

COMPETING NOTIONS OF TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM

by

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## **Abstract**

While public school teachers in British Columbia are almost universally referred to as professionals, the meaning of teacher professionalism is not easily established nor widely agreed upon. In this study, I will argue that this lack of consensus is a major factor contributing to the ongoing political struggle over the control of public education in this province. To that end, I have attempted to develop an understanding of teacher professionalism and the differing and often competing ways in which it is conceptualized by various stakeholders in British Columbia's public education system. Using a conceptual framework based on the academic literature addressing professionalism in general and teacher professionalism more specifically, this study will critically analyze the perspectives of these stakeholders on multiple dimensions of teacher professionalism such as teacher autonomy and teacher regulation. Using case study methodology and critical discourse analysis, I address the following questions: (1) what discourses are competing in framing the central issues that define the current debate around teacher professionalism?, and (2) how do different stakeholders in the public education system in British Columbia use a particular discourse to frame central issues in the debate surrounding teacher professionalism, and for what reasons?

## **Preface**

This paper represents original and independent work done by the author, Dan Wyper.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

AGM	Annual General Meeting
BC	British Columbia
BCCT	British Columbia College of Teachers
BCPSEA	British Columbia Public School Employers' Association
BCPVPA	British Columbia Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association
BCSTA	British Columbia School Trustees Association
BCTF	British Columbia Teachers' Federation
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
K-12	Kindergarten to Grade 12
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
NDP	New Democratic Party
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PD	Professional Development
TRB	Teacher Regulation Branch

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## **Chapter One – Teacher Professionalism: Mapping a Contested Terrain**

### **Introduction**

This is a qualitative case study (Yin, 2009) undertaken in order to investigate the current debate in British Columbia (BC) regarding teacher professionalism by examining the ways in which central issues such as teacher autonomy and regulation are framed by competing discourses of professionalism. This debate has had implications on almost every facet of public education in BC, with particular implications for the role and status of public teachers (see Ball, 1990; Bottery, 2009; Evetts, 2011; Goodson, 2003; Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996; McNess, Broadfoot, & Osborne, 2003). Teachers, on one hand, have been seeking increased autonomy<sup>1</sup> and self-regulation<sup>2</sup> as an extension of this autonomy, a vision in which teachers play a pivotal and integral role in the provision of public education. From this perspective, teachers' professionalism should grant them a great deal of power to determine not only how their classrooms are run, but also how the educational system at large should operate. On the other hand, the provincial government and its bargaining agent, the British Columbia Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA), have suggested that the bureaucratic nature of public service necessarily limits teacher autonomy and that teachers are best regulated by an independent, external body, a vision in which teachers are part of an accountable and efficient bureaucracy. What makes this a compelling study is that both of these positions are justified by and founded upon distinctly different understandings of the notion of teacher professionalism. The nature of the tensions created by this debate, as well as the reasons underlying the position of each stakeholder, are topics worth exploring, as they reveal how these two groups (and others) use

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<sup>1</sup> Autonomy is defined by Freidson (2001) as "independence of judgment and freedom of action" (p. 122).

<sup>2</sup> Cruess, Johnston, and Cruess (2002) define self-regulation as "the privilege and obligation to set and maintain standards for education and training, entry into practice, and the standards of practice" (p. 209).

teacher professionalism as a pretext to frame their priorities and achieve their aims by influencing how educational policy is created and implemented. It is not, in actuality, the definition of teacher professionalism that is being debated, but rather a question of power – who should make the important decisions regarding the delivery of public education and the allocation of public resources? Broadly speaking, my goal in this study is to investigate how competing notions of professionalism figure into this political struggle over power and control in public education.

### **Research Problem: Purpose and Relevance of this Study**

The term *teacher professionalism* is complex and multi-dimensional, and brings to mind other issues such as teacher autonomy, regulation, and discipline. These issues are not merely abstract, academic distractions, but contentious topics with legal implications that have shaped the political landscape in which educational policy has been decided for decades (see Fleming, 2011). Recent examples include the dissolution of the British Columbia College of Teachers (BCCT), its replacement by the Teacher Regulation Branch (TRB), the legislative changes made to the *Teaching Profession Act*, and the arbitration that arose from one teacher's attempt to exercise her autonomy in opposition to the direction of her employer. The central issues in these cases, such as teacher regulation in the former and teacher autonomy in the latter, are topics that have defined a larger, political debate in BC over *who* will make important decisions regarding the future of public education and *how* these decisions will be made. Professionalism, as a discourse<sup>3</sup>, has become contested ground in a larger political struggle over public education; with

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<sup>3</sup> Fairclough (2005) defines *discourse* as simply “a particular way of representing certain parts or aspects of the (physical, social, psychological) world” (p. 925). Used here, the word discourse signifies that *professionalism* is one way to represent certain aspects of the educational world in BC. In other words, discourses of teacher professionalism provide lenses through which certain aspects of public education can be understood, from which conclusions can be drawn, and upon which positions can be taken.

no consensus on its definition, professionalism has become defined in different by different groups. Various stakeholders, such as teachers, educational administrators, politicians, and government bureaucrats, have all laid claim to different areas of this contested terrain, with varying degrees of success and justification. While these definitions of teacher professionalism have been used as levers to exert power over policy-making in education, a clear delineation of the meaning of teacher professionalism has not yet been established. For example, a teacher may claim that the tenets of teacher professionalism allow her to decide what to teach, and how, while the teacher's employer may argue that her professionalism requires that teacher practice be aligned with Ministry and/or school district objectives. The intent of this study is to map out this contested terrain in order to establish a better understanding of the underpinnings of this ongoing struggle over particular features of public education in BC, such as teacher regulation, teacher autonomy, teacher discipline and professional development, all of which revolve around how teacher professionalism is to be understood and actualized in practice. It is hoped that this will provide a new angle on "the complexities and frustrations of governance and labour relations that characterize the current [public education] system" (Fleming, 2011, p. 137).

The extent to which public teachers' activities and practices are seen to fit into a given discourse of professionalism will change depending on one's perspective and interests. The fact that different groups can approach the same issues (autonomy, regulation) and, using the same term (teacher professionalism), reach completely different, often contradictory conclusions is a fascinating phenomenon that opens a rich area of study and debate. For example, Ball (2009) points out how administrators may prefer the "post-professional" teacher who is "accountable and generically and primarily oriented to performance indicators, competition, comparison, and responsiveness" (p. 677). Teachers themselves prefer "authentic professionalism," which defines

teachers as “open, moral, emotionally invested, politically aware, acute, reflective, compromising and focused on agreement-making” (Ball, p. 677). Evetts (2009) sees traditional conceptions of professionalism such as “trust, discretion, and competence” being threatened by cost-cutting, neo-liberal bureaucrats (p. 28). For Poole (2008), the imposition of “heavy-handed accountability” means that “teachers’ work, once conceived as requiring high discretion and autonomy, is increasingly reduced to technical-rational conceptions of teaching and teachers are increasingly viewed as technicians” (p. 35). Ginsburg and Megahed (2009) have pointed out how, as an ideology, professionalism can be used to control teachers’ work by challenging their autonomy (p. 543) and that “historically and today ‘profession,’ ‘professionalization,’ and ‘professionalism,’ have punctuated the discourses about reforming teaching, teachers, and teacher education around the world” (p. 548). Finally, Stack and Mazawi (2009) have shown how recent discussions regarding the regulation of educational leaders reflect “the state’s attempt to create a system of control over the formulation and implementation of educational policies rooted in an econometric understanding of the goals of education,” which also happens to “manifest itself in the creation of political apparatuses that regulate the professional autonomy of educators and school leaders” (p. 75). These examples illustrate how competing groups have staked out their place in the debate by redefining teacher professionalism to align with and further their own interests.

In British Columbia, there are many voices competing to establish a particular understandings of teacher professionalism, and some voices are louder than others. Arguably, the loudest voice over the past 30 years has been that of the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation (BCTF), although as the employers’ bargaining agent, the BCPSEA has also become an increasingly vocal stakeholder group (Fleming, 2011). For example, the BCTF has argued that

teachers' professionalism entitles them to high levels of professional autonomy, which it has characterized as "an important source of strength in a public education system" (British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 2012b). To the contrary, the government's bargaining agent has suggested that teachers' professionalism requires them to align their practice with the organizational goals of the educational bureaucracy (BCPSEA, 2011d). These are but two examples of how professionalism can be *used* as what Anderson (2001) calls a "legitimizing discourse" (p. 211). Little attention has been paid to the question of how discourses of professionalism have been used *in BC*, and for what purposes.

The ways in which different stakeholder groups use competing discourses of teacher professionalism to further their aims will have powerful implications on the future of public education in British Columbia in terms of who controls what. For example, what would be the consequences for BC's educational system if the BCTF's vision of teacher professionalism were actualized, and teachers were given full and complete autonomy over their practice and professional development? The same question could be asked of the BCPSEA's position: how would the educational system change if teachers' professional autonomy was subjected to increased external pressure in the name of bureaucratic cost-effectiveness and standardization? Competing notions of teacher professionalism will play a significant role in determining how this debate unfolds and how public education in BC changes as a result; this study is an attempt to examine these competing notions.

### **Personal Motivation**

**Location.** I am a relatively new teacher who, after working at several different schools under varying types of contracts (teacher-on-call, long term teacher-on-call, temporary, and continuing), has recently secured a continuing position in a large secondary school in Vancouver,

BC. The school is a part of the public school system and as I have always worked in this system, my interest in this study is primarily with public schooling. While working as a teacher, I have also been enrolled at the University of British Columbia in a Master's Program, where I had the opportunity to hear Kit Krieger, former president of the BCTF and registrar of the now-defunct BCCT, speak about teacher regulation in BC and its implications for teacher professionalism. He began his talk with a simple observation: while other professionals such as doctors and lawyers display prominently their professional credentials (by hanging their degrees and professional certifications on the walls of their offices), it is a rare sight to see a teacher's professional credentials advertised in such a fashion. Thus was sparked an interest in teacher professionalism, and the motivation for writing this paper.

**Personal interest.** What I find interesting about teacher professionalism is its ambiguity, its contentious nature, and its implied contradictions. I have always felt that I am a professional, but I was unsure of what that meant. I view myself as a public servant, an employee of anyone who pays their provincial taxes, and thus necessarily accountable to them in my work. I also believe that my own competence, the training that I have received, and the unique relationships I form with students should allow me a certain amount of discretion in terms of what I teach and how I teach it. I have also understood labour unions and professional organizations as separate, mutually exclusive entities and I was not sure how I could belong to both. I felt that professionalism was a type of status or label; a profession was someone who had special privileges. However, if that is the case, what exactly qualifies one as a professional, and does one need to continually maintain that qualification? Reaping the rewards of professional status (such as autonomy, a fair salary and pension, rock-solid job security) without fully understanding the corresponding responsibilities (public accountability in the form of rigorous standardized testing,

an obligation to teach a standardized curriculum, and a certain amount of deference to the democratically elected politicians in the Ministry of Education) seemed to me to be the very essence of *un*professional behaviour.

**Why and how this study was conceived.** The more I read, the more I realized that there is no such thing as a unanimous, definitive understanding of professionalism. A personal memoir chronicling my struggles with defining teacher professionalism, however, is not something I was interested in writing, so I decided to look to other groups and organizations to see how they define professionalism, why they might emphasize certain aspects of professionalism over others, and how the word “professionalism” might be used as a means to achieve particular ends (increased autonomy, or increased bureaucratic efficiency for example). As I began to discover, the politics of public education are multi-dimensional – there are many different groups (teachers, administrators, politicians, parents, students, trustees, and academics) who all hold different perspectives. This study, then, is an attempt to understand, compare, contrast, and perhaps reconcile these perspectives in order to gain a better understanding of professionalism as it fits into the largely political world of public education.

## **Chapter Overview**

Chapter Two contextualizes the current debate surrounding teacher professionalism in BC by providing a historical and political background of recent, relevant events. A detailed set of research questions based on this context is then presented and justified in order to give my study direction and purpose. Chapter Three presents a conceptual framework based on a review of the academic literature dealing with the diverse dimensions of professionalism (in general) and teacher professionalism (in particular). In Chapter Four I lay out a practical methodology for the analysis of these research questions, as well as an explanation of my reasons for adopting such a

research methodology. Chapter Five is dedicated to presenting and discussing the results of my data collection and analysis. Chapter Six concludes my paper with a discussion of the implications of my findings, limitations of my study, and possible directions for future research.

## Chapter Two – Context and Research Questions

### Teacher Professionalism: The BC Context

Since the election of the Liberal government in 2001, there has been a great deal of mutual antagonism and distrust between the BCTF – which Fleming (2011) refers to as a perpetual and self-appointed “system critic” (p. 120) – and the provincial government – which “remains silent most of the time about education,” staying “off the educational skyline by choice” while “the resulting vacuum in leadership is evident for all to see” (p. 127). Fleming goes on to state that “opportunities to pursue sound educational policies, or sound bargaining policies, are slight when the fundamental calculations remain political and, more often than not, vituperative on both sides” (p. 126). The disagreement has been far-reaching and has involved almost every aspect of public education – funding, class sizes, standardized testing, curriculum, etc. (Fleming, 2011). With respect to teacher professionalism, however, there has been little debate over a precise definition. Rather, offshoots of professionalism such as teacher autonomy, teacher regulation, and professional development are fought over extensively, with vague references to teacher professionalism used by both sides to advance their claims (see Chapter Five). While there is little explicit debate surrounding teacher professionalism, *per se*, many assumptions stemming from differing understandings of teacher professionalism punctuate the debate, with both sides using their understanding to frame the issues in distinctive and often contradictory ways.

According to Poole (2007), “an analysis of the discourse and power relations between the BC Teachers’ Federation (BCTF) and government reveals a neo-liberal<sup>4</sup> agenda on the part of

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<sup>4</sup> “Neo-liberals conceptualize education as a commodity to be bought by customers (students and parents) and sold by suppliers (schools and others). From a market perspective, schools are training grounds for future workers and consumers, as well a multi-billion dollar industry offering opportunities for profit. Efficiency, accountability for student outcomes (usually measured by standardized test scores and other measures like graduation rates), choice for

government and anti-neo-liberalism on the part of the BCTF” (p. 9). This ideological disagreement includes differing interpretations and framings of professionalism in teaching, as reflected by Evett’s (2009) claim that “relationships between professionals and clients are being converted<sup>5</sup> into customer relations through the establishment of quasi-markets, customer satisfaction surveys and evaluations, and quality measures” (p. 28). This is just one example of how an emphasis on external accountability designed for the purposes of quality control of service providers (schools and teachers) and their products (efficiency and effectiveness of their programs and teaching practices in terms of measurable educational outcomes) offered in an open quasi-market can change the meaning of teacher professionalism. Attempts by educational stakeholders in BC to reframe professionalism have profound implications for the future of public education, as they are directly related to the question of who makes important decisions regarding the allocation of resources and the delivery of what is essentially a public resource.

This chapter provides the historical and political context for my study, introduces several of the major stakeholders that have participated in this debate, such as the BCTF, the provincial government, its bargaining agent (the BCPSEA), school trustees (the British Columbia School Trustees Association), and school administrators (the British Columbia Principals’ and Vice-Principals’ Association), and familiarizes the reader with what Fleming (2011) calls “the turbulent nature of organizational relationships in public schools” (p. 158). This will provide the context for my research questions, which will also be identified in this chapter.

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parents (e.g., charter schools, vouchers, within-district school choice), privatization (e.g., public funding for private schools, user-pay fees, contracting with private firms to operate public schools, private-public partnerships for school construction, school-business partnerships), and attacks on teachers’ unions are hallmarks of neo-liberalism in education” (Poole, 2007, p. 1).

<sup>5</sup> From “the traditional relationship of employer–professional trust” (Evetts, 2011, p. 416).

**The Sooke arbitration and teacher autonomy.** A prime example of the relevance of teacher professionalism and the way it is framed occurred in 2007, when a Sooke District teacher refused to administer a district-wide, teacher-developed assessment called the District Assessment of Reading Team. The Sooke School District disciplined her for “insubordination because of ‘deliberate and overt refusal’ to follow the principal’s direction” (Dorsey, p. 1). The union grieved the next day, claiming that “the employer violated [the teacher’s] rights contrary to Article F3 [of the then-current collective bargaining agreement<sup>6</sup>] and did not have just and reasonable cause for any discipline” (p. 32). In other words, the teacher “exercised her individual<sup>7</sup> professional autonomy in a professional manner to refuse to administer what she considered to be an inappropriate assessment for her class” (p. 33). Furthermore, the union asserted that the ability of an administrator to “direct a teacher to do an assessment or use particular readings or evaluation techniques that find favour, regardless of the teacher’s professional judgement about the teacher’s own skills and the need of the students, diminishes both the professionalism and autonomy of teaching recognized and agreed in the collective agreement” (p. 36). In other words, limiting autonomy can be seen as de-professionalizing teachers’ work, a notion that will be returned to later in this paper.

The Sooke School District countered with the argument that “the education system and Article F3 of the collective agreement are not intended to protect the idiosyncratic judgments of individual teachers” and that there is nothing in the collective bargaining agreement stating that

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<sup>6</sup> Article F3 then stated (as it still does) that “the Board recognizes and respects the professionalism of teachers covered under this collective agreement. Teachers shall, within the bounds of the prescribed curriculum and consistent with recognized effective educational practice, have individual professional autonomy” (Dorsey, 2009, p. 1).

<sup>7</sup> The focus here is on individual autonomy, rather than collective autonomy. This is an important distinction, one which will be discussed later in this paper (see page 30).

teachers do *not* have to administer tests (Dorsey, 2009, p. 36). Furthermore, they quote the BC School Regulations, which sets out a list of teacher duties:

The duties of a teacher include [...] (a) providing teaching and other educational services, including advice and instructional assistance, to the students assigned to the teacher, as required or assigned by the board or minister; [...] (g) evaluating educational programs for students as required by the minister or the board. (Dorsey, 2009, p. 37)

That is, the employers claimed they were within their legal rights in directing the teacher to perform the assessment, and as nothing in the collective bargaining agreement stated otherwise, their discipline was warranted.

Although the arbitrator, Dorsey (2009) recognized that “professional judgment is a critical element in the quality of public education” (p. 40), he nonetheless ruled in favour of the employer. He states that “other professions are self-regulating within a regulatory regime and maintain and reinforce their professional autonomy through an effective system of self-regulation that imposes and enforces standards, ethics, quality service, professional development and cost-containment for the public being served,” but “teachers do not have this” (p. 40). As such, teachers are subject to “direction and discipline by employers” in the “highly structured regulatory regime in which they work” (p. 40).

