this I mean that it is a common feature of such books to list some or all of the standards, sometimes quoting them directly and sometimes supplying references, as the book proceeds: a literacy practice known as *intertextuality* (Barton, 1994). For example, a chapter, or a whole book, about assessment would refer to the standards from *Domain E: Assessment for Learning*. Sometimes the standards are put at the start of the chapter, sometimes at the end. Within such textbooks, the readers – the trainee teachers – might be encouraged to reflect on the standards, to think about how they apply to their

own professional practice. Many students – and tutors – encounter the standards in this way, rather than downloading the full pdf from the LLUK website. But what are the standards doing within textbooks such as these – how do they work?

Many of the textbooks that students on these courses use are now published in third, fourth or fifth editions, and some have been in print for two decades or more. That is, they have been in print since before the LLUK standards were published. Six years ago, a textbook would have been citing the earlier FEto standards. Six years before that, there were no professional standards for the authors to refer to. What is noteworthy, if you read and then compare different textbook editions from this period of time, is that the content of the different editions remains relatively unchanged: certainly, the imposition over the last decade or so of two – quite different – sets of professional standards does not seem to have impacted on the content of books, apart from the fact that as such books are updated, the relevant standards are included.

Problematizing professionalism

Up to this point, I have presented two examples within which I have provided deliberately small-scale accounts of just two of the kinds of actions or practices that the LLUK standards are enfolded within. In the first vignette, I explored the extent to which students and tutors do or do not make reference to the LLUK standards within the assessment processes of a teacher training course; in the second, I considered the ways in which the authors of teacher-training textbooks cite from the standards. Focussing on such relatively tiny episodes may seem at first look to be rather trivial or prosaic – irrelevant even. And yet it is within tiny episodes such as these that *literacy practices*, the ways that texts are used in the social world, can be seen.

Small stories such as these are important because they allow us to see how textual artefacts such as the LLUK standards sometimes gets used. During episodes such as these, the standards are not being disputed, contradicted or challenged: there is no discourse to challenge managerialism, employer-led professionalisation or competence-based models of professional knowledge here. What there is, indeed all that there is, is a text-based artefact, a thing made up of some physical stuff, that we all agree is called ‘the LLUK standards’ or, to give it it’s full title, ‘new overarching professional standards for teachers, tutors and trainers in the lifelong learning sector’. It might be a pdf file or a hard copy, lying on a desk or in a box file, stored on a usb memory stick or on an email attachment: these are the ways in which the standards get sent out and about. And then what happens to them? They get cited from; they get ignored or left on a shelf; or they get saved to a folder that gets lost sight of on an already crowded hard drive. The important point to hold on to here is that once the standards get sent ‘out there’, on very many occasions the journey that they take does not last very long and certainly does not result in the kind of end use for the standards that it’s initial *sponsors* - the people who wrote and promulgate them – envisaged (Brandt and Clinton, 2002). The ways in which they are used are not always closely aligned to the intentions that lie behind them.

Some kinds of action or response are in close alignment. When university teacher-training programme leaders write or revise their curricula so that they ‘map onto’ the required professional standards, the work of the standards is being accomplished: the central tenets of their discourse of professionalism are in some ways being circulated and established. References to the standards within textbooks also helps establish the

network, although here the accomplishment of the standards might be seen as being somewhat inadvertent, even accidental. But at other times, people who 'could' and 'should' be being enrolled within the network are clearly not being sufficiently engaged, or interested, in order to get them to do so. This is why so many teacher educators, as well as trainee teachers, simply allow the standards to pass them by. They do not challenge or critique them; nor do they read and reflect on them: they simply ignore them.

Thus far, I have drawn on just two very small exchanges or interactions – two *literacy events* which revolve around particular *literacy practices* – that involve and envelop the LLUK standards. There are lots of others. And the role of the researcher, in this instance, is to slowly, painstakingly map out all of these tiny episodes and events, finding out who does actually read the standards and who does not, and what they do with them afterwards. Only then will it become possible to start to account for the power that such standards, within and through the social practices in which they are enfolded, actually embody. And this is important because the ways in which the standards can be said to be informing a discourse of professionalisation need to take account of the fact that many of the people who actually work in the lifelong learning sector do not read or even pay much meaningful attention to them. So where does this leave 'professionalism' as a concept or construct around which the practices of teachers – and teacher-educators – in the lifelong learning sector might be understood?

Definitions of professionalism within the lifelong learning sector workforce are at the same time relatively immature, and also contested. By immature I mean to refer to the fact that the profession is relatively new, in some senses unformed in terms of those paradigmatic characteristics of professionalism that tend to be posited as desirable for a profession to regard itself as fully formed and autonomous (Eraut, 1994; Taylor, 1997). And by contested I mean to refer to the fact that there are two significant discourses of professionalism within the lifelong learning sector that can be straightforwardly identified.