It would appear that this case delivers a significant blow to teachers’ claims to professionalism in BC. The arbitration pointed to a significant tension between the demands of the bureaucracy (a principal’s direction, in this example) and central tenets of teacher autonomy (that teachers should decide how, what, and whether to assess students). Teachers’ autonomy has been, at worst, negated by the demands of a highly bureaucratic system, and at best, redefined in

the context of an educational system that Dorsey (2009) characterizes as a “bureaucratic professional educational enterprise” (p. 41).

By framing teacher autonomy as secondary to the bureaucratic nature of public education (and allowable only to the extent that the bureaucratic framework permits), the Sooke arbitration provides an important context for the recent debate surrounding teacher autonomy. Dorsey (2009) demonstrates how the actualization of an important dimension of teacher professionalism such as autonomy may create a “clash of professional and bureaucratic cultures” (p. 44), wherein teacher professionalism does not always trump a board of education’s “responsibilities and obligations” to enforce an “accountable framework” under statutory regulations (p. 44). Autonomy, however, is not the only dimension of professionalism that has been placed under scrutiny in BC. Teacher self-regulation is also closely linked to teacher professionalism, and the best place to start a discussion of this regulation is with the 1987 creation of the BCCT.

**The British Columbia College of Teachers.** If self-regulation is a prerequisite for professionalism, BC public teachers took a step toward professionalism in 1987 with the creation of the BCCT. According to the University of Victoria educational historian Thomas Fleming (2011), the 1987 institution of the *Teaching Profession Act* established the BCCT as “a self-regulating organization intended to certify educators and represent both public and professional interests” (p. 117). Politically, however, the founding of the College proved to be highly controversial, and “soon became just another in a constellation of issues dividing government and teachers” (p. 117). The BCTF’s opposition was almost immediate, and it “portrayed the College’s creation as a government effort to undermine the federation’s influence in representing teachers’ interests and issued a two-page circular to its members outlining why the federation did not want the College” (p. 117). When this failed to derail the College, the BCTF realized it “had

but two options – either boycott the College or control the College” (p. 117). It chose the latter, and “BCTF-backed candidates filled all 15 elected seats on the 20-seat council (Fleming, 2011, p. 117). The fact that the creation of a self-regulating professional body created such controversy and political opposition among members of the BCTF is a prime example of how contentious the issue of teacher professionalism has become in the world of public education in British Columbia. It also reflects the extent to which both parties (teachers and the government) struggle to control the system, and how teacher professionalism figures into this struggle quite prominently. Within the BCCT, this struggle was ongoing for more than 20 years, but has recently reached a conclusion.

In 2010, 11 members of the College wrote to the Ministry of Education questioning the “fundamental governance issues within the College that impaired the capacity of that entity to properly discharge the responsibilities assigned to it by the Legislature” (Avison, 2010, p. 4). In response, the government asked Don Avison to prepare a report, which was published as *A College Divided: Report of the Fact Finder on the BC College of Teachers*.

The findings of the report were not kind to the BCCT or the BCTF. Avison (2010) states: “the blunt reality is that, when compared against the performance of other professional bodies, the College of Teachers falls well short of the standard consistently achieved by others and which ought to be expected of them” (p. 28). Specifically, Avison compared the BCCT to organizations such as “the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the Law Society of British Columbia and the Chartered Accountants of British Columbia,” and found that all three had:

...comparatively stronger mechanisms for the certification of members, comprehensive requirements for on-going professional development of members and discipline processes

that, by comparison, are more responsive to the public interest and certainly more transparent than what can be found at the College of Teachers. (p. 27)

Avison noted that these shortcomings are entirely due to “the BCTF’s intrusion upon the capacity of the BCCT to be properly regarded as an independent entity responsible for the self-regulation of the teaching profession” (p. 32). He concluded that the College needed to be “substantially re-structured” (p. 32).

Apparently, the government was listening. In 2011, they tabled Bill 12, which “repeals the *Teaching Profession Act* [...] and replaces it with a new *Teachers Act*,” establishing “new certification and discipline processes for public school teachers and independent school teachers” (Bill 12, 2011). The new legislation dissolved the BCCT and replaced it with the BC Teachers’ Council, on which the BCTF no longer holds a majority. Furthermore, the new Act created the TRB, which according to the Ministry’s website, has a “mandate to regulate educators and is empowered through the *Teachers Act* to ensure that educators who work with students in BC classrooms are competent and suitable for the important role they play in society” (BC Ministry of Education, 2013). This amounts to an entirely new control mechanism explicitly founded by the Ministry of Education to exert control over the teaching profession, which is significantly different from the previous system in which teachers held the regulatory reins. Under the *Teaching Profession Act*, a majority of the governing council of the BCCT were teachers, who thus essentially regulated their own profession. Now, under the *Teachers Act*, powers of regulation (such as teacher certification and discipline) are no longer held by teachers themselves, but by appointees of the Ministry of Education. For BC teachers, self-regulation has been replaced with external regulation by the state. Given that self-regulation is an important

dimension of professionalism (as discussed in the next chapter), this replacement has important implications for teacher professionalism in BC.

Both the Sooke arbitration and the creation and dissolution of the BCCT provide compelling evidence for the contentious and relevant nature of the debate surrounding central dimensions of teacher professionalism. These dimensions, such as teacher autonomy and regulation, determine who controls teachers. But as primary agents in the provision of public education, should teachers not have the right to decide what students learn? What constitutes inappropriate behaviour for a teacher? Who should decide what is considered pedagogical best practice in a classroom, and how can (or should?) this practice be adhered to? These are fundamental questions that must be addressed by a public education system, and to answer them, a complete understanding of how teacher professionalism should look, in reality, is required. These two examples also hint at some other realities of public education in this province: the bureaucratic nature of educational organization and the strong influence of the BCTF. Each of these will now be addressed in turn.

**Teaching in a bureaucracy.** The current scope of professional self-regulation and autonomy in a bureaucratic context has been defined by the BCPSEA as a balance between teachers' autonomous discretion and a responsibility stemming from the publically funded nature of their jobs. In a document "to promote discussion on select employment matters at issue in the K-12 public education sector," attention is drawn to the fact that teachers (unlike some other professionals) are employees as well as professionals (BCPSEA, 2011c, p. 1). The document goes on to state that "of all the criteria that are said to define a profession (which generally include shared standards of practice, monopoly over service, long periods of training, etc.), a high degree of professional autonomy is the one criterion that is most at odds with the education

profession” (p. 2). The document also claims that ineffective regulation by the BCCT (as reported by Avison, 2010) has further weakened teachers’ claims to professionalism: “teachers, seeing themselves as autonomous professionals, take issue at having their authority limited by what they perceive to be a bureaucratic, regulated, accountability-driven and assessment-focused education system” (BCPSEA, 2011c, p. 5). Of course, the groups represented by the BCPSEA (school employers) make up this bureaucracy, and the authority to which the excerpt refers is precisely the control over public education that the BCPSEA, using a particular discourse of teacher professionalism, seeks to exert. For the BCPSEA, notions such as accountability and standards-based practice characterize teacher professionalism. Meanwhile, teachers use a much different discourse of professionalism to make the same claim, one in which teacher autonomy is pivotal.

**The BCTF and teacher professionalism.** The BCTF has been a consistent and influential voice in BC’s education system since long before the creation of the BCCT (Fleming, 2011). In fact, the same bill that introduced the BCCT to the teaching profession in 1987 also gave teachers the choice of belonging to either a professional association or a union: “ignoring all evidence to the contrary, government presumed that teachers would choose a model of professional organization over the protection of trade union status”<sup>8</sup> (Fleming, 2011, p. 114). This did not happen, and ever since, the loudest voice in BC’s educational system has been the BCTF. While its primary role is to represent teachers, the BCTF is also a highly political organization. Fleming has even suggested that the BCTF acts more like the official opposition than the Official Opposition (p. 76).

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<sup>8</sup> This legislation also introduced a distinction between teachers and administrators, who would henceforth be represented by a separate organization, the British Columbia Principals’ and Vice-Principals’ Association, rather than the teachers’ union.

In terms of building teacher professionalism, the BCTF has at times played a constructive role. For example, it did much in the 1960s and 70s to help teachers “professionalize” when it “encouraged its membership to burnish their educational qualifications through in-service, specialist training, and university study” (Fleming, 2011, p. 70). However, Naylor (2002) claims that “enhancing teacher professionalism has always held a subordinate and acquiescent place in union structures” (p. 12). Instead, the union has focussed on traditional industrial goals, such as political activism and collective bargaining. For Naylor, this is problematic, and he suggests that focussing more on professional issues (which implies a concern for the improvement of education for children) will help counteract the belief that unions exist only to protect the vested interests of teachers rather than the public. Naylor further asserts that professionalism is about leadership, inquiry, and collaboration, as well as “engaging in dialogue and reflection on areas such as pedagogy, school organization, and educational change” (p. 12). However, it is also about helping to “enable the teaching profession and teachers’ organizations to be viewed more positively than they currently are” (p. 12).

As the only organization in BC representing public teachers, the BCTF’s role has been to defend and promote teacher professionalism. While it is clear that the BCTF subscribes to a discourse of professionalism much different from that of the Ministry of Education, a discourse in which teachers’ professional knowledge, practical expertise, and post-secondary training should entitle them to full status as professionals, it seems that the BCTF’s true aim is to obtain the power and autonomy that comes with this full status. While this is not to say that teachers should necessarily have full control over the education *system*, they do consider themselves as fully autonomous professionals whose decisions regarding pedagogical practice and student learning should not be questioned by those outside the profession. Unfortunately for the plight of

teacher professionalism in BC, the union falls into a trap – by advocating first and foremost for individual teachers, its credibility as an advocate for the profession has been called into question (see Avison, 2010). While the BCTF is certainly an organization of teachers, the *professional* nature of the organization is not easy to establish. As will be seen in the next chapter, the predominant view of professionalism as revealed by the academic literature suggests that self-regulation is a pre-requisite to professionalism (see Chapter Three, p. 36), and as long as the BCTF continues to oppose any form of external or internal professional control, they will be at odds with this prevailing view. The literature is clear: without self-regulation, teachers in BC are limited to a kind of bureaucratic professionalism in which individual and collective autonomy are severely impeded by the demands of the educational bureaucracy.

As I have suggested so far in this chapter, the ways in which teachers are regulated in BC, and the extent to which their autonomy should be exercised, is highly debatable. The complexity of the debate is heightened when one considers that teachers are in a complicated position: they are both employees in an educational bureaucracy that need to be held accountable, and members of a union of autonomous professionals who are deserving of public trust and respect. The resolution of this debate is not a trivial matter: it impacts the negotiation process between teachers and the province, and has broader implications on the provision of public education in BC in terms of who controls its development and delivery. Nor is this resolution a simple matter, and as such merits the scrutiny of critical study. One way to provide this scrutiny is to examine how different discourses of teacher professionalism factor into the debate. Different groups stake out their terrain under banners of teacher professionalism that look quite dissimilar – by emphasizing different dimensions of contrasting discourses of professionalism, these groups vie for control over the provision of education: a quintessential

public good. In understanding the complicated nature of the debate, and how it may influence the future of public education, a detailed, rigorous and thorough examination of these discourses is a relevant and fruitful place to start.

### **Research Questions**

The Sooke case and the dissolution of the BCCT are specific examples of how discourses of teacher professionalism have figured into larger discussions surrounding the role of teachers in the educational system and how teachers might exert power over that system. I seek to develop an understanding of how teacher professionalism is perceived and actualized more generally by various educational stakeholders in BC. To establish this broader perspective, and to provide a framework for my study, I approach the subject from two directions. The first focuses on identifying and discussing the central issues in the debate surrounding teacher professionalism. These focal points provide concepts against which to compare and differentiate discourses of professionalism. In this regard, the following set of questions guided my inquiry:

1. What discourses are competing in framing the central issues that define the current debate around teacher professionalism in British Columbia? How and by whom are the contours of the debate about teacher professionalism defined by these central issues, and for what purposes?

This first set of questions is addressed by an in-depth look at the academic literature pertaining to professionalism (in general) and teacher professionalism (in particular), and provides a theoretical foundation on which to base my analysis of major educational stakeholder groups in BC.

The second part of my research focuses on the perspectives of these stakeholder groups regarding teacher professionalism. Their perspectives provide examples of how competing

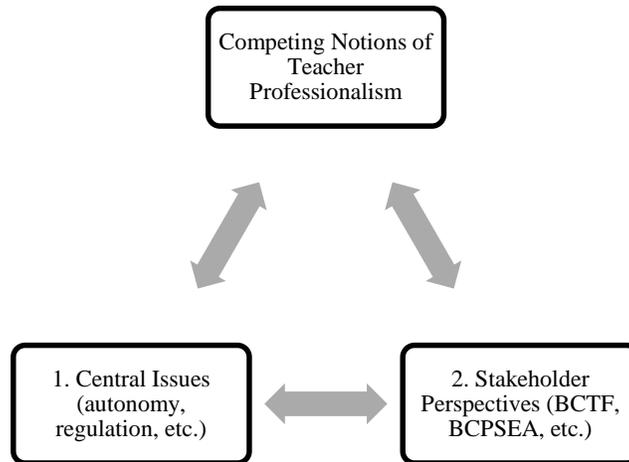
discourses may frame the central issues in the debate. By including as many stakeholder groups as possible, my goal was to conduct as balanced and comprehensive an analysis as possible.

Much of the current literature focuses on the conflict between the BCTF and the BCPSEA, but I have attempted to expand on this by including other stakeholder groups in my analysis. This process is guided by a second set of research questions:

2. How do different stakeholders in the public education system in British Columbia, such as the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF), the British Columbia Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA), the provincial government, the British Columbia School Trustees Association (BCSTA), and the British Columbia Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association (BCPVPA), *use* a particular discourse of professionalism to frame central issues in the debate surrounding teacher professionalism, and for what reasons? What is at stake for each group, and how does their use of discourse illuminate and explain the larger political struggle over public education in BC?

The primary difference between these two sets of questions is that the first is not concerned with stakeholder perspectives *per se*, but rather with a more general analysis of central issues pertaining to teacher professionalism (such as teacher autonomy and regulation), while the second set of questions focus on stakeholders and their specific perspectives on these issues.

That being said, the two components of my study as defined by these questions are not mutually exclusive. Examining stakeholders' perspectives (through document analysis) allows me to shed light on the central issues in the debate, as well as the reasons why some issues are present in the debate while others are absent. These issues are in turn used to examine stakeholders' perspectives (see Figure 1). Both sets of research questions lead to a better understanding of teacher professionalism in British Columbia.



*Figure 1.* Two sets of research questions.

So far, I have established the relevance of my study by introducing the contested terrain of teacher professionalism in BC and providing two sets of research questions to guide my analysis of this contested terrain. The first set of questions is addressed by studying the academic literature on teacher professionalism, which is the topic of the next chapter.

### **Chapter Three – Literature Review and Conceptual Framework**

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the academic literature pertaining to (teacher) professionalism and to develop a conceptual framework on which to base the rest of my study. The chapter begins with a very brief etymological and historical introduction to the terms ‘professionalism,’ ‘professional,’ and ‘profession.’ The next part summarizes five important dimensions of professionalism (in general) that are found in the mostly sociological literature. The third section presents and discusses a definition of professionalism that Freidson (2001) refers to as “the Third Logic.” The fourth section attempts to integrate the first three sections into a working definition of professionalism that is later used for the analysis, interpretation, and discussion of my research questions. The fifth section describes how different meanings of professionalism as identified in the literature review are relevant in discussing the work of public school teachers. Finally, the chapter concludes with an outline of two dominant discourses of teacher professionalism, answering my first set of research questions and setting up the conceptual framework to guide the second phase of my investigation: a critical analysis of documents reflecting various stakeholders’ perspectives on the teacher professionalism debate.

#### **What is Professionalism?**

According to Demirkasmoğlu (2010), the words ‘professionalism,’ ‘professional,’ and ‘profession’ have their etymological roots in the Latin word *profess*, which relates to possessing and sharing knowledge: “to be a professional or a professor was to profess to be an expert in some skill or field of knowledge” (p. 2048). While noting that “profession in its modern usage first came into prominence during industrialization,” Sciulli and Halley (2009) provide more detail as to its etymological roots in claiming that “all Western-language usages of the term profession, including English-language usages, stem from the same Latin root, *profiteor* and

*profiteri*,” which “denote simply that one avows, confesses or professes something publicly, whether a learned discipline, a sentiment (friendship), or an aspiration (to volunteer evidence, enter a candidacy, or practice a trade)” (p. 208).

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, sociologists defined professionalism as a set of traits and characteristics (such as expertise, public trust, abstract professional knowledge, etc.) that differentiated a profession from other occupations (Runté, 1995), which Martimianakis, Maniate, and Hodges (2009) call a “checklist conception of professionalism” (p. 831). This conception was based on a series of case studies that sought to distil professionalism into an easily defined set of criteria:

According to these studies, professions were organised bodies of experts who applied esoteric knowledge to particular cases. They had elaborate systems of instruction and training, together with entry by examination and other formal prerequisites. They normally possessed and enforced a code of ethics or behaviour. (Abbott, 1988 as quoted in Martimianakis et al., 2009, p. 831)

However, “given this model’s inability to precisely define relevant traits, their interaction, or their origins, trait models have been completely discredited” (Runté, 1995). Sociologists have since turned to a “structural-functional model of professionalism” in which professionals have a “monopoly over a body of theoretical knowledge” wherefrom a professional’s rights and responsibilities originate (Runté, 1995). This model focuses on the role of a professional in a social and collective context rather than on individual traits of the professional (Martimianakis et al., 2009). Both the checklist conception and the structural-functional model, however, lack “explanatory power in terms of *how* professional behaviours actually arise” and neglect “the influences of context, institutions, and socio-economic and political concerns” (Martimianakis et

al., 2009, p. 832, emphasis in original). As a result, recent definitions have reconceptualized professionalism as a “social construct,”<sup>9</sup> a “social contract,”<sup>10</sup> an “ideal of morality and integrity” (Cruess, Johnston, & Cruess, 2002, 209), an “ideology”<sup>11</sup> and most often, a “discourse” (Anderson, 2001; Ball, 1990;2009; Evetts, 2009;2011; Lindblad & Lindblad, 2009; McNess, Broadfoot & Osborn, 2003). Some suggest that “there is no such thing as a profession” and that “the only feature that ever really distinguished the professions from other occupations was the ‘professional’ label itself” (Runté, 2009). Nonetheless, recent events in BC show how contentious and powerful this label has become, highlighting the importance of understanding its meaning.

Like any complex concept, there is a great deal of literature dedicated to defining teacher professionalism, and competing notions have resulted in a lack of consensus over what exactly constitutes ‘professionalism.’ The purpose of this section is to outline the academic discussion that has taken place regarding notions of professionalism in order to establish and define concepts that will be relevant to my eventual examination and critique of stakeholder perspectives. These concepts will also be used to create a working definition of professionalism, which will in turn be used to examine how professionalism is defined in an educational context and to establish two dominant, competing discourses framing the notion of teacher professionalism. These competing discourses will eventually form a basis to generate the codes, categories, and key terms that I will use to critically analyze the perspectives of different educational stakeholders regarding teacher professionalism.

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<sup>9</sup> As opposed to “a stable construct that can be isolated, taught, and assessed”; rather as “a socially constructed interaction” (Martimianikis et al., 2009, p. 835).

<sup>10</sup> More specifically, professionalism is seen as a social contract that exists between professions and the public which “governs professionals’ behavior and represents the applied morality of the profession” and which serves as “an important part of the public’s expectations of the profession” (Cruess et al., 2002, p. 209).

<sup>11</sup> Based on an “ideological claim of collective devotion to that transcendent value and, more importantly, the right to serve it independently when the practical demands of patrons and clients stifle it” (Freidson, 2001, p. 122-123).

Although different authors refer to certain aspects of professionalism in various ways, these components can nonetheless be categorized into several common themes (Martimianakis et al., 2009). There is some overlap among categories and strong links between them, but professionalism can generally be said to have five elements, or dimensions: 1) an orientation toward public service, 2) high task complexity requiring both theoretically and practically grounded expertise and knowledge, 3) a code of ethics or conduct, 4) discretionary judgment and individual autonomy, and 5) collective autonomy supported by self-regulation.

### **Five Dimensions of Professionalism**

**Public accountability.** According to Cruess, Johnston, and Cruess (2002), members of a profession serve others by “consistently placing the interests of individual patients and society above their own” (p. 209), which, for Evetts (2011), explains how professions contribute to the “stability and civility of social systems” (p. 8). In an educational context, this dimension of professionalism manifests itself in what Hargreaves and Goodson (1996) think “teacher professionalism should mean in a complex, modern age: ... opportunities and expectations to engage with the *moral and social purposes* and value of what teachers teach [and] a commitment to active *care* and not just anodyne *service* for students” (p. 20-21, emphasis in original). In British Columbia, the public service undertaken by teachers, as defined by the School Act (1996), is “to enable all learners to become literate, to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society and a prosperous and sustainable economy” (p. 11). Ball (2003) characterizes this public service as “highly personal, expressed in the lexicons of belief and commitment, service and even love, and of mental health and emotional well-being” (p. 216).

Lindblad and Lindblad (2009), however, have challenged the status of professionals as “altruistic heroes of modern society” (p. 759), suggesting that professions are concerned as much with protecting their own interests as those of the public. In the medical field, for example, Cruess et al. (2002) point out how professionalism has been weakened by “the public perception that medicine failed to self-regulate in a way that can guarantee competence, and that it put its own interests above that of patients and the public” (p. 210). This emphasizes the importance of professions being accountable not only to themselves and their profession, but perhaps most importantly, to the public.

**Expertise and knowledge.** In order for a particular occupation to be defined as a profession, “official recognition that the occupation uses in its work a complex body of formal knowledge and skill that commands abstract concepts or theories and requires the exercise of a considerable amount of discretion” is required (Freidson, 2001, p. 83). For Ball (2009) this forms a very important aspect of “authentic professionalism,” which is said to rest on “ambiguity and pluralism,” where the ambiguity comes from “a moral landscape that allows space for moral uncertainty” and a need for “communal and internal dialogues” in order to deploy “moral knowledge” (p. 668). In contrast, pluralism “returns moral responsibility for action to its natural bearer: the acting individual” (Ball, 2009, 668). In other words, highly complex situations do not always lend themselves to simple, black-or-white solutions, but are instead characterized by many layers of uncertainty and doubt. These situations are said to be the domain of the professions.

According to Bottery (2009), the ambiguity of educational work stems from a need to balance the voices and needs of diverse stakeholders. Abstract theories, their application in practice, and the ambiguity and pluralism that accompany them require high levels of

competence from professionals in providing public service, which in turn should generate public trust. As a result, “externally imposed rules (from states or organizations) governing the work [of professionals] are minimized” (Evetts, 2011, p. 10). This exemption from external regulation is considered to be a privilege, not a right. So long as professionals are demonstrably committed to competence, integrity, morality, altruism, and the public good, they shall be granted with autonomy and the privilege of self-regulation (Cruess et al., 2002). This is all possible (and necessary) due to “the complexity of the specialized knowledge which each profession controls” (Cruess et al., p. 208). For Foucault, as cited in Lindblad and Lindblad (2009), “professionalism becomes a ‘new micro-physics of power,’ indeed the quintessentially modern mode of wielding power” and “knowledge is a power at work in professional practice” (p. 761). That is, the expertise and knowledge held by professionals is the source of whatever power they may possess, which justifies the autonomy and discretionary judgment they are said to deserve.

**A code of ethics.** For Cruess et al. (2002), professionalism is not something that can be realized, but an ideal to which professionals should aspire, and a code of ethics is the most effective way to define this ideal. A code of ethics provides language for a social contract that exists between professions and the public, and as such it “governs professionals’ behavior and represents the applied morality of the profession,” which serves as “an important part of the public’s expectations of the profession” (p. 209). David (2000) seconds the importance of a code of ethics, suggesting that the ethical nature of professionalism “calls for expression in a code of practice” (p. 23).

Whether defined as a code of ethics or a code of practice, Freidson (2001) proposes two purposes for such codes: they “persuade the public that the formulation of ethical standards justifies trust” and “provide practitioners with considered opinions, sometimes very detailed and

systematic about the ethics of actions taken in the course of their work” (p. 214-215). The codes must also be “vigorously (though sensitively)” enforced, otherwise becoming “mere rhetoric” (p. 216). Ideally, this enforcement is carried out *by* the profession, *for* the profession, and forms a kind of internal or self-regulation, ruling out a need for imposed regulation from outside the profession.

**Discretionary judgment and individual autonomy.** Professionals offer public service and accountability, expertise in highly complex situations, and a code of ethics to formalize their contribution. The public reciprocates by providing professionals with a certain amount of freedom, both individually (for the professional) and collectively (for the profession). Professionals are thus granted a high degree of individual autonomy and trust in their discretionary judgment. This autonomy, and the power that comes with it, is justified by the first three dimensions of professionalism.

But what is ‘discretionary judgment’ or ‘individual autonomy’? Freidson (2001) provides thorough definitions, delineating “discretionary specialization” from “mechanical specialization.” What distinguishes discretionary from mechanical specialization is “the fact that the tasks it involves, however narrow, minute, detailed, or ‘specialized’ the range, are tasks in which discretion or fresh judgment must often be exercised if they are to be performed successfully” (p. 23). Furthermore, “the productivity of [...] discretionary specialization by definition lies in its capacity to be flexible and adaptive in dealing with qualitative differences among the individual tasks” (p. 111-112). If professionals are to engage in complex work defined by Ball’s (2009) ambiguous moral landscape, they must have the flexibility and authority provided by their autonomy. For Evetts (2011), once education, training, and experience are achieved, the exercise of discretion based on competences is deserving of special status. Freidson

takes this idea further, describing a profession as “a secular priesthood” that can claim “independence of judgment and freedom of action rather than mere faithful service” due to their promotion of “transcendent and self-evidently desirable values” (p. 122). Freidson also suggests that underneath this role is an “ideological claim of collective devotion to that transcendent value and, more importantly, the right to serve it independently when the practical demands of patrons and clients stifle it” (p. 122-123).

**Self-regulation and collective autonomy.** Cruess et al. (2002) define self-regulation as “the privilege and obligation to set and maintain standards for education and training, entry into practice, and the standards of practice” (p. 209). Evetts (2011) links self-regulation to what she calls “optimistic professionalism” which allows for “decentralized occupational control and regulation” by the profession (p. 10). This self-regulation, which Freidson (2001) calls an “occupationally controlled division of labor” (p. 55), is for him the single most important defining characteristic of a profession, something so important that without it, professionalism does not exist:

Professionalism may be said to exist when an organized occupation gains the power to determine who is qualified to perform a defined set of tasks, to prevent all others from performing that work, and to control the criteria by which to evaluate performance. (p. 12)

In other words, *the* defining characteristic of a profession is the ability to control the parameters of a particular set of tasks (an occupation). It is both the cause and the effect of the other four dimensions, and as shall be argued below, is also the dimension to which teachers in British Columbia have the weakest claim.

The abovementioned dimensions are distilled into Table 1 below, and although professionalism is more than a simple list of requirements, this is a useful place to start.

Table 1

*A Normative Definition of Professionalism*

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Why is it important?</b>
Public accountability	The need for a profession to justify the trust it is given by the public.	Professionals work for the public first, and for themselves second.
Expertise & knowledge	The need for a profession to seek extensive and ongoing training.	Professionals work in highly complex, morally ambiguous environments.
Code of ethics, conduct, or practice	The need for a profession to explicitly state how members will behave.	The rights and responsibilities of a professional must be grounded in a formalized document.
Individual autonomy	The right given to professionals to act on their own judgement and discretion.	In order to properly carry out their jobs in a highly complex environment, professionals must be able to exercise discretionary judgment.
Self-regulation	The right given to a profession to control and oversee its own members.	Public accountability must be ensured by the profession itself, rather than the state or any other organization.

**Professionalism as a Social Construct – Freidson’s Third Logic**

The preceding sections describe the five widely accepted dimensions of professionalism, but professionalism is not something to be defined solely by characteristics, traits, or roles within society. Martimianakis et al. (2009) suggest that focusing on such normative definitions “leads to an over-emphasis on codes of behavior and misses the influences of context, institutions and socio-economic and political concerns,” and some sociologists have argued that definitions “may actually serve as a way for a profession to safeguard its power in relation to the state and its monopoly in relation to the market, and to defend its authority in relation to other professions and occupations” (p. 832). As a result, sociologists now understand professionalism “as a social construction” in which “professions successfully carve out their privileged location in the

division of labour” (Martimianakis et al., 2009, p. 832). This approach allows us to study the “specific behaviors and traits of individuals,” and to focus on “how professionalism is experienced” by professionals (Martimianakis et al., 2009, p. 833). Therefore, scholars have come to see professionalism as a “means and effect of social control” driven primarily by “knowledge production” within professions, and sometimes by organizations, to govern the power intrinsic to professionalism (Martimianakis et al., 2009, p. 833).

Martimianakis et al. (2009) also suggest that we should “think about professionalism not in terms of a stable construct that can be isolated, taught, and assessed, but as something that is socially constructed in interaction” (p. 835). Professionalism is more than a categorical set of traits and characteristics; it is a social construct, built upon the five dimensions of public accountability, expert knowledge, a well-defined code of ethics, individual autonomy and, most importantly, self-regulation. According to Freidson (2001), this social construct is one mode of organizational control contrasted with two others: the “free-labour market and the [...] rational-legal bureaucracy” (Freidson, p. 5). While glimpses of his model illuminate the previous discussion of the five dimensions of professionalism, it is useful to examine this model as a cohesive whole, as it helps to provide a legal, political, and economic context to the concept of professionalism.

Freidson (2001) describes many aspects of professionalism, but the most definitive is the ability for professions to control their own work. Two underlying assumptions in his definition that justify a presumed need for “occupational self-control” are “the belief that certain work is so specialized as to be inaccessible to those lacking the required training and expertise, and the belief that it cannot be standardized, rationalized, or commodified” (Freidson, 2001, p. 17). Freidson (2001) even suggests that a profession amounts to a monopoly, “not over real property,

wealth, political power, or even knowledge, but rather over the *practice* of a defined body of intellectualized knowledge and skill, a discipline” (p. 198, emphasis in original). This self-regulation “is the essential characteristic of ideal-typical professionalism from which all else flows” (p. 32).

When framed as a division of labour, Freidson (2001) sees professionalism as providing an alternative to market-based competition, in which “consumers are sovereign [...] the content and structure of the division of labor [...] are created by the competitive enterprise of workers seeking to gain a living by satisfying consumer demand” (p. 56), and a bureaucracy, in which “a directing authority and support staff decide what work shall be done and how it shall be divided among jobs” (p. 56). When the division of labour is occupationally controlled, we have professions in which “specializations are stabilized as distinct occupations whose members have the exclusive right to perform the tasks connected with them” (Freidson, 2001, p. 56). This is where power becomes relevant, as “the human division of labor is by its nature socially organized through the exercise of power” (p. 59), which comes from formal, theoretical knowledge:

...the prerequisite for all other institutions of professionalism is official recognition that the occupation uses in its work a complex body of formal knowledge and skill that commands abstract concepts or theories and requires the exercise of a considerable amount of discretion. The general public’s views of that occupation can facilitate and support such recognition, as can the views of some influential elite, but recognition and support from the state or some other paramount power is essential. When so recognized, an occupation is in a position to control its own work rather than be controlled by consumers [the market] or managers [bureaucracy]. (p. 83)

Thus, controlling the generation and reproduction of this knowledge is central to controlling an occupation, which highlights the importance of strong tertiary education programs. These programs ensure that, freed from the need to practice, “faculties can devote themselves to systematizing, refining, and expanding the body of knowledge and skill over which the profession claims jurisdiction” (Freidson, 2001, p. 96). These programs can also be used in “controlling the number of practitioners entering the labor market by imposing stringent standards on admission to professional school and requiring candidates to pass some sort of examination in order to obtain their qualifying credential” (Freidson, 2001, p. 94).

While these conceptualizations are certainly relevant to this discussion, they alone do not provide a justification for qualifying a particular occupation as a professional activity. Freidson (2001) calls the “claims, values and ideas that provide the rationale for these institutions of professionalism” the “ideology” of professionalism (p. 105). It is with this ideological conception that Freidson (2001) justifies his treatment of professionalism as a “secular priesthood” (p. 122). The debate surrounding teacher professionalism in British Columbia is a testament to the notion that conceptualizing professionalism as an ideology is the source of much of its power, a notion that is examined in more detail below.

### **A Working Definition of Professionalism**

As seen in the literature, an occupation is considered to be a profession when, first and foremost, the occupational group puts public interest above its own (Cruess et al., 2002; Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996) in carrying out jobs of high complexity (Freidson, 2001) characterized by moral ambiguity (Ball, 2009). This results in a need for both theoretically and practically grounded formal knowledge and expertise (Freidson, 2001; Cruess et al., 2002; Evetts, 2011) and a formalized code of ethics to guarantee delivery of public service (Cruess et

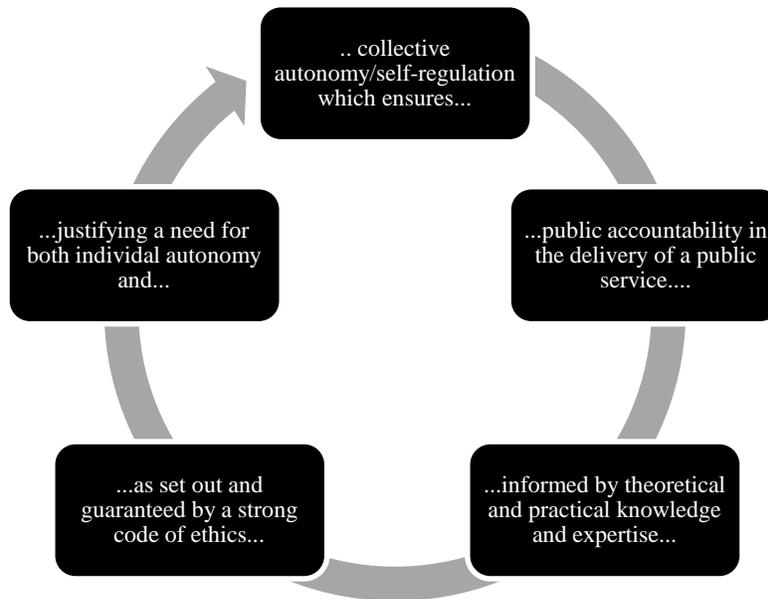
al., 2002; David, 2000; Freidson, 2001). Professionals are rewarded for their actions with individual autonomy (Freidson, 2001; Evetts, 2011) and the capacity to ensure that their privileges are earned and maintained through self-regulation (Cruess et al., 2002; Evetts, 2011; Freidson, 2001). Finally, the relationship between professionals and the public is seen as both a social contract and an occupational organizational logic in competition (and disharmony) with market-based and bureaucratically-administered alternatives (Freidson, 2011).

Before proceeding with an examination of the disagreements, contradictions, and controversies pertaining to the teaching occupation as a profession, the following summarizes what I have so far developed as a working definition of professionalism.

*Professionalism is a social contract in which an occupational group provides a publically accountable service with a high level of expertise based on both theoretically and practically generated knowledge as formalized (or guaranteed) in a code of ethics or practice. In response, the public allows members of the profession a high degree of individual autonomy and discretionary judgment with which to practice their craft, while the profession as a whole is granted collective autonomy in order to practice self-regulation. The self-regulation is the mechanism through which the collective autonomy of the profession and the individual autonomy of each professional is justified and maintained.*

This working definition is represented graphically in Figure 2, emphasizing the links between each dimension of professionalism, as well as the primary importance of self-regulation. The fact that self-regulation occupies the ‘keystone’ position in Figure 2 emphasizes that it is from this dimension that all others flow, and to which all others lead. Without self-regulation, a profession cannot conduct its professional responsibilities in an accountable manner by upholding the

knowledge and expertise of its members and establishing a rigorous professional code of ethics, and thus fails to justify its right to individual autonomy for its members.



*Figure 2.* The five dimensions of professionalism.

### **Professionalism in an Educational Setting**

Although there is some agreement in the literature regarding the definition of professionalism, much of this consensus disintegrates when such a definition is applied to the reality of bureaucratic governments and politically motivated school reforms. My research has been conducted in this reality, on the so-called “front lines” of education. With a working definition of professionalism at hand, I will now examine how this definition is understood and actualized when professionalism is located in an educational context. I will also outline some of the tensions that arise, and attempt to delineate competing discourses of professionalism that stem from the literature.

As the competing ways of framing teaching within larger discourses of professionalism are described, it should become apparent that a critical problem and source of tension between teaching and professionalism is that teaching is carried out in a bureaucratic setting, while

professionalism (according to my working definition) is fundamentally anti-bureaucratic. In a bureaucracy, the interests of various groups must be balanced, so power is distributed among organizational hierarchies according to some overarching bureaucratic framework. In a profession (ideally defined), professionals themselves hold exclusive power and control over their work. In BC's public education system, however, teachers do not have this power (at least, not exclusively). As a result, the question of who controls the work of teachers is at stake in the debate surrounding teacher professionalism, and the outcome of this debate will hinge upon how competing discourses of teacher professionalism are actualized in policy and practice.