The first, and arguably longest-established, is a discourse that sees professionalism as emergent and developmental, bound up in the ways in which teachers in the sector understand their role in terms of pedagogy, assessment, their responsibilities to students and so forth (Bathmaker and Avis, 2005). This is a discourse that is acquired over time. In part this is due to the fact that for the vast majority of teachers in the sector, initial threshold professional qualifications are studied on a part-time in-service basis. And in part this is due to dominant employment patterns within the sector, characterised as the 'long interview': many teachers start working in the sector on a part-time or casual basis and over a further period of time receive more substantial and/or permanent employment contracts (Gleeson and James, 2007). Within this discourse, professional identity and status is seen as residing within professional knowledge and subject expertise, characterised by a high degree of autonomy that rests not only on expertise but also a freedom to exercise professional judgement that is based on experience. The second dominant discourse of professionalism is similarly easy to identify, and tends to be referred to as a managerialist discourse. This is a dominant discourse of professionalism that is tied up with audit cultures and human resource management (Garrick, 1998; Strathern, 2000). Within this discourse, professionalism is defined in terms of compliance and control. 'Being professional' becomes a euphemism for individual alignment to – if not necessarily uncritical support for – the managerialist ethos that can be seen as pervading working practices in the further education sector since the incorporation of colleges in 1992 (Shain and Gleeson, 1999).

The majority of college lecturers, however, do not tend to discuss their experiences of the conflicts that can occur between what they think is right for their students and what they think their managers are telling them to do, in terms of competing discourses of professionalism. In the real world of the further education college, both of these discourses represent bodies of tacit, not theoretical, knowledge (Eraut, 1994). Indeed, for many lecturers, the first – and sometimes only – opportunity that they have for discussing these themes in a considered and systematic manner occurs as an element of their part-time initial teacher training. So to what extent does the text of the LLUK standards successfully represent these – and perhaps other – discourses of professionalism?

Conclusions: professional standards, readership and ambiguity

The LLUK standards occupy a number of tones or *registers* (Swales, 1990). Some of them sit quite comfortably within a discourse of autonomous professionalism, referring to the use of, for example, specialist bodies of knowledge or expertise by lecturers. Examples include “use relevant theories of learning to support the development in practice of learning and teaching” (standard AP4.1), or “apply appropriate assessment methods to produce valid, reliable and sufficient evidence” (standard EP2.2). Such standards may be vague but it is hard to argue with the central theme that the professionalism of lecturers should rest in part on the application of specialist bodies of knowledge (Shulman, 1986). And at the same time, other standards work to position lecturers firmly within the organisational workplace practices that are characteristic of managerialist professionalism. Examples include “evaluate own contribution to the organisation’s quality cycle” (standard AP7.2), or “identify and use appropriate organisational systems for communicating with learners and colleagues” (standard BP3.5). In a sense, therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that the LLUK standards address both the kinds of professional behaviour that lecturers might value and espouse, as well as the kinds of professionalism that managerialist cultures rest on. From the *literacy studies* perspective that has been used here, however, some more complex issues emerge, which coalesce to form three further questions. These, with some possible responses, are discussed in turn.

Firstly, bearing in mind the ways by which the LLUK framework can be said to be attempting to combine two different readings or discourses of professionalism, an initial question might be: to what extent are the LLUK standards setting out to *persuade* readers of the case for both of these discourses? In answering this question, we can note the presence of a foreword written by the then government minister responsible for further education, references to the wider government legislation that contained the framework and to the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) on the one hand, and on the other the use of broad imperatives such as “teachers in the lifelong learning sector value all learners equally and individually”. Textual features such as these help render the text *persuasive* through the way in which the reader is positioned in relation to the dominant discourses that inhabit it (Gee, 2010; Murphy, 2001).

Secondly, mindful of the inherent fragilities of any text-based artefact, our next question might be: how successfully do the LLUK standards, as a text, capture or reify these discourses? In answering this question, we need to be mindful (as discussed above) of the very different ways in which different readers respond to the standards (Finlay et al., 2007; Gleeson and James, 2007; Lucas, 2007; Lucas and Nasta, 2010). These

differing responses to the standards reflect the inherent quality of any text: literacy studies theory reminds us that a text has no *fixed* meaning because each reader will bring her or his own experiences and knowledge to the act of reading and meaning making (Barton, 1994; Barton and Hamilton, 1998).

Thirdly, acknowledging the importance of readership and of the meanings that readers bring to a text, a final question might be: who actually reads these standards, and how do they access them? The empirical data that this paper rests on would seem to suggest that on the teacher-training programme being researched here, trainee teachers and teacher educators often give the standards in themselves only cursory treatment at best, and sometimes bypass them completely. The standards are sometimes foregrounded in the assessment process, but this by no means assures that they have been critically discussed (Tummons 2010, 2011). And other empirical research would seem to indicate that teachers in other professional and national contexts do the same (Fenwick, 2010; Mulcahy, 2011).

It is all well and good for academics and researchers to debate – at times in quite a heated fashion – the different ways by which the professional lives of lecturers in further education colleges are shaped by the LLUK framework, but none of these arguments make sense unless we have an understanding of who is actually reading them in the first place, and why. Do we read them in order to shape our profession, or do we simply cut and paste them, to comply with a quality assurance processes that allow our teacher-training courses to be appropriately endorsed? And when a new set of standards is established (as is currently anticipated within the UK lifelong learning sector), would we treat them any differently?

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