**Performativity and professionalism.** Ball (2003) asserts that educational reform “policy technologies... set over and against the older policy technologies of professionalism and bureaucracy” (p. 216) threaten public education. One such technology is performativity, which is defined as “a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change – based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic)” (p. 216). He also suggests that *who* defines the field of judgment is crucial, and states that performativity “is changing what it means to be a teacher” (p. 217) by introducing external oversight into what has traditionally been considered teachers’ professional domain. This reform is presented under the guise of freedom when in fact what results is simply a new form of control in which teachers “are encouraged to ‘add value’ to themselves,” where this “value replaces values” such as commitment and a belief in public service (p. 217). This reform results in two “conflicting effects”: an “increasing individualization” and a “community based upon corporate culture” (p. 219). In other words, “mechanisms of introjection whereby the identity finds its core in its place in an organization of knowledge and practice are being

threatened by or replaced by mechanisms of projection [where] identity is a reflection of external contingencies” (p. 221).

The relevance of Ball’s (2003) insights for the current discussion is how performativity can be seen to limit teacher professionalism in the sense that “professional judgment is subordinated to the requirements of performativity and marketing” (p. 226). Performativity is replacing professionalism because “these technologies offer a politically attractive alternative to the state-centered, public welfare tradition of educational provision” (p. 215), and create an external accountability framework in contrast to the more self-administered forms of accountability (such as self-regulation) traditionally associated with professionalism. In this way, Ball places performativity in direct opposition of professionalism, and even suggests that performativity has replaced professionalism. From this perspective, the importance of dimensions of teacher professionalism such as autonomy, trust in expertise, and the ability to self-regulate are severely reduced in order to ensure strict public accountability and external control of professionals.

**“Optimistic” and “pessimistic” professionalism.** Based on Freidson’s (2001) work, Evetts (2011) has coined the term “optimistic” professionalism, which “is based on the principle that [professionals’] work is of importance either to the public or to the interests of the state or an elite” (p. 9). Not surprisingly, this form of professionalism is seen to contribute positively to society. It is also anti-bureaucratic, as it allows for “decentralized occupational control and regulation” that has “frequently covered for the various failures of statutory and organizational forms of work regulation” (p. 10). A contrasting “pessimistic” view of professionalism is that it is an ideology initiated and controlled by practitioners in order to create a monopoly around certain occupations, which is seen to “promote professional practitioners’ own occupational self-

interests in terms of their salary, status, and power” (p. 10). Here, we can see an example of professionalism existing for the benefit of its members rather than the public.

This second (pessimistic) view has been combined with the first (optimistic) view to create what Evetts (2011) calls “a discourse of occupational change and control” (p. 11) containing both occupational value and ideological elements. Professionalism becomes “a disciplinary logic which inscribes ‘autonomous’ professional practice within a network of accountability and governs professional conduct at a distance” (p. 11), not unlike Ball’s (2003) notion of performativity. This *discourse* of professionalism can be used both by professions and by those who would control them, which leads to the perspectives of Foucault.

According to Ball (1990), Foucault’s discourse analysis is particularly relevant in “educational sites as generators of a historically specific (modern) discourse, that is, as sites in which certain modern validations of, and exclusions from, the ‘right to speak’ are generated” (p. 3). Ball (1990) also points out how “control is to be exerted over teachers’ work by the use of techniques of management,” which has “begun to shift the governance of schools from professional/collegial in style to managerial/bureaucratic” (p. 153). This shift is even more sinister when considering how one of these ‘techniques of management,’ the “techniques of appraisal, have been developed and legitimated to the extent that they co-opt individuals, and established notions of professionalism, into their operation” (Ball, 1990, p. 160). Thus:

...the teacher is encouraged to view the procedures of appraisal as a part of the process of self-understanding and self-betterment – professional development – which Foucault calls ‘subjectification’: the active engagement of the subject in self-formation, ‘operations on people’s own bodies, on their own souls, on their own conduct.’ (Ball, 1990, p. 161)

Furthermore, “notions like accountability, school review, and school improvement have been reworked into versions of surveillance and monitoring that ‘fit’ into the preferred teacher discourse of professionalism” (Ball, 1990, p. 162). Teachers have come to believe in many of the ideas touted by proponents of pessimistic professionalism, to buy into a new discourse of professionalism in which performativity, accountability, and improvement initiatives are accepted as not only worthy but also integral to the profession. For Ball (1990), this leads to the division of schools into ‘the good’ and ‘the bad’ by establishing a normative average school, and “the worker, the technician, the teacher is constituted into this network of discourses, roles, aspirations, and desires” (p. 165). Management is, as Ball (1990) quotes Foucault, “a fundamental instrument in the constitution of industrial capitalism and the type of society that is its accompaniment” (p. 165). Professional teachers, then, are unwitting proponents of this power. Here, key dimensions of professionalism as set out in the literature (such as autonomy and self-regulation) are again of secondary importance while external regulation and accountability, framed as necessary components of an inevitable educational bureaucracy, are prioritized.

**Professionalism “from within” and “from above.”** Evetts (2011) categorizes the discourse of professionalism into two categories: professionalism *from within* (“successful manipulation of the market by the group, such as medicine and law,” [p. 11]) and professionalism *from above* (“domination of forces external to the group, such as engineering and social work,” [p. 11]). The former has generally been successful at using the discourse of professionalism in “constructing its occupational identity, promoting its image with clients and customers, and bargaining with states to secure and maintain its regulatory responsibilities” (p. 11), while the latter imposes a “false or selective discourse, because autonomy and occupational

control of the work are seldom included,” which is used as a “disciplinary mechanism of autonomous subjects exercising appropriate conduct” (p. 11). Evetts elaborates:

Organizational objectives (which are sometimes political) define practitioner-client relations, set achievement targets and performance indicators. In these ways organizational objectives regulate and replace occupational control of the practitioner-client work interactions thereby limiting the exercise of discretionary decision-making and preventing the service ethic that has been so important in professional work. (p. 12)

This is an excellent example of how contrasting discourses can be used to reframe teacher professionalism according to differing views on what is considered important – competing notions of teacher professionalism. Evetts (2011) goes on to show how these competing discourses set up a myth and a reality of professionalism. The “myth of professionalism” includes “aspects such as exclusive ownership of an area of expertise, increased status and salary, autonomy and discretion in work practices and the occupational control of the work” (p. 13). The “reality of professionalism,” however:

...includes the substitution of organizational for professional values; bureaucratic, hierarchical and managerial controls rather than collegial relations; managerial and organizational objectives rather than client trust and autonomy based on competencies and expertise; budgetary restrictions and financial rationalizations; the standardization of work practices rather than discretion; and performance targets, accountability and sometimes increased political controls. (p. 13).

Evetts further suggests that professionalism can even be a form of exploitation when it is “operationalized by managers in work organizations” as a “discourse of self-control which

enables self-motivation and sometimes even self-exploitation” wherein “the expectations by self and others of the professional have no limits” (p. 13).

Underlying all of these contested notions of professionalism is a more basic, fundamental problem – the challenge of a profession trying to exist within a bureaucracy. Ball’s (2009) notion of performativity can be seen as a simple manifestation of bureaucratic control over a profession. Evett’s (2009) competing discourses can also be seen as a bureaucratic/professional splitting of the issues – the myth of professionalism from within being trampled on by a more bureaucratic reality of professionalism from above. The key dimension, here, is the question of who regulates a profession, for what purposes, and for whose benefit. Traditionally and ideally, a profession is regulated *by* members of the profession, *for* the profession (from-within). Increasingly, especially in education (and certainly in BC), teachers are now regulated externally (from-above). The theoretical background provided by Freidson (2001) shows how professionalism and bureaucracies are separate, yet education is one area where the two are supposed to exist together.

**External accountability and the meaning of teacher autonomy.** For Bottery (2009), threats to teacher professionalism (in the form of increased external accountability at the expense of autonomy) do not come from the bureaucracy, but rather, from a neo-liberal championing of market-based principles. In an analysis of “the changing meaning of teacher professionalism in England,” he found that teacher professionalism is being “reduced rather than facilitated” (p. 683). He reports that the role of educators in England is changing from “trusted experts” to “employees in a competitive institution” (p. 683), which has resulted from a “gradual move from a cooperative to a competitive, from a national to an institutional, from a public to a private

frame of mind”<sup>12</sup> (p. 687). In essence, Bottery suggests that, due to “a belief in the superiority of the private sector over public sector practice” (p. 690) – a fundamental characteristic of neo-liberal ideology – educational organizations are “being modelled on the notion of a private firm, with professionals as responsive, efficient entrepreneurs, engaged in competition with rival ‘firms’” (p. 687). This has resulted in teachers becoming “branded technicians [...] employees in a competitive institution with a larger directed societal agenda” rather than “critical professionals [...] trusted experts and gatekeepers in a social democratic welfare state” (p. 683). Evetts (2009) has also spoken to the tension between teacher professionalism and neo-liberalism, providing new ways to frame the interaction between teacher-professionals and their students, their schools, and the public: “relationships between professionals and clients are being converted into customer relations through the establishment of quasi-markets, customer satisfaction surveys and evaluations, quality measures and payment by results” (p. 28).

From a neo-liberal perspective, external accountability is justified by a need to have an external quality control process (through such mechanisms as standardized tests, school rankings, etc.) of public education providers and their programs, so that the public can make an informed decision regarding the education of their children being offered in an open quasi-market. The extent of teacher autonomy, then, is shaped by the demands of the market, rather than the needs of the profession. While neo-liberalism is not the only way of understanding the provision of education that facilitates the emergence of external accountability processes, its uniqueness resides in the introduction of market elements that has led governments to introduce

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<sup>12</sup> Bottery illustrates this claim with an example: “When I conducted research in the 1990s, interviewing individuals in state and private schools and hospitals, I found a gradual culture change in the state institutions, from a ‘public’ orientation to a private one. Individuals in the public sector still hold dear the idea of working within a service which was wedded to the building of a ‘better,’ more equitable nation, and found it hard to countenance that they had to seek and maintain a competitive advantage against the school or hospital down the road, which essentially meant not sharing good practice. Yet they and their leaders were aware of the potential consequences of not viewing these institutions in the way.” (p. 687)

external accountability measures for the purpose of quality control to satisfy the needs of customers looking for the best product and service providers. It should be noted, however, that other ideologies may also facilitate the emergence of external accountability measures in order to make sure that teachers' work is aligned with the state's goals and aims of education.

Another way in which teacher accountability has been framed is by what Ladwig and Gore (2009) refer to as "the standards agenda." In a case study of the 2004 establishment of the New South Wales Institute of Teachers by the State parliament, Ladwig and Gore examine specific standards as outlined in the Institute's documentation. Although they are generally critical of efforts to credentialize the teaching profession through the external imposition of standards, they do not completely refute the notion, as "without explicit criteria as to what counts as legitimate, acceptable, and desirable practice within a profession, practitioners are likely to operate in haphazard and idiosyncratic ways" (Ladwig & Gore, 2009, p. 727). The weakness of the standards in their study, however, is that "none of them articulates a level of specificity which requires taking a stance on longstanding and on-going debates about how to teach and how to engage students" (p. 727). In other words, "they are ambiguous on just what the teacher is expected to do in order to be deemed competent" (p. 727), and standards can suffer from a lack of specificity when focused on the 'what' (specific curricular learning outcomes) but not the 'how' (pedagogical theory and teaching strategies). The standards agenda is also criticized for creating a competitive rather than a collegial environment, which leads to a hierarchy of credentials for individual teachers. Furthermore, standardization is seen as hindering teachers' autonomy: "the setting of standards for teaching as part of a professionalization agenda, particularly in terms of the codification of a unique body of knowledge, is seen by many within education as being at odds with the notion of autonomy that is also a central characteristic of

professions” (Ladwig & Gore, 2009, p. 731), because they limit the discretion that professionals may employ in their work:

In a ‘profession’ where standards have previously been rather arbitrary or unspecified, and are seen to remain that way, it would not be surprising that autonomy (limited though it may be) will remain the primary source of teachers’ sense of themselves as professionals. (p. 731)

In a more local example, Fendler (2009) examines the *National Board of Teaching Standards and Teachers for a New Era*, two American teacher professional groups “that describe themselves as being established on behalf of teachers by teachers and teacher educators” (p. 735). He points out how “standards-based reforms” have led to increasingly detailed curriculum which, on one hand, “lends legitimacy to teaching expertise” (p. 740), but also “has the effect of usurping at least some part of the non-routine, context-dependent capacity for judgment traditionally afforded to professionals,” especially with regard to the “interpretation and implementation of curriculum” (p. 741). From Fendler’s perspective, professionalism itself is “a double-edged sword,” in that “it provides a venue for regulation at ever deeper levels of detail and specificity” and “provides a warrant for assessment and a theme for accountability” (p. 750). That is, this discourse of professionalism lends itself well to a perceived need for narrow, short-sighted, standards-based accountability.

For Goodson (2003), this makes “the current condition of teachers’ lives paradoxical,” because attempts to standardize teachers’ practice puts into question teachers’ professional knowledge, threatening to undercut and subvert their professionalism (p. 127). McNess et al. (2003) also support this point in discussing the growing tension between what used to be a “sociocultural model of teaching that recognized and included the emotional and social aspects

necessary for a more learner-centered approach” (p. 246) and a new performance-based model focused on accountability and assessment. McNess et al. also suggest that British teachers were concerned about externally imposed educational change that not only added to their bureaucratic workloads but also focused on managerially effective aspects of education while ignoring teachers’ appreciation for the affective dimensions of teaching. As a result, “some teachers in the study, expressed a feeling of fragmented identity, torn between an official discourse which emphasized technical and managerial skills, and a strongly held personal view which emphasized the importance of an emotional and affective dimension to teaching” (McNess et al., 2003, p. 248).

Finally, Poole (2008) considers how accountability and standardization (in the form of standardized tests, in particular) have redefined teacher professionalism. She discusses the impact of “technical-rational” approaches to education on teachers’ self-identity, which is determined by “categorizing themselves as members of groups” (p. 25). Neo-liberal management approaches are seen to “conscript individual identity” (p. 30) to fit within organizational goals rather than individual professional goals. This conscription is particularly relevant for teachers because they often “view their work as a calling or vocation” (p. 28), which has the added effect of transforming professionals into technicians:

The new policy direction changes the nature of teachers’ work so that it focuses on narrowly defined purposes of education—learning as measured by high stakes standardized tests—and heavy-handed accountability uses intimidation to shape the practice of teachers. Many teachers experience these measures as violations of professional identity. Broader definitions of education that emphasize development of the whole child and education for a democratic society have given way to one that reduces

education to the transmission of knowledge—disciplinary content constructed primarily from a white, male, middle class and heterosexual perspective. Teachers’ work, once conceived as requiring high discretion and autonomy, is increasingly reduced to technical-rational conceptions of teaching and teachers are increasingly viewed as technicians. (p. 35)

Taken together, the tension between different, competing discourses of teacher professionalism can be understood as the result of separate methods of organizational control (as defined by Freidson, 2009), such as professionalism, rational-legal bureaucracies, and free-market labour, colliding with one another. Whether the state exhibits the characteristics of neo-liberalism or some other political ideology, the question of how the teaching profession should be controlled (or at least, regulated) in a public education system is not only central, but potentially contentious. It should come as no surprise then that such differing ideologies and sociological frameworks experience disharmony. In fact, it would be surprising if they did *not*. This, perhaps, is one of the reasons that the educational successes documented in Finland are so widely touted. Before providing an overarching summary of the competing conceptions of teacher professionalism, a brief discussion of the Finnish system and its perspective on teacher professionalism will shed some light on these issues.

**The Finnish understanding of teacher professionalism.** Pasi Sahlberg, a high-ranking diplomat in the Finnish Ministry of Education, has written a book called *Finnish Lessons: What the world can learn from educational change in Finland*. As the title suggests, his goal in writing this book is to both describe and promote the world-leading educational system in his country. While this book provides an account of all the factors underlying these educational successes, the

focus here will be on the Finnish approach to teacher professionalism, which aligns itself very closely with the working definition established on Page 35 of this paper.

For example, Sahlberg (2011) has found that, of all the factors contributing to the success of the Finnish educational system, “one factor trumps all others: the daily contributions of excellent teachers” (p. 70). While Finland has made a Masters’ degree a requirement for teachers which has improved teacher training a great deal, it is “more important to ensure that teachers’ work in schools is based on professional dignity and social respect” (p. 70). Salary is not a significant factor in attracting quality teachers – they “earn slightly more than the national average salary” (p. 77) – but teachers “expect that they will experience professional autonomy, prestige, respect, and trust in their work” (p. 76-77). Because of the trust placed in teachers (as a result of their education), there are very few externally imposed standardized tests or school inspections. This “moral professional environment” (p. 95) and excellent working conditions (e.g., high-school teachers’ annual teaching time is half the OECD average [Sahlberg, p. 91]) are cited as the most important factors attracting teachers. According to Sahlberg, attracting the highest quality people to become teachers depends on the “critical condition ... that a teacher’s work should represent an independent and respectful profession rather than merely focus on technical implementation of externally mandated standards, endless tests, and administrative burdens” (p. 95).

It seems as though Finland has created a positive feedback loop whereby a highly regarded profession perpetuates because of the high standards for that profession, which further increases public regard. Autonomy is very important in Finland, but that autonomy is earned through rigorous training and lifelong learning. Again, salary is not a high priority, but strong working conditions and a collaborative professional work-environment prevail. Internal

accountability through a process of strong collegial practices *between* teachers rather than external accountability as imposed on employees by employers mark a fundamental difference between the Finnish and British Columbian educational system.

In an interview with CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) Radio, the integral role of the teaching profession is further explained by Andres Schleicher, the Special Advisor on Education Policy to the OECD's Secretary-General and Head of the Indicators and Analysis Division:

What makes Finland stand out is the quality of the teaching profession. It's a system where the best people become teachers. They get nine applications and just select one of them to become a teacher. Basically the teaching profession owns the professional standards. You don't have a government that basically tells teachers what to do and how to do it, but basically it's the teaching profession that advanced; became the protagonists of its own profession. That has shaped the entire culture of learning and teaching in Finland. (Schleicher, 2012)

That is, a strong teaching profession and a strong education system go hand in hand. In Finland, the profession is strong because teachers own it. This is optimistic, from-within, non-bureaucratic professionalism in which autonomy is supported by high standards maintained by teachers, rather than by an external body. Teachers are accountable to the profession rather than the bureaucracy. For teachers in Finland, Evetts' (2011) myth of professionalism has become a reality and the self-regulation that figures so prominently in Freidson's (2001) definition has been fully implemented. Finland provides an excellent example to refute those who would view professionalism and teaching as mutually exclusive, as well as an ideal to which proponents of strengthening North American teacher professionalism can aspire.

## Competing Notions of Teacher Professionalism

The following table summarizes what has so far been discussed regarding the competing notions of teacher professionalism. While the various disagreements, contradictions, tensions, and conflicts exist in many different dimensions, they can be distilled into two main competing discourses framing the understanding and operationalization of teacher professionalism, as summarized in Table 2, which also outlines how the dimensions of professionalism identified above (e.g., autonomy, regulation, etc) are framed by each of the main discourses.

Table 2

### *Two Discourses of Teacher Professionalism*

<b><i>The Bureaucratic Professional</i></b>	<b><i>The Fully Autonomous Professional</i></b>
Professionalism is necessarily bounded by the fact that education has to be an accountable and effective bureaucracy that is run most efficiently using market-based and data-driven principles to ensure high quality education. Some of the ways in which professionalism must be limited/regulated are through the application of <i>external testing</i> to ensure quality, specific professional development and standards to align teachers' work with organizational goals, and legislative infrastructure and credentialization to ensure that the public interest comes before the interest of the profession. This discourse tends to emphasize the necessity of a bureaucratic framework to ensure public accountability.	This discourse is characterized by an emphasis on individual and collective teacher autonomy, and proposes that as long as the profession earns and maintains the public's trust (ideally through rigorous self-regulation and ethical codes), teachers should enjoy the prestige, and more importantly, working conditions (such as individual autonomy) that allow them to apply their professional competence to the important role of public education. Professional development and continuous learning are directed by the profession, and collegial relations rather than top-down management ensure teacher efficacy. This discourse conceptualizes professionalism as a necessary counterweight to the market-driven and bureaucratic nature of public education.
<b>Accountability</b> is framed as the most important dimensions of professionalism, necessitated by the public nature of teachers' work. Accountability is external.	<b>Accountability</b> is provided by the profession itself through a strong code of ethics and a high level of knowledge and expertise.
The <b>regulation</b> of teachers is seen as an extension of the need for accountability, and is most effectively achieved externally.	<b>Self-regulation</b> is the best way to ensure that teachers provide the best education for students, and to insulate the profession from the bureaucracy.

<i>The Bureaucratic Professional, con't</i>	<i>The Fully Autonomous Professional, con't</i>
<b>Teacher autonomy</b> must be encouraged only to the extent that teachers are able to meet the expectations of the accountability framework provided by the bureaucracy.	<b>Teacher autonomy</b> is the most important dimension of teacher professionalism and is the only way to ensure a high level of public service through the proper application of teacher knowledge and expertise.

As will be discussed in Chapter Five, educational organizations in BC tend to find their perspectives at various points along a spectrum bookended by these two discourses.

## Chapter Four – Methodology

### Research Design

The central goal of my inquiry is to develop a comprehensive understanding of the nature and characteristics of the competing discourses shaping the current debate around teacher professionalism in BC. To develop such an understanding I conducted a case study in which the subjects are educational stakeholders in BC, and the objects are competing discourses of teacher professionalism. Textual documents from these stakeholders were analysed according to Fairclough's (2010) version of critical discourse analysis (CDA), using ATLAS/ti computer software (see Muhr, 1997) and strategies suggested by Yin (2009).

**Objectives.** The primary objective of my research is to develop an understanding of the competing notions of teacher professionalism that exist in BC and their respective rationales. To do this, I investigated 1) the central issues driving the debate, namely teacher regulation and professional autonomy, and 2) educational stakeholder perspectives on these issues (see Chapter Two, page 20).

Zainal (2007) and Yin (2009) divide research into three overlapping categories: exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory. Exploratory studies “explore any phenomenon in the data which serves as a point of interest to the reader” (Zainal, p. 3) and are undertaken to examine an area where little is known or to investigate the possibilities of undertaking a particular research study. Descriptive studies differ in that they “describe natural phenomena which occur within the data in question” and attempt to describe systematically these phenomena. Lastly, explanatory studies “examine the data closely both at a surface and deep level in order to explain the phenomena in the data” and attempt to clarify why and how there is a relationship between two or more aspects of a situation (Zainal, p. 3). My first set of research

questions is primarily descriptive, as I am concerned above all with describing the complex phenomenon of issues driving the debate about teacher professionalism. My second set of research questions has an additional explanatory dimension, as it seeks to determine *why* and *how* stakeholder perspectives differ.

**Case studies.** Case studies are a mode of inquiry particularly well-suited for descriptive and explanatory research (Yin, 2009), and I have thus chosen this method for my study. Thomas (2011) defines case studies as follows:

Case studies are analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions, or other systems that are studied holistically by one or more methods. The case that is the *subject* of the inquiry will be an instance of a class of phenomena that provides an analytical frame – an *object* – within which the study is conducted and which the case illuminates and explicates. (p. 513, emphasis in original)

Central to this definition is the “distinction between subject and object of study” (p. 514).

Thomas states that “the *subject* will be selected because it is an interesting or unusual or revealing example through which the lineaments of the *object* can be refracted” (p. 514). With regard to my study, the subjects of my inquiry are the various stakeholders in BC’s public education system that have used or contributed to a particular discourse of teacher professionalism, while these discourses, as “the analytical focus that crystallizes, thickens, or develops as the study proceeds” (p. 514) will constitute the object of my study.

A case study is defined by Yin (2009) as consisting of “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon [in my case, teacher professionalism] in depth and within its real-life context [public education in BC], especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). Case studies are preferred when

“examining contemporary events, but when the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated,” because of its “unique strength [in] its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence” (p. 11). When studying an abstraction (such as teacher professionalism), Yin suggests that “to justify using the case study method, you need to define a specific, real-life ‘case’ to represent the abstraction” (p. 32). In my study, educational stakeholders provide this case.

One of the main advantages of the case study method is that “the examination of the data is most often conducted within the context of its use” (Zainal, 2007, p. 4). With regard to discourses of teacher professionalism, the “context of their use” is in the documents released by various educational stakeholder groups in their attempts to lay claim to contested political ground, thus justifying a case study approach for my study. Furthermore, Yin (2009) suggests that a case study has a distinct advantage over other forms of research “when a question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control” (p. 13). As I have described in Chapter Two, the context and recent history of the debate surrounding teacher professionalism are a “contemporary set of events” over which I have “no control,” which further justifies my use of a case study. Additional justification for this methodology comes from Zainal (2007), who suggests that case studies “allow the exploration and understanding of complex issues,” especially when “a holistic, in-depth investigation is required” (p. 1). As discussed in the previous three chapters, an exploration of how the notion of professionalism applies to the work of public school teachers provides a host of complex (and political) issues, such as autonomy and regulation, and requires a holistic investigation to be studied effectively.

**Data collection.** Yin (2009) sets out three aspects of a well-designed empirical study: internal validity, external validity, and reliability. Reliability is ensured in the current study by defining and using a case study protocol and keeping a case study database (p. 45). The codes and methods used to analyse each document were specified (the protocol), and this protocol remained consistent from stakeholder to stakeholder. Furthermore, coding and other data (the database) have been kept on file with my advisor, Dr. Gerald Fallon. Although validity is more difficult to establish with case studies, it is not impossible (Yin, p. 43). The most important consideration in this regard is what Yin calls “replication logic,” of which there are two types: “literal” (“each case predicts similar results”) and theoretical (“each case predicts contrasting results but for anticipatable reasons”) (p. 54). Both types of replication require “the development of a rich, theoretical framework” (p. 54), which was completed before performing the data collection and analysis (see Chapter Three). This theoretical framework helped me to identify different categories used to perform my analysis (a process outlined below) as well as to establish the validity of my study. As will be described in Chapter 5, much of what emerged during my analysis was echoed by the academic literature that formed the theoretical foundation of my conceptual framework. This correlation between my findings and conceptual framework provide strong support for the validity of my study.

**Integrating results.** To integrate the analysis of my case study, I used Yin’s (2009) suggested strategies: “to treat evidence fairly, produce compelling analytical conclusions, and rule out alternative interpretations” (p. 130). The “first and most preferred strategy is to follow the theoretical propositions that led to your case study” (p. 130), which in my case was the way in which teacher autonomy and regulation are framed by competing discourses of professionalism. To complement this strategy, Yin also recommends a set of techniques to

develop internal and external validity, one of which calls for the use of “word tables,” to “display the data [...] according to some uniform framework” (p. 156). For this study, I tabulated textual data obtained using ATLAS/ti software for each stakeholder group. While some of the categories stemmed from the texts themselves (and were consequentially unique to one or more stakeholder group), others came from definitions of professionalism in general as defined in the literature, as well as a critical look at the context of teaching in British Columbia. Essentially, the headings of each of the columns in Table 3 below represent the themes searched for in each document.

Table 3

*Word Table: Codes and Categories Used in Case Analysis*

Stakeholder Group	Definition of professionalism	Notions of accountability	Professional development	Teacher evaluation & discipline	Regulation of professionals	Public status	[...]
BCTF							
BCPSEA							
Provincial government							
BCSTA							
BCPVPA							

### **Stakeholder Selection**

I approached my case study by analyzing documents published by the many stakeholder groups that make up the public education system in BC. As these stakeholders are not representative of any larger group outside of this context, I did not seek to make generalizations outside of BC. Instead, these stakeholders were considered as separate entities that, when taken together, provided a context for my examination of the application of competing discourses of teacher professionalism to practical issues in education. My study is built on the assumption that there is a *debate* with regard to teacher professionalism in BC, and that different discourses are being used to discuss the meaning of teacher professionalism. In this light, each stakeholder group can be seen as one of the actors, or participants, in this debate.

In order to properly establish the scene for these ‘actors,’ my examination of each stakeholder group included a consideration of the environment (e.g., political, legal, social, etc.) within which each stakeholder group operates, along with a description of its nature, structure, purposes, and mandate. Each group in my study was chosen because of its direct involvement (as assessed by contextualizing their role within the administration of BC’s public education system) with issues pertaining to teacher professionalism. A brief summary of each of the stakeholder groups in my study follow below. More details as to the organizational structure, history, and mandate – a contextualization of their role in the educational system – as well as detailed references in support of this section, can be found in Appendix A.

As the organization representing public school teachers in BC, the BCTF is an obvious choice to include in this study. A union of professionals, it has three primary areas of interest: advocating for the welfare of public teachers, defending public education, and promoting social justice. The BCPSEA is another obvious choice for inclusion; as the body representing school employers and the government’s official bargaining agent, it also represents the bureaucracy within which teachers operate. The third stakeholder in my study is the provincial government, a useful data source for the analysis of the perspectives of provincial Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) with regard to teacher professionalism. It should be acknowledged that while the nature of this stakeholder group is different from others in my study in that the others are non-governmental organizations, it is important to include this group in order to reflect the perspectives of provincial legislators, who are important stakeholders without organizations analogous to the BCTF or the BCPSEA. The final two stakeholder groups in my study are the BCSTA and the BCPVPA. The BCSTA represents school trustees, those responsible for setting local school board policy, much of which is relevant to teacher professionalism. Finally, the

BCPVPA represents school administrators, those on the ‘front lines’ of the educational bureaucracy, providing a unique perspective on teacher professionalism.

These five actors: the BCTF (teachers), the BCPSEA (the government’s bargaining agent), the provincial government, the BCSTA (school trustees), and the BCPVPA (school administrators), represent the stakeholder groups analyzed in this study. A description of the documents collected from each group is given below.

## **Documents**

To analyze the perspectives of the abovementioned stakeholder groups, I collected textual documents from each. Some of the organizations (such as the BCTF and the BCPSEA) have a plethora of published texts, research papers, media releases, and policy documents, while other groups are less prolific in their publishing, providing fewer accessible points of data collection. While this was a challenge for my study, I decided that a particular group should not be excluded due to having fewer documents available for analysis. Indeed, in some cases, a lack of published documents relevant to teacher professionalism could itself be considered a relevant finding. Common themes among groups were identified, and the similarities and differences between groups were explored. While a document list can be found in Appendix B, a summary is provided here.

**BCTF documents.** My analysis of the BCTF is based on 15 communication publications obtained from the BCTF website. Seven of the documents were filed under ‘Research Reports’<sup>13</sup>, seven were published in the BCTF’s monthly newspaper, *Teacher Newsmagazine*, and one was categorized under ‘Briefs and Position Papers’<sup>14</sup>. All of these documents were located using the

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<sup>13</sup> Published by the BCTF Research Department “to report on a variety of educational and labour issues” (BCTF, 2012e).

<sup>14</sup> These “briefs and position papers are submitted by the BCTF to government” (BCTF, 2012d).

website's custom Google search engine, and search words included 'profession,' 'professional,' and 'professionalism.'

**BCPSEA documents.** Fewer documents were available for the analysis of the BCPSEA. As an employers' organization, one of the BCPSEA's methods of communication are bulletins, which "are distributed to all school districts as issues arise" (BCPSEA, 2013b). Three such bulletins were found that were relevant to the current discussion: two bargaining updates and one legislative update. In addition, the BCPSEA has published a series of papers called "Perspectives in Practice" written "to promote discussion on select employment matters at issue in the K-12 public education sector" (BCPSEA, 2013c). Three of these papers were highly reflective of the association's take on professionalism. All six BCPSEA documents were identified by combing through the BCPSEA's website using terms such as 'professionalism,' 'professional,' 'autonomy,' and 'regulation.'

**Provincial government documents.** In order to examine the ways in which the government frames and understands teacher professionalism, especially within the context of Bill 12, the official Hansard record of the debates that preceded the passing of the Bill were analyzed. This debate transpired over three days in the BC Legislature; the first reading was on October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2011, the second on October 27<sup>th</sup> and the morning of November 1<sup>st</sup>, and the third on the afternoon of November 1<sup>st</sup>.

In this case, it is important to note not only *what* was coded, but also *whom*. No particular effort was made to analyze one political party over another, although both major political parties in BC – the governing Liberals and the Opposition New Democratic Party – were well-represented in the debate. There were also several Independent members whose contributions to

the debate were included in my analysis. Table 4 below summarizes which MLAs provided codable data, along with their titles (if any) and party affiliations.

Table 4

*Coded MLAs and Their Affiliations*

<i>MLA</i>	<i>Party Affiliation</i>	<i>Title (if applicable)</i>
<b>Abbott, George</b>	Liberal	Minister of Education
<b>Austin, Robin</b>	NDP	Opposition Critic of Education
<b>Barnett, Donna</b>	Liberal	N/A
<b>Coons, Gary</b>	NDP	N/A
<b>Huntington, Vicki</b>	Independent	N/A
<b>MacDonald, Norm</b>	NDP	N/A
<b>McIntrye, Joan</b>	Liberal	N/A
<b>Routley, Doug</b>	NDP	N/A
<b>Rustad, John</b>	Liberal	N/A
<b>Sather, Michael</b>	NDP	N/A
<b>Simons, Nicholas</b>	NDP	N/A
<b>Simpson, Bob</b>	Independent	N/A
<b>Sultan, Ralph</b>	Liberal	N/A
<b>Thornthwaite, Jane</b>	Liberal	N/A

**BCSTA documents.** There were very few public documents available regarding the BCSTA’s notion of teacher professionalism. In fact, only one document was identified – an “E-Alert” – which was used to disseminate and inform trustees and superintendents about “breaking education news” (BC School Trustees Association, 2004). This particular alert related to the dispute surrounding the BCCT, and sought to establish “five principles that, if applied, will protect the public interest in K-12 teaching” (BC School Trustees Association, 2004). As such, this document revealed much about the BCSTA’s understanding of teacher professionalism.

**BCPVPA documents.** I found three relevant documents for analysis of the BCPVPA. The first two were articles published in the BCPVPA magazine, *Adminfo*. The topic of the first article was what BCPVPA President Les Dukowski referred to as “collective efficiencies” in schools (Dukowski, 2007). The topic of the second article was “four critical elements of a successful public education system” as proposed by BCPVPA Executive Director Kit Krieger (Krieger, 2013a). The third document was a detailed set of “leadership standards” intended to provide leadership guidelines for practicing school administrators (BCPVPA, 2007).

This chapter has thus far established the structure and organization of my study, identified the stakeholders chosen as subjects of my case, and summarized which documents from each stakeholder were used. In the following section, I will delineate how the documents were analyzed, based on what Fairclough (2010) refers to as critical discourse analysis, or CDA.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis**

Taylor (2004) notes that “the increasing importance of language in social life” and corresponding “attempts to shape it and control it to meet institutional or organizational objectives” have led to an increasingly important role for discourse analysis in academic critique. Edwards and Nicoll (2001) point to “a proliferation of text, discourses, and signs” that has led to “the growth of discourse analysis as a way of investigating their significance” (p. 106). In this investigation, “texts can be considered to be a manifestation of discourse and the discursive ‘unit’ on which the researcher focuses” which means that “discourse analysis is the systematic study of texts” (Grant & Hardy, 2004, p. 6).

According to Taylor (2004), the goals of CDA are to:

...explore the relationships between discursive practices, events, and texts; and wider social and cultural structures, relations, and processes. CDA explores how texts construct

representations of the world, social relationships, and social identities, and there is an emphasis on highlighting how such practices and texts are ideologically shaped by relations of power. (p. 435)

CDA is relevant to the current study because policy-making is seen as “an arena of struggle over meaning” where language is used strategically to achieve specific (and contested) ends (p. 435).

Teacher professionalism can be seen as the “arena of struggle” where the “meaning” of the various dimensions of teacher professionalism (autonomy, accountability, regulation, etc.) are used by each stakeholder to achieve their specific ends.

Furthermore, the behaviour of discourse within an organization is particularly relevant.

For example, Mumby and Clair (1997) suggest that:

...organizations exist only in so far as their members create them through discourse. This is not to claim that organizations are “nothing but” discourse, but rather that discourse is the principal means by which organization members create a coherent social reality that frames their sense of who they are. (p. 181)

This excerpt is important for my study, because most of the subjects of my inquiry are organizations, and it suggests that analyzing each with respect to teacher professionalism should involve an analysis of the discourse used to frame teacher professionalism by that organization.

The analysis of data collected from each stakeholder group (specifically, texts published by or relating to each group) was loosely based on Fairclough’s (2010) formulation of CDA, which he defines as an “analysis of dialectical relations between discourse and other objects, elements, or moments, as well as an analysis of the ‘internal relations’ of discourse,” rather than an analysis of discourse “in itself” (p. 4). The word *dialectical* indicates that discourses and the objects with which they interact are different from one another, but not discrete, and that “no one

object or element (such as discourse) can be analysed other than in terms of its dialectical relations with others” (p. 4). This is relevant to my study, as ‘professionalism,’ as a discourse, is seen as different but not discrete from issues such as autonomy and teacher regulation; one cannot be studied without studying the rest. Fundamentally, my study seeks to understand the dialectical relations between professionalism, autonomy, and teacher regulation, by performing CDA on the documents published by stakeholder groups.

To perform this analysis, Fairclough (2010) suggests constructing “objects of research” by using a “theory-driven process” to convert a research topic “into a ‘researchable object’: cogent, coherent, and researchable research questions” (p. 5). Constructing these objects of research “allow[s] for various ‘points of entry’ for the discourse analyst ... which focus upon different elements or aspects of the object of research” (p. 5). In my case, each text published by the stakeholder groups provides such a ‘point of entry,’ allowing me to ‘see’ the discourse of teacher professionalism and related issues from different perspectives. For example, the document *Accountability in public education* (BCTF, 2009) provides a point of entry for me to determine how the BCTF operationalizes its chosen discourse of professionalism in framing one dimension of professionalism: teacher accountability.

### **Codes and Categories**

Textual analysis was conducted using the computer software ATLAS/ti, “a powerful workbench for the qualitative analysis of large bodies of textual, graphical and audio data” (Muhr, 1997, p. 1). This software allows one to “‘connect’ selected passages, memos, and codes, into diagrams which graphically outline complex relations” which “virtually transforms your text-based work space into a graphical ‘playground’ for constructing concepts and theories based on relationships” (p. 7). Codes used to analyze my documents were determined by combining

important terms identified in the literature review as well as concepts that seemed to surface regularly in the documents themselves. For example, Freidson (2001) stresses the importance of self-regulation to a profession, while Cruess, Johnston, and Cruess (2002) conceptualize professionalism as a contract between a group of practitioners and the public they serve. These two articles suggest the coding schemes ‘self-regulation’ and ‘public service,’ which provide two distinct lenses through which to examine educational stakeholders’ understandings of teacher professionalism. Further codes were generated by a historical overview of recent events in the ongoing debate surrounding teacher professionalism in this province, such as the dissolution of the BCCT in 2011 and the Sooke arbitration in 2009. A complete list of codes, along with brief descriptions of each, is provided in Table 5.

Table 5

*Codes and Descriptors*

<i>Code</i>	<i>Descriptor</i>
<b>Employees</b>	Instances where teachers are referred to as “employees.”
<b>Alignment</b>	The notion that one of the responsibilities of teaching is aligning practice with district and provincial goals and objectives.
<b>Bargaining</b>	How teachers (collectively and otherwise) establish their salaries and working conditions with their employer.
<b>BCCT</b>	References to the British Columbia College of Teachers.
<b>Definition of Professionalism</b>	How professionalism is conceptualized, and what factors contribute to professional status among teachers.
<b>Professional Autonomy</b>	The notion that, as professionals, teachers can control (aspects of) their own work. Includes references to agency and independence.
<b>Professional Development</b>	How teachers develop their professionalism. Also referred to as ‘professional learning’ and ‘professional growth.’
<b>Public Status</b>	How the public perceives teachers, including notions of trust and public service.
<b>Self-Regulation</b>	Self-regulation by teachers’ themselves as opposed to external regulation by government or its agent.
<b>Standards</b>	Standards or criteria to which teachers are held.

<i>Code</i>	<i>Descriptor</i>
<b>Teacher Accountability</b>	How, to whom, and in what ways teachers are held accountable for their work.
<b>Teacher Discipline</b>	Ways in which teachers are disciplined or corrected in their work.
<b>Teacher Evaluations</b>	Attempts to assess teachers' performance, including performance reviews and rankings.
<b>Teacher Supervision and Control</b>	How teachers' behaviour (and also, professional development) is monitored, directed, instructed, managed, overseen, or otherwise influenced.
<b>Teacher Unionism</b>	The notion that teachers are members of a collective union, and the implications of that membership on teacher professionalism.

Integrating these codes/categories with the five dimensions of professionalism and two overarching discourses of teacher professionalism as identified above allowed me to perform a comprehensive discourse analysis of each stakeholder. This resulted in several key themes regarding how each stakeholder group frames teacher professionalism, as discussed in Chapters Five and Six.

### **Study Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

Yin (2009) cites several common concerns about case studies: that they are often conducted without rigor, “that they provide little basis for scientific generalization,” and that they are less apt than other methods at establishing causal relationships (p. 15). I have attempted to minimize these drawbacks by providing a robust case study protocol and a strong theoretical foundation from which to derive my findings. However, generalizable, statistically founded conclusions were not possible.

My study was also limited by the fact that not all stakeholder groups have published an abundance of texts and documents to analyze. There are mountains of data available from the BCTF and BCPSEA; other stakeholders provided molehills. Furthermore, the perspectives of students and faculties of education on teacher professionalism were not included in this study. For both students and faculties of education, representative cases would be difficult to identify,

as these stakeholders may hold very different perspectives. An examination of these perspectives may be another fruitful direction for future study.

CDA also has its limitations as a methodology. Haig (2004) notes that one of the most common critiques of CDA is that “its philosophical foundations” are “unclear” (p. 134). It is also limited by the fact that it lacks “an adequately developed sociological theory,” and that, at times it can suffer from an “overblown practical ambition with regard to effecting social change that interferes fatally with its scholarly task” (p. 134). This last statement is the most relevant to my study, in that CDA can result in an “over-interpretation of data” which “leads to a tendency to judge results according to their political implications as much if not more than their validity” (p. 138). Accordingly, the need to consider both the political implications *and* the validity of my research has been acknowledged throughout this study.

Another limitation, especially in relation to the nature of CDA, comes from the fact that I chose as units of analysis representational institutions, which led me to develop a certain reading that may have been different than if I had conducted, for example, interviews with organizational representatives or a multiple-case study of the professional lives of specific teachers. The perspective I have chosen, from the outside looking in, led me to fairly broad conclusions, whereas other perspectives would have yielded results of higher resolution and depth than I was able to provide. Indeed, a potentially fruitful direction for future research might be to examine individual teachers and to learn how they, themselves, perceive professionalism. Another possibility would be to contact authors of the documents I analyze here to add some nuance to this discussion.

Lastly, this study looked only at a snapshot in time, and did not collect any longitudinal data. The fast-changing political and economic climate in BC means that the world of education

is dynamic and fluid. In the time it took to complete this paper, the BCCT was dissolved, a province-wide teacher strike occurred, and a dramatic provincial election took place.

Undoubtedly, these recent developments are relevant to this study, a relevance that can perhaps be explored by future scholars.

## **Chapter Five – Findings and Discussion**

The goal of this chapter is to discuss how, and to what extent, each educational stakeholder in BC has included in their understanding of teacher professionalism the different dimensions delineated in my conceptual framework (see Chapter Three). I assert that each stakeholder emphasizes certain dimensions over others in an attempt to control the way in which teachers function within the system. This results in fundamentally contradictory discourses of teacher professionalism, as well as a great deal of tension between stakeholders with regard to teachers' role in education. If these tensions are to be resolved, and a way forward is to be found, it must first be understood exactly how different groups approach issues such as teacher autonomy, teacher accountability, self-regulation, teacher knowledge and expertise, and their professional code of ethics. It must also be determined whether there is any common space between these approaches wherein a consensus-based resolution may be found.

The organization of this chapter follows the five dimensions of teacher professionalism (self-regulation, autonomy, accountability, knowledge and expertise, and a code of ethics) as identified in the conceptual framework established in Chapter Two (see p. 37), as well as the two essential discourses of teacher professionalism in which these dimensions are framed – the Bureaucratic Professional and the Fully Autonomous Professional (see p. 54). Using the coding scheme outlined in Chapter Four, I examine how each of the five dimensions are addressed by each stakeholder, as revealed by my analysis of documents such as media releases, position papers, collective bargaining proposals, editorials, and organizational literature, and the extent to which the treatment of these five dimensions situates each stakeholder within one discourse or the other.

Before providing a detailed qualitative analysis, a brief quantitative overview of the results of my coding is included on Table 6 below. For each group, the number of times each code was identified within the analyzed documents is referred to as “frequency,” expressed as both a raw number and a percentage of all mentions made by the group, allowing me to compare the different stakeholders given the varying number of documents available for each group. It should be noted that this table is to be used to compare data within each group, rather than between groups, and comments on between-group differences are made in later sections of this chapter. This table provides strong evidence that different groups tend to emphasize different dimensions of teacher professionalism, which is a key point of this study, and what makes teacher professionalism such a compelling topic. The fact that the same idea – ‘professionalism’ – can be understood in such different ways shows just how contested its meaning has become in public education. Furthermore, the fact that these groups use these different dimensions as legitimizing discourses to achieve their aims suggests that teacher professionalism is not simply an abstract notion but a powerful pretext for change and an ongoing struggle over power in public education.

Table 6

*Code Frequency Comparison*

<i>Code</i>	<i>BCTF</i>		<i>BCPSEA</i>		<i>Provincial Gov't</i>		<i>BCSTA</i>		<i>BCPVPA</i>	
	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>%</i>
<b>Employees</b>	0	0%	8	7%	3	4%	0	0%	0	0%
<b>Alignment</b>	0	0%	10	9%	0	0%	0	0%	5	21%
<b>Bargaining</b>	7	3%	1	1%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%
<b>BCCT</b>	6	3%	3	3%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%
<b>Definition of Professionalism</b>	25	11%	2	2%	1	1%	1	7%	2	8%
<b>Professional Autonomy</b>	47	21%	22	19%	0	0%	0	0%	3	13%
<b>Professional Development</b>	37	17%	16	14%	2	3%	0	0%	1	4%
<b>Public Status</b>	9	4%	2	2%	18	23%	7	50%	4	17%
<b>Self-Regulation</b>	3	1%	7	6%	14	18%	1	7%	0	0%
<b>Standards</b>	8	4%	3	3%	12	15%	1	7%	4	17%
<b>Teacher Accountability</b>	13	6%	5	4%	8	10%	2	14%	5	21%
<b>Teacher Discipline</b>	5	2%	6	5%	16	20%	1	7%	0	0%
<b>Teacher Evaluations</b>	7	3%	18	16%	1	1%		0%	0	0%
<b>Supervision &amp; Control</b>	40	18%	6	5%	0	0%	1	7%	0	0%
<b>Teacher Unionism</b>	15	7%	6	5%	2	3%	0	0%	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100%</b>

These findings suggest several overarching themes. The BCTF clearly has the most interest in discussing the relationship between teacher's professionalism and their autonomy, the ramifications for teachers' professional development, and the erosive effect of teacher supervision upon teacher autonomy; less emphasis is placed on certification and the relationship between teachers and their employers. The BCPSEA, on the other hand, focuses primarily on teachers as employees, leading to an emphasis on balancing teacher autonomy with what it perceives as equally important notions of professionalism such as alignment with employer objectives and ongoing teacher evaluations. The remaining three groups (the provincial government, BCSTA, and BCPVPA) all tend to focus on the public nature of teachers' work and the consequential need for having standards-based accountability; the BCSTA and the BCPVPA view teachers as public servants whose practice must be aligned with and accountable to the goal of their employers, while the provincial government sees professional standards and their enforcement through discipline (to regulate teacher conduct and certify teacher competence) as the most important aspects of teacher professionalism.

These findings are discussed in-depth below, by examining how each stakeholder approaches the five dimensions of teacher professionalism, and which dimensions are emphasized over others. This allows me to orient my discussion on the similarities and differences between each stakeholder, and to provide some insight as to the larger issues each stakeholder is trying to address. It should be noted that the order in which I examine these stakeholders is somewhat arbitrary, although the fact that the BCTF and the BCPSEA are examined first is a reflection of their relative abundance of published documents.

## The BCTF

Although I found no explicit definitions of teacher professionalism in the documents examined, the BCTF does provide some tangential evidence indicating its conception of teacher professionalism. In a workshop<sup>15</sup> called “Creating a Culture of Professionalism,” a “teacher professional” is defined as having seven characteristics: “knowledgeable, collaborative, passionate, relationship oriented, current with practice, accepting & open-minded, and a life-long learner” (BCTF, 2012g). As professionals, “teachers put the interests of students ahead of the interests of the profession and themselves” (Shields & Turner, 2011), and Naylor (2011c) lists four criteria of professionalism, “all of which could apply to teachers: the use of skills based on theoretical knowledge, education and training in those skills certified by examination, a code of professional conduct oriented towards the public good, and a powerful professional organization.” Professional development is also by the BCTF seen as an important dimension of professionalism, for “to be a professional implies that each member of a profession undertakes professional development” (Naylor, 2011d). This, crucially, includes control over the content and orientation of professional development, as “professions or professional bodies set parameters in terms of focus or time” while “many encourage autonomy within those parameters” (Naylor, 2011d). Finally, while teacher autonomy is never mentioned explicitly as a dimension of professionalism, Naylor (2011g) implicitly links this dimension to teacher professionalism stating that “increasing accountability and reducing teachers’ autonomy further, as BCPSEA clearly wants to do, will erode the status of teaching as a profession.” In fact, the

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<sup>15</sup> A workshop that “explores the ways local and school teams can and do lead on professional issues, develop ideas and practices around professional cultures, and seek ways to enhance and support the autonomous professional practices of teachers” (BCTF, 2012f).

BCTF mentions teacher autonomy more often than any other code in my analysis, which warrants further exploration.

**Teacher autonomy, professional development, and accountability.** As discussed in the academic literature review above, autonomy is a key component of professionalism. Defined variously as the ability or freedom to apply discretionary judgement based on professional knowledge to complex situations, autonomy can be thought of as the primary right that comes with professional status. Of course, this right of autonomy should also come with responsibility, which is generally considered to be the establishment, *by the profession*, of a rigorous internal accountability or regulatory framework to continually justify the autonomy bestowed upon the profession. This autonomy is also the source of a profession's power.

The high frequency of the term 'teacher autonomy' in the BCTF documents suggests that full professional autonomy is a central feature in this stakeholder group's conceptualization of teacher professionalism. As an organization whose primary mandate is to advocate for the welfare of its members (public school teachers), it should come as no surprise that teacher autonomy – the primary source of teachers' powers – would figure so prominently into its conception of professionalism. This focus on autonomy has a profound effect on the way other dimensions of professionalism are defined and operationalized. These dimensions, such as self-regulation and public accountability, are generally understood in the literature to be legitimizing sources of public trust and the autonomy that follows (see Bottery, 2009; Cruess, Johnston, & Cruess 2002; David, 2000; Evetts, 2011; McNess, Broadfoot, & Osborn, 2003; and especially Freidson, 2001), which means that overemphasizing autonomy at their expense can lead to an incomplete conceptualization of professionalism. The literature is quite clear: professionalism is

a social contract wherein autonomy is not simply granted but earned through rigorous self-regulation in order to ensure a high level of public accountability.

While it was difficult to find an explicit definition of teacher autonomy, the Federation's website equates it with teachers' freedom to "exercise their judgment and act on it," and ties it directly to public education as "an important source of strength in a public education system" (BCTF, 2012b). Furthermore, autonomy "remains an essential component of professionalism, and if teachers are professionals then they need and deserve significant degrees of autonomy in terms of what<sup>16</sup> and how they teach (Naylor, 2011f). In almost all cases, autonomy is seen by the BCTF as being attacked, threatened, subverted, or diminished by the government and/or its bargaining agent, the BCPSEA. Examples abound. Anderson and Daly (2012) state that the role of the professional development chairpersons [...] is increasingly a critical one in continuing BCTF resistance against *the threatened loss of teachers' autonomy* over their professional development." Naylor (2011f) reports that "while *the union has identified threats to autonomy* [...] there are also some principals and district managers who may reach beyond their defined powers and in so doing *attack what teachers consider to be their autonomy* to use their professional judgment to teach and assess students." In another document, Naylor (2011d) notes that the BCPSEA's bargaining philosophy and position are "highly confrontational, in that *both directly attack teacher autonomy* and shift the locus of professional development control from teachers-as-professionals to employers." Novakowski (2004) also propagates the notion that teacher professionalism is under attack in claiming that "openly and blatantly adding insult to injury, *the government attacked the professionalism of BC teachers* by legislatively taking over the BC College of Teachers." For McNally (2009), this attack is structural: "professionals resist

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<sup>16</sup> The BCTF does not suggest that teachers should be the sole determinants of curricular learning objectives.

and subvert the control agenda aims of education managers; *so the professionalism of teachers is structurally attacked and undermined.*” Finally, Anderson and Daly (2012) point to the BCTF as the defense against such attacks: “all of these initiatives came as a result of the BCTF *resisting attacks that would lessen* the number of non-instructional days and *professional autonomy* in relation to these days” (all emphases added in this paragraph).

These examples demonstrate that teacher autonomy is the primary focus of the BCTF’s understanding and operationalization of teacher professionalism. Restrictions on autonomy are equated with attacks on professionalism. In another example, one article from the *BCTF Teacher Newsmagazine* reports on the provincial government’s “agenda of attacks on teacher autonomy that could well be a source of professional struggle for some time to come” (Kuehn, 2002). According to Naylor (2011b), the government has “limited autonomy by ordering and increasingly controlling approaches to governance, administration, and pedagogy” while the government’s bargaining agent, the BCPSEA:

...similarly attempts to appropriate professionalism (by further limiting autonomy), suppresses alternative views (by ignoring the literature but citing arbitrations), and fails to engage in serious debate because its goal is direction and control rather than engaging in the current discourse on teacher professionalism and autonomy. (Naylor, 2011c)

More simply, “the greater the level of management control, the lesser degree of autonomy occurs [*sic*]” (Naylor, 2011c).

One of the primary threats to teachers’ autonomy is increasing external control over professional development, which is reflected in the BCTF’s perspective on what the government has referred to as ‘alignment’:

What Abbott [Minister of Education] meant by ‘alignment’ was not stated, but if previous employer representative documents are considered, they include explicit or implied statements such as the following: Teachers are employees and should do whatever professional development their employer tells them to do. Administrators will increasingly control and direct teachers’ professional development. Mentoring should be tied to performance reviews not to supporting all new teachers as they enter the profession. PD [Professional Development] templates will be introduced to enforce conformity. Teaching is not on the same standing as other professions; therefore, teachers do not enjoy, and are not entitled to, the same levels of autonomy as other professions, and in the future should have less. (BCTF, 2011)

Professional development is seen as one of the ways in which teachers can most effectively exercise their autonomy. Consequently, it is put forward as an antidote to perceived encroachment and an important dimension in the BCTF’s conception of professionalism:

Today, continuous, career-long development as a professional is one of the key aspects of being a teacher in British Columbia. It is one of the primary goals of the BCTF and is noted in the four out of eight current BC Teacher Regulation Branch Standards. In order to develop as professionals, teachers must have autonomy, respect, and time to assess and understand their own strengths and needs and must have opportunities to grow, and to share expertise. (Anderson & Daly, 2012)

Perhaps it is not surprising that professional development is seen by the BCTF as a key element of teacher professionalism. However, its vision of professional development is specifically considered to be teacher-directed rather than externally imposed, and “true professional development is much more than learning skills in a *top-down* manner of delivery” (McNally,

2009, emphasis in original). “Teacher choice” is seen as essential in countering unrealistically high “external expectations” (McNally, 2009), which are used “to undermine and discredit teacher professionalism” (Hill, 2010). This emphasis on the threatening nature of ‘external’ control of teachers also extends into the BCTF’s conception of accountability.

For the BCTF, accountability should be “something that comes from within, rather than something that is externally imposed” (BCTF, 2006). This internal accountability, a supposedly natural extension of teachers’ professionalism, is meant to “respond to the implicit social contract between society and the public school system,” and is justified by the fact that BC teachers “are among the most rigorously trained and well-educated teachers in the world” (BCTF, 2006). The need for external accountability implies “that internal accountability does not exist or is not sufficient,” which “demonstrates a lack of trust in teachers and the teaching profession” (BCTF, 2006). Teachers’ autonomy is also seen to be “challenged and reduced when imposed accountability agendas dominate” (Naylor, 2011f), and that:

...increasing accountability and reducing teachers’ autonomy further, as BCPSEA clearly wants to do, will erode the status of teaching as a profession, thereby making it less attractive to those who want a professional career which offers significant autonomy to its members. (Naylor, 2011g)

For the BCTF, accountability and autonomy are not only mutually exclusive, but the former is seen to detract from the latter. Notably, this differs from the way professionalism is understood in the academic literature, where public accountability and professional autonomy go hand in hand.

While terms of autonomy, professional development, and accountability were prevalent in the BCTF documents, the following are concepts notable primarily due to their absence.

**Regulation, standards of practice, and teacher discipline.** One of the most important dimensions of professionalism discussed in the academic literature is the notion of self-regulation (see Freidson, 2001). Self-regulation, including the enforcement of strong standards of practice, can be seen as the responsibility that comes with the right to professional status (self-regulation and the establishment of standards leads to public trust, from which a professional's right to autonomy is established). Because much of the BCTF literature focuses on the threats to teacher autonomy and teacher professionalism (without defining them clearly), most forms of control, supervision, management, or oversight are framed in a negative way, most often as attacks or struggles between the BCTF and the BCPSEA. The idea that teachers are professionals is a fundamental assumption in all of the BCTF documents analyzed, but several of the key justifications for this professional status (rigorous self-regulation and internal and/or public accountability, most notably) are never established. Furthermore, any attempts at establishing an organizational framework to support these dimensions of professionalism are dismissed as infringements on teachers' professional rights.

One example of how external pressures are framed as an erosion of teachers' professional rights is provided by Hill (2010), who states that "the arena of professional development is becoming a hugely contested space for teachers" and that "administration and district personnel are encroaching relentlessly with 'best practice' content and pushing for more standardized practice and assessment across the province." Another example comes from Kuehn (2002), who frames this external control as "compliance – which means making sure that teachers are following outside direction rather than acting on their professional judgment," which is equated with autonomy. He also describes a "movement from a professional model of decisions with a high degree of trust to this new system of central direction, compliance, audits and loss of

professional autonomy” (Kuehn, 2002). A final example of the negative way in which the BCTF seems to view the regulation of teachers is the way it chafes at the use of the word ‘employee’ in government reports. This reaction is best expressed by Naylor (2011d):

Teachers are professionals, not just ‘employees.’ Another key problem with the BCPSEA paper and its subsequent tabled language is its continued labeling and categorization of teachers as employees. Teachers are, of course, employed, just as doctors are in hospitals or judges in a court, but the sustained labeling removes any concept of professionalism from their role. The teacher as no more than an employee therefore places the teacher within the ‘master-servant’ relationship, denying professionalism and reducing, if not eliminating, autonomy. Even ‘professional growth plans’ proposed by BCPSEA are defined to support ‘employee,’ not ‘professional growth.’ Such placement well suits narrowly-focused HR control of those employed, but does little to build effective professional learning for teachers.

Although much is criticized about the external control of teachers and its restrictive implications on teacher professionalism, the BCTF provides no alternatives. Furthermore, mentions of self-regulation and accountability (either internal or external) are conspicuously absent from most documents, and when they are included, they are almost always framed as oppositional rather than integral to teachers’ autonomy (which is equated with teachers’ professionalism). The best example of this comes from Naylor (2011f) who states that “teachers’ autonomy is challenged and reduced when imposed accountability agendas dominate.” In another document, Naylor (2011a) fundamentally questions what is widely understood in the literature to be a mutual relationship between public trust and accountability. He states that “the erosion of trust is a precursor to increased accountability,” when, in fact, internal accountability exercised by the

profession itself is the very dimension of professionalism that justifies public trust. He goes on to describe “this erosion” as becoming “more pronounced internationally over the last three decades, during which time teacher autonomy has been negatively impacted as increased regulation directs and controls more of teachers’ work” (Naylor, 2011a). It is quite clear from these documents that the BCTF’s brand of teacher professionalism, characterized by a high degree of teacher autonomy, redefines accountability as desirable only to the extent that it comes from, and stays, *within* the profession. External accountability of any kind is *verboten*.

Accountability is not the only dimension of professionalism marginalized by the BCTF. Contrary to the academic literature, there is little emphasis on self-regulation and the consequential empowerment of professionals in any of the analyzed BCTF documents. The BCTF’s conception of teacher professionalism seems to be one in which the rights of professionalism, such as autonomy and public trust, are given a great deal of attention, while the demands of professionalism, such as rigorous self-regulation and accountability, are given short shrift. Instead of acknowledging and meeting these demands, the BCTF’s answer to the perceived ongoing attempts at de-professionalizing teachers is in their organization as a union, and in the collective powers that result.

**Teacher unionism.** It is not surprising that documents taken from the website of a teachers’ union would include numerous mentions of teacher unionism, but these mentions are noteworthy because they reflect a belief that unionism and professionalism go hand-in-hand. In fact, the possibility that some may see a contradiction between professionalism and unionization is addressed head-on in several documents. One article from the *Teacher Newsmagazine*, for example, states directly that “trade union membership [...] does not negate professional status; teachers still possess specialized knowledge, are bound by codes of professional practise, and are

still entrusted with a unique educational responsibility” (BCTF, 2003). The same article also acknowledges that:

There appears to be conflict and confusion in the minds of the public with respect to teachers’ simultaneous status. Apparently, the public views the objectives of a trade union in marked contrast with those of a profession. A profession is seen to provide a specialized and valued service to the public; in theory at least, it is accountable to the public interest for the conduct and performance of its members. A profession, therefore, typically has a governing body that establishes standards of entry, certification, conduct, and performance, and which imposes sanctions against members who fail to meet the conditions for continued practice.

The BCTF resolves the apparent contradiction between professionalism and unionization by stating that the “granting [of] union certification to teachers simply formalizes and legitimizes the employer–employee relationship that has always existed between school boards and teachers” which “does not de-professionalize<sup>17</sup> teaching in any way” (BCTF, 2003). There is more, however, to this distinction between a union of professionals and a professionalism association.

The creation of the BCCT in 1987 (see page 13) was significant, in that it attempted to create a separate entity responsible for the regulation of the teacher profession. This was seen, by some, as a necessary step towards greater professional recognition for teachers. There was to be one body, the BCTF, functioning as a traditional labour union in advocating for individual members, while another body, the BCCT, at arms-length, would be concerned with upholding the standards of the profession. The BCTF, however, did not see it this way; the transfer of key

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<sup>17</sup>In fact, the BCTF’s perception of de-professionalization is mainly linked to its understanding of accountability as prescribed by government.

professional functions from the Federation was seen as an overt attack and a no-so-subtle attempt at union-busting. It was for this reason that the BCTF essentially took control of the BCCT, which prevented the College's ability to function as a proper regulatory body (see Avison, 2010).

The perceived dichotomy between unionization and professionalism is based entirely on the trait and structural-functional models of professionalism discussed in Chapter 3 (see page 24 and 31), and as such, is somewhat misconceived. There is no reason a union of professionals cannot act as both a regulatory and an advocatory body. In fact, the type of internal accountability and self-regulation prescribed by the literature around Fully Autonomous Professionalism demands just such an organization – one made up of professionals to uphold the standards of the profession. The question of whether that organization is referred to as a union of professionals or a professional association is little more than semantics. Whatever it is called, however, its establishment of internal accountability must be rigorous, transparent, and effective – a requirement that remains unacknowledged by the BCTF.

There is little evidence that the BCTF has given equal consideration to its advocacy and regulatory roles. There are, however, some suggestions as to how it might do so in the future, namely by emphasizing the professional nature of the organization. For example, Naylor (2011e) suggests that the BCTF underscore its “professional focus,” which would place it in the same category as “other associations such as those of doctors, dentists, accountants, and other professionals who enjoy high public esteem.” Thus, “giving a higher profile and priority to developing and promoting professional development opportunities for teachers would ensure a sustainable role and function for teacher unions” and may “enable the teaching profession and teachers’ organizations to be viewed more positively than they currently are” (Naylor, 2011e).

The Federation has also established a “Code of Ethics” that “states general rules for all members of the BCTF for maintaining high standards of professional service and conduct toward students, colleagues, and the professional union”:

1. The teacher speaks and acts toward students with respect and dignity, and deals judiciously with them, always mindful of their individual rights and sensibilities.
2. The teacher respects the confidential nature of information concerning students and may give it only to authorized persons or agencies directly concerned with their welfare. *The teacher follows legal requirements in reporting child protection issues.*
3. The teacher recognizes that a privileged relationship with students exists and refrains from exploiting that relationship for material, ideological, or other advantage.
4. The teacher is willing to review with colleagues, students, and their parents/guardians the quality of service rendered by the teacher and the practices employed in discharging professional duties.
5. The teacher directs any criticism of the teaching performance and related work of a colleague to that colleague in private, and only then, after informing the colleague in writing of the intent to do so, may direct the criticism, in confidence, to appropriate individuals who are able to offer advice and assistance. *It shall not be considered a breach of the Code of Ethics for a member to follow legal requirements or official protocols in reporting child protection issues.*
6. The teacher acknowledges the authority and responsibilities of the BCTF and its locals and fulfills obligations arising from membership in her or his professional union.
7. The teacher adheres to the provisions of the collective agreement.

8. The teacher acts in a manner not prejudicial to job actions or other collective strategies of her or his professional union.
  9. The teacher neither applies for nor accepts a position which is included in a Federation in-dispute declaration.
  10. The teacher, as an individual or as a member of a group of teachers, does not make unauthorized representations to outside bodies in the name of the Federation or its locals.
- (BCTF, 2012a, emphasis in original)

On the surface, this code seems to reflect some understanding of the need to establish professional standards, although closer examination reveals that the rigorous enforcement of these standards and the associated public accountability are not actually reflected in its content. No mention is made of consequences (internally or externally enforced) that may come as a result of violating these codes. Of the 10 rules stated on this list, the first three deal with student rights and the last five specifically outline the implications for teachers of belonging to a professional union. Only the remaining two items refer to professional regulation, but in neither item is mention made of public accountability, enforcement, or a specific regulatory body.

This reflects an understanding of regulation framed by the BCTF's conception of teacher professionalism in which teacher autonomy is the driving dimension. From this perspective, teacher's autonomy precludes the need for stringent, external regulation – as professionals, teachers are accountable to themselves and their profession, with no external regulation required. To the extent that some regulation may be needed, the Federation seeks to act as both a nominal regulatory body and a trade union – a “union of professionals” (BCTF 2012a). It also seems clear that a great deal of distrust and suspicion exist between the BCTF and the provincial government, so much so that rather than promote initiatives to strengthen teacher

professionalism in BC (such as vigorous self-regulation and the establishment of strongly enforced standards of practice), the BCTF has limited itself to what Naylor (2011e) describes as “perennially and predictably reactive engagements with governments.” In other words, the BCTF has both defined and entrenched itself as an organization devoted to defending attacks against teacher professionalism (a reactive position) rather than proactively defining exactly what professionalism entails and ensuring that teachers meet these criteria. As such, the Federation is more focused on disagreeing with those attacks than establishing its own rigorous definition of regulation and professionalism. This is in keeping with an organization dedicated to advocating on behalf of its members, but effectively discredits any claim that the BCTF is a self-regulating professional organization as defined in the academic literature.

**The BCTF and teacher professionalism.** The main driver of the BCTF’s understanding of teacher professionalism is teacher autonomy, and all other dimensions are reframed to suit this understanding. In fact, teacher autonomy is so important to the BCTF that one of its primary goals is “to ensure, through the development of democratic processes, professional autonomy for teachers” (BCTF, 2012c). The importance placed on the link between teacher autonomy and professional development and the high frequency of references to professional growth in BCTF documents (see Table 6) indicates that practical knowledge and expertise among teachers is also a high priority for the Federation, to the extent that it should support teachers’ autonomy. The BCTF has also instituted a professional Code of Ethics, which suggests some understanding that professionals must be held to high standards of practice. However, this Code does not establish or state exactly how these standards are to be enforced, instead leaving it to teachers to uphold these standards autonomously. Accountability is almost always referred to in a negative light in the examined documents, as if it limits and erodes teachers’ professional autonomy rather than

constitutes a complementary responsibility. Finally, in terms of its treatment of teacher regulation, the BCTF is devoted to rejecting the external regulation of teachers, usually framed as a foreign imposition by those who would trample on teachers' professional right to autonomy, while minimally addressing how teachers might establish a robust and transparent system of internal regulation (and thus accountability). This suggests a fundamental disconnect between widely established academic understandings of professionalism and that of the BCTF.

The BCTF's understanding of teacher professionalism aligns quite closely with the discourse of professionalism earlier described as "The Fully Autonomous Professional" (see Table 2). As a professional union representing and advocating for teachers, the prestige and working conditions that stem from this conceptualization are of obvious importance and appeal. The overall rejection of top-down, external management of both teachers and the profession, as well as the emphasis placed on collective (if not collegial) relations is clear in BCTF documents. Finally, the repeated negative framing of external control over public education in general and the work of teachers in particular as attacks on professionalism reflects the idea that professionalism should counteract the bureaucracy within which public education is administered.

Important aspects of this discourse, however, are marginalized. As mentioned above, the BCTF takes teachers' status as professionals as a given; the public's trust having already been established, with no need to maintain this trust through transparent accountability and stringent regulation. Moreover, there is a conspicuous absence of a substantive definition identifying key dimensions of professionalism. This omission has several possible explanations. The first is that years of bargaining and public conflict with provincial governments may have created an organization prone to rhetoric but shy on providing concrete details that could be used against it.

From a bargaining perspective, professionalism is a powerful pretext that allows the union to make claims on its members' behalf. More cynically, the BCTF's selective use of the discourse of professionalism could reflect an unspoken understanding that, while the rights that come with professionalism are of great benefit to teachers, the responsibilities that come with these rights are onerous and best left unexamined. The BCPSEA, however, has no such aversion. As will be shown below, the BCPSEA uses an entirely different dimension as its main driver in understanding and operationalizing teacher professionalism: accountability.

### **The BCPSEA**

Three significant patterns emerged in my analysis of the BCPSEA. The first is related to framing teachers as employees, and the consequential assumption that their practice should align with the goals and objectives of their employer (e.g., by following professional development initiatives imposed by the employer, implementing only prescribed pedagogical practices, and administering ministry- and board-wide standardized tests). Framing teachers as employees allows for the introduction of terms such as “employee assessment,” “employee evaluation, performance appraisal, employee appraisal, performance review” and “career development” (BCPSEA, 2011a), all of which betray the human-resources perspective of the BCPSEA and have important implications for teacher autonomy and professional development. This betrayal of the BCPSEA human-resources perspective is the second pattern in my analysis. Both the BCPSEA and the BCTF address autonomy and professional development head-on, albeit in much different ways as discussed below. The third pattern is the differing way in which each organization approaches teacher regulation; the BCPSEA tends to stress the importance of *teacher evaluations*, which is a much softer and less critical way of describing what the BCTF labels as *supervision and control*. While both organizations are essentially referring to the same

idea (teacher regulation), the way they approach the discussion is markedly different and merits analysis. Each of these patterns will now be discussed in more detail.

**Professionals or employees?** First of all, it should be established that the BCPSEA's official stance is that teachers have "dual status as both professionals and employees" (BCPSEA, 2011c). However, from this perspective, being an employee puts significant limits on both the professional autonomy and professional development of teachers. For example, one document states that "professional autonomy is limited by [...] the fact that many professionals are also employees" (BCPSEA, 2011c). Comparing teachers to other professionals such as lawyers and accountants, the same document goes on to state that, "while they have the autonomy to exercise their professional judgement, they must also comply with the requirements of their employer, and failure to do so can result in discipline or termination" (BCPSEA, 2011c). These "requirements" are summarized as follows:

Given the context within which they work [...] there are limits on teachers' professional autonomy. The Ministry of Education is ultimately responsible for setting policy, establishing the curriculum and defining educational practices. Boards of education employ teachers to implement the ministry's vision, policies and goals. Teacher autonomy is therefore limited by the Ministry's authority over the curriculum, the obligations and rights of management (in particular, to evaluate and supervise teachers), and the teacher's obligation to operate consistently with effective educational practice. (BCPSEA, 2011c)

A prime example of this discourse put into practice is provided by the Sooke Arbitration Case discussed earlier in this paper (see page 11). A teacher was asked by her principal to administer a district-wide, in-class assessment of her students that she felt inappropriate. Citing her

professional autonomy and judgement, she refused, which prompted disciplinary action from her employer. The BCTF local claimed a grievance on her behalf, with the BCPSEA responding in defense of the school district, and the case went to arbitration. The arbitrator (Dorsey, 2009) ruled against the teacher, citing the need for boards of education to “employ teachers to implement the ministry’s vision,” the limiting of teacher autonomy by the “ministry’s authority over the curriculum” and, most important to this case, “the teacher’s obligation to operate consistently with effective educational practice” (p. 44). This case amounts to a strong legal justification and validation of the BCPSEA’s stance on teachers’ professional autonomy: that teachers are as much employees as professionals, and that their autonomy should be limited as a result of this dual status. A direct consequence of this limitation is the BCPSEA’s insistence that teacher practice should be aligned with organizational goals.

The BCPSEA’s framing of teachers as employees reflects a fundamental difference between the BCPSEA and the BCTF’s conception of professionalism. This difference is most obvious in the contrasting ways in which each organization defines notions of alignment. For the BCPSEA, alignment means teachers have the professional responsibility to participate in such things as standardized testing, district-directed professional development, and ongoing teacher evaluations; this is seen as a natural extension of the employer-employee relationship between teachers and administrators. For the BCTF, alignment is presented in a negative light, as a way to force teachers to “do whatever their employer tells them to do,” allow administrators to “control and direct teachers’ professional development,” “enforce conformity,” reduce the professional standing of teachers as compared to other professions, and to justify even more reduction in professionalism in the future (BCTF, 2011b).

For the BCPSEA, alignment is most relevant to teacher assessment, which should be used to “evaluate an employee’s performance, motivate and engage employees by providing feedback and goal-setting opportunities, and align the behaviour of an individual with the broader goals of the organization” (BCPSEA, 2011a). Rather than understanding this alignment as a limitation of teacher professionalism, the BCPSEA believes it “speaks to teacher professional *responsibilities* to address school, district, and Ministry initiatives” (BCPSEA, 2011d, emphasis added). This highlights a significant point of contrast between the BCPSEA and the BCTF, as the Federation seems to view alignment as a threat to professionalism and an attack on teachers rather than a necessary consequence of teachers’ professionalism. This point is probably best made by the BCPSEA’s own literature, which states that:

As explored in the overview of performance management in other employment sectors, a supervisor asking employees to link their daily work to the goals of the organization would be upheld as modelling best practices; here, it is cause for concern that requires contacting the BCTF local office. (BCPSEA, 2011a)

For the BCPSEA, aligning professional practice with the goals and objectives of the employer is a duty and obligation that comes with being a professional. For the BCTF, forcing teachers to align their goals to that of some external body is a violation of professional autonomy and a threat to teachers’ professional identity. To explore this contrast in more detail, the next section examines a second pattern: the BCPSEA’s conception of professional autonomy and development.

**Professional autonomy and development.** The BCPSEA’s understanding of teachers’ professional autonomy specifically speaks volumes to its understanding of teacher professionalism more generally. For the BCTF, teacher autonomy is seen as a given – a natural

and necessary extension of their notion of teacher professionalism. For the BCPSEA, however, teacher professionalism and autonomy are not so closely linked. It posits that the public nature of teachers' work differentiates teachers from "traditional professions – such as medicine and law – [which] uphold the autonomy of their members to make independent decisions, exercise their professional judgment, and provide services largely free of external supervision" and it questions whether the "same degree of professional autonomy should apply to teachers" (BCPSEA, 2011c). It also makes the unsupported claim that "most jurisdictions" do not engage in discussions of autonomy as it pertains to the K-12 teaching profession, chalking up the importance of autonomy for BC teachers to the BCTF's continued attempts to expand "the scope of what is meant by professional autonomy in the K-12 public education sector" (BCPSEA, 2011c). That is, the BCPSEA assumes that because teachers work for, and are paid by, the public, they deserve less autonomy than other professions, and it also accuses the BCTF of broadening the notion of autonomy to include aspects of BC teachers' work that is not included in other (unnamed) jurisdictions.

The BCPSEA never argues that autonomy is not a prerequisite for professionalism, but rather that "of all the criteria that are said to define a profession (which generally include shared standards of practice, monopoly over service, long periods of training, etc.), a high degree of professional autonomy is the one criterion that is most at odds with the education profession" (BCPSEA, 2011c). Because "educators work in a regulated work environment, must generally follow a prescribed centralized curriculum, and are often asked to administer specific assessments of students on behalf of their school, district, or ministry of education," teachers are seen by the BCPSEA to "have less autonomy than other professionals"<sup>18</sup> (BCPSEA, 2011c).

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<sup>18</sup> The Sooke Case, once again, provides an excellent example of this: the requirement of administering standardized tests trumped teacher autonomy.

According to the BCPSEA, teachers' claims to professional autonomy are further weakened by "the complicated nature of the relationship between the BC College of Teachers [now the TRB] and the union, [which] means that the education profession does not have the same structures and policies in place to regulate the professional autonomy of its members"<sup>19</sup> (BCPSEA, 2011c). The BCPSEA seems to be on more solid ground here in claiming that the lack of self-regulation by teachers decreases their autonomy, at least in relation to the academic literature. Not all of what the BCPSEA claims, however, is supported by this literature.

It seems that while the BCPSEA does not intend to argue that teachers are not professionals, per se, it does advocate limits on both the professional autonomy and professional development of teachers (the latter implied by the emphasis on "effective educational practice"). In the context described by the academic literature, this position is problematic. As defined by Ball (2009), Evetts (2011), and Freidson (2001), professionalism rests on the assumption that the complexity and importance of the work in which professionals engage requires a high amount of freedom for them to exercise their own judgement, which is enhanced by a high level of knowledge and bolstered by public trust. To impose limitations on teachers' autonomy, as proposed by the BCPSEA, is effectively to deny teachers professional status. This implies that the BCPSEA either denies that teachers' work is complex enough to warrant full autonomy (that they do not possess the professional knowledge and skill to exercise this autonomy), or that they have not earned enough public trust to justify autonomy. Of course, the reality may be a combination of these or other explanations.

The differences in opinion between the union and the employers is not lost on the BCPSEA, which recognizes that "teachers, seeing themselves as autonomous professionals, take

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<sup>19</sup> The BCTF, no doubt, would regard 'regulating professional autonomy' as an oxymoron.

issue at having their authority limited by what they perceive to be a bureaucratic, regulated, accountability-driven and assessment-focused education system” (BCPSEA, 2011c).

Recognizing these differences, however, is far from reconciling them. The BCPSEA has stated that the debate stems from a lack of understanding of “what it means to be a professional operating as an employee in a regulated system accountable to the public” (BCPSEA, 2011c).

For example, one of the BCPSEA’s bargaining proposals relating to teacher assessment proposes a need to “include a high degree of teacher autonomy, but not without acceptance of shared responsibilities and accountability” (BCPSEA, 2011d). For the BCTF, professional autonomy is a binary notion, something that is either held by a group of professionals, or not. In contrast, the BCPSEA considers professional autonomy to exist on a continuum: “it is a matter of degree and extent, not absolutes” (BCPSEA, 2011c). On one end of this continuum lies the idealized version of professionalism written about in much of the academic literature and heralded by the BCTF; on the other end lies the need for teachers to be accountable, responsible, public employees.

In spite of this disagreement regarding teacher autonomy, both organizations agree on the importance of professional development. According to the BCPSEA, “one of the hallmarks of a profession is its commitment to ensuring that its members engage in a process of continuous learning so that they can maintain the profession’s standards and stay current with new knowledge and best practices” (BCPSEA, 2011f). While the BCTF would likely share this view, they would disagree that professional development must “balance the need to respect a professional’s autonomy to decide upon his or her personal professional development goals, with the need to ensure that those goals are aligned with those of the employer” (BCPSEA, 2011f). In other words, while the BCTF conceptualizes professional development as furthering and demonstrating teachers’ professional autonomy, they make no mention of linking this

professional development to employer initiatives or organization goals. The BCPSEA, on the other hand, understands autonomy as only one of many components of professional development, many of which are employer-driven and highly linked to assessment, evaluation, performance reviews, and alignment with external direction. More succinctly, professional development according to the BCPSEA should address “both the expressed needs of individual teachers as well as other broad-based common initiatives” (BCPSEA, 2011d).

The BCPSEA’s take on professional development can be better understood by analyzing a proposal made as a part of the a recent round of bargaining talks with the BCTF. This proposal reflects a desire on the part of the BCPSEA to “establish a system for professional growth and engagement that”:

- Recognizes the importance of personal development plans and the role that ongoing professional growth plays in this.
- Aligns individual and organizational goals.
- Provides employees with clear performance expectations.
- Provides employees with regular feedback and support where applicable including initiatives such as mentorship. (BCPSEA, 2011e)

Several messages are clear from this excerpt. First, it exemplifies the importance placed by the BCPSEA on alignment with organizational goals. Second, it reflects the tendency of the BCPSEA to refer to teachers almost always as employees (a word used rarely, if ever, in the BCTF literature). Third is the idea that the BCPSEA’s understanding of professional development is indistinguishable from its belief that teachers’ professionalism requires ongoing, external evaluation. All of these messages demonstrate that the main driver in the BCPSEA’s understanding of teacher professionalism is public accountability, and that its conceptualization

of the other four dimensions is highly influenced by this emphasis. These influences can be seen by examining the ways in which teacher regulation, evaluation, and assessment are understood by the BCPSEA.

**Teacher regulation, evaluation and assessment.** The BCPSEA's notion of regulation is never stated explicitly, although it can be gleaned from their comments regarding the BCCT, the former "statutory authority responsible for regulating the teaching profession" (BCPSEA, 2011f). According to the BCPSEA, the BCCT's mandate is to be "responsible for ensuring the competence of BC's educators by setting standards for the education, professional responsibility and competence of certificate holders and applicants for certificates of qualification" (BCPSEA, 2011f). Elsewhere, the BCPSEA links professional regulation to professional development, in the sense that a profession's regulatory body should ensure that professional development be "linked to standards of practice" and "balance the need to respect a professional's autonomy to decide upon his or her personal professional development goals, with the need to ensure that those goals are aligned with those of the employer" (BCPSEA, 2011f). To summarize, the BCPSEA asserts that teacher regulation must ensure teacher competence by setting standards, enforcing them, and finding a compromise between individual autonomy and the need for teachers to align their practice with the needs of their employers.

The BCTF vehemently opposes any form of external regulation, and "stakes a claim to being solely responsible for the professional development of teachers" (BCPSEA, 2011f). The BCPSEA, however, maintains that since the dissolution of the BCCT and the passage of the *Teachers Act* in 2012, the certification, regulation, and disciplining of teachers shall take place "through shared responsibility between the Provincial Government and the public education sector" which will include "a new Discipline and Professional Conduct Board to hear complaints

made against teachers” (BCPSEA, 2011b). These references to “discipline” rarely appear in the BCPSEA documents. Instead, most mention of teacher regulation is couched in less antagonistic language such as ‘teacher evaluation,’ ‘performance management,’ and ‘ongoing professional assessment.’ Likely to fit within its ongoing discourse framing teacher professionalism as under attack, the BCTF tends to refer to such practices as teacher supervision and control. Despite differing language, both groups are essentially referring to the same thing: external oversight of teachers’ practice.

The BCPSEA recognizes the sensitivity of teacher evaluations, given that “in some quarters within the public education system [one can safely assume this is a reference to the BCTF], teacher assessment has historically been viewed with suspicion”<sup>20</sup> (BCPSEA, 2011a). However, “assessment is also a professional responsibility,” and “*outside* feedback, formal evaluation, and personal assessment should be accepted as appropriate practice by any professional group” (BCPSEA, 2011a, emphasis added). The practice of assessment is meant to address “two broad goals, with the first focusing on accountability and the second on professional growth” (BCPSEA, 2011a). This, of course, is anathema to the BCTF; the idea that an external imposition should play a role in teachers’ professional development violates highly valued notions of teachers’ professional autonomy.

The BCPSEA’s position is best understood through its own summary of the difference between itself and the BCTF with regard to the “two very distinct views of the role of assessment” taken by each organization:

On the one hand, the BCTF generally takes the position that teachers are autonomous professionals who have the knowledge and expertise to operate independently of school

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<sup>20</sup> The BCPSEA uses the terms evaluation and assessment interchangeably.

or district goals. Teachers are professionals who can self-assess their strengths and weaknesses, and formal evaluations are seen simply as a requirement of employment. Education partner groups, on the other hand, believe that it is quite justifiable for the employer (including school administrators and the district) to have an interest in assessing teachers, to identify areas for individual growth that are aligned with broader school or district goals, and to check in at some agreed-upon date to review overall performance. (BCPSEA, 2011a)

While never going as far as to say that teachers are not entitled to the privileges and rights of professionalism, the BCPSEA puts primary importance on making teachers accountable to the public by aligning their practice with employer goals. Thus, it defines and operationalizes a notion of teacher professionalism that is characterized by highly limited teacher autonomy. Given their mandate to represent employers and bargain on their behalf, it is perhaps understandable that regulation becomes more about management and less about teacher empowerment. On the other hand, the BCTF's primary mandate is to advocate for teachers and their control over public education, which helps explain why it tends to focus more heavily on teacher autonomy while chafing at any mention of teacher regulation. This leads to a rather vital omission shared by both organizations: very little mention is made of the possibility of teachers practicing self-regulation. Given the importance placed on self-regulation in the academic literature surrounding professionalism, this finding (or a lack thereof) warrants some discussion.

To return for a moment to this literature, self-regulation is considered by Freidson (2001) to “exist when an organized occupation gains the power to determine who is qualified to perform a defined set of tasks, to prevent all others from performing that work, and to control the criteria by which to evaluate performance” (p. 12). Others, such as Cruess et al. (2002) and Evetts (2011)

agree that self-regulation, rather than external regulation, sets the stage for professionalism by providing internal accountability, ensuring the maintenance of high standards, earning public trust, and therefore allowing full autonomy for a profession. Neither the BCPSEA nor the BCTF raise the possibility, or even seem to recognize the importance, of this type of regulation. For the BCTF, self-regulation is at best implicitly addressed by its belief in teachers' autonomy, full stop. For the BCPSEA, the demands of public accountability require that regulation be externally imposed rather than internally exercised by the profession. The respective and exclusive emphases of each group (the BCTF on autonomy and the BCPSEA on accountability) overshadow the academically crucial notion of regulation by the profession, for the profession.

This has not always been the case. As discussed in more detail earlier (see Chapter Two, p. 19), the *Teaching Profession Act* was passed in 1987, which created the BC College of Teachers. The BCCT, on the surface at least, seemed to provide exactly what Freidson (2001), Cruess et. al (2002), and Evetts (2011) may have proposed for the teaching profession in BC – an organization of teachers with a mandate to strengthen the teaching profession through self-regulation. However, BC already *had* an organization of teachers with a very broad mandate, which opposed the creation of the BCCT from the start: the BCTF. In retrospect, and with respect to the plight of teacher professionalism in British Columbia, the BCTF's opposition to the BCCT seems to be a missed opportunity of monumental proportions. It became a rather large bone of contention in over 20 years of struggle between the BCTF and the BCPSEA, a struggle that culminated with the publication of the Avison Report in 2010 which lambasted the BCTF's intrusion into the disciplinary functioning of the College. This report led to the dissolution of the College and, in part, the replacement of the *Teaching Profession Act* with *The Teachers Act* in 2011. The titular modification is a significant one – not only by omitting the word “profession”

(the implications of which are rather obvious), but also by replacing the words “teaching profession” with “teachers,” which tends to individualize teachers rather than refer to them as a cohesive profession. This legislation also replaced the BCCT with the TRB of the Ministry of Education, effectively curtailing any chance of teacher self-regulation in BC.

**The BCPSEA and teacher professionalism.** Returning to the five dimensions of professionalism, the BCPSEA (much like the BCTF) emphasizes some dimensions more than others. The most emphasis, by far, is placed on the public accountability of professionals and the enforcement of professional standards through teacher evaluations and assessments. These standards are generally understood to be externally imposed rather than generated by teachers themselves, while accountability is also something ensured from outside of the profession rather than from within. Furthermore, the perceived need for accountability seems to trump almost entirely an equally important aspect of professionalism: individual autonomy. If the BCTF could be accused of trumpeting the professional rights of teachers while overlooking the responsibilities, the BCPSEA has the opposite inclination: it overemphasizes teachers’ responsibilities without adequately allowing them rights that come with these responsibilities, such as a high level of autonomy and competitive salaries.

Of the two overarching discourses of professionalism identified in the literature review earlier (see Table 2 on page 50), the BCPSEA is a clear proponent of “The Bureaucratic Professional.” There is ample evidence of the influence of this discourse in the BCPSEA documents analyzed: repeated mention of alignment of professional goals with those of the employer, framing teachers as employees first and professionals second, and the emphasis on accountability and assessment. As an organization dedicated to managing human-resources, the BCPSEA is a strong proponent of the bureaucratic aspect of this discourse.

In examining the BCTF and the BCPSEA through the lenses provided by these two overarching discourses, it is clear that these organizations differ starkly. It is small wonder then that there has been so much disagreement between the BCTF and the BCPSEA when it comes to matters such as autonomy, professional development, and teacher regulation – while the stakeholders use the same terms, they are understood in very different ways. For the BCTF, teacher autonomy is the cornerstone of teachers’ professional practice, while for the BCPSEA, it is the first criteria of professionalism to be trimmed as a result of employers’ need to align teachers’ practice with organizational goals. Similarly, for the BCPSEA, professional development should reflect teachers’ professional obligation to address their employers’ concerns. The BCTF also considers professional development to be an extension of teachers’ professionalism, but rather than viewing this as an opportunity for alignment, it is seen as the opposite: a chance for teachers to exert their autonomy and strengthen their professionalism. Finally, with respect to teacher regulation, both the BCTF and the BCPSEA seem to have agreed (at least implicitly) that the *self*-regulation of teachers is not of primary concern and that defining the notion of ‘regulation’ in too much detail is unnecessary. To the extent that the BCTF acknowledges a regulatory need, it sees itself as adequately providing it (although it does not clarify how exactly the regulation should function). The BCPSEA, however, recognizes a strong need for teacher regulation, but leaves the Ministry of Education and its TRB to provide the details, as directed by the provincial government. For this reason, an examination of the legislative formation of the TRB, the views of the politicians that were involved, and the political debate that surrounded it was a logical next step in my analysis.

## The Provincial Government

While the BCTF and the BCPSEA have been debating many of the dimensions of teacher professionalism for years, a different type of debate arose more recently – a political discussion surrounding implementation of Bill 12 by the BC Legislative Assembly. This debate is worth examining here, as it reflects the ways in which lawmakers and politicians in BC conceptualize teacher professionalism.

The primary concern of the debated legislation in this case is teacher regulation, which provides some relevant insight into the ways in which the government frames teacher professionalism. It seems that politicians are most concerned with emphasizing the public nature of teaching. This is demonstrated when members of the legislature from both the NDP and the Liberal parties refer repeatedly to teachers' work dealing with, educating, and protecting 'our' children. For example, Norm MacDonald (NDP) refers to teachers as "responsible for our children," (*Official Report of the Debates of the Legislative Assembly*, 27 October 2011) while Liberal Joan McIntyre talks about how important it is that "our children ... have gone through our education system in a safe manner" (*Official Report of the Debates of the Legislative Assembly*, 31 October, 2011). The framing of education as a public good (something that is *ours*) provides justification for the Bill and greatly impacts politicians' conception of teacher professionalism – as those who have been elected to represent the public, it seems only natural that they would have some say in how a public resource such as education might be administered. The 'protection of the public' is the perceived need upon which the Bill was developed, written, and ultimately, passed. This has important implications for the way teacher professionalism is understood by the elected officials who comprise our government.

**Protecting the public.** According to George Abbott, the Minister of Education for the governing Liberal Party, Bill 12 had three goals: to “raise the stature of the teaching profession, increase public confidence in the profession’s disciplinary processes, and strengthen accountability and transparency” (*Official Report of the Debates of the Legislative Assembly*, 26 October, 2011). These goals are founded on a need to “meet our commitment to safer schools and public trust” and a belief that “regulation of the teaching profession in the public interest is critical to ensuring public safety and student safety (*Official Report of the Debates of the Legislative Assembly*, 27 October 2011). This emphasis on safety is also noted by other members of the Legislature. For example, Norm MacDonald of the NDP suggested that “what is at stake with a bill like this is to make sure that it is set up in a way that our children are safe – not most of the time, not 99 percent of the time, but all of the time” and Linda Rustad (Liberal) claims that this Bill “is about the profession, and it is about how we assure parents and the people in general that our system is doing what it’s supposed to be doing, which is educating our children and protecting our children” (*Official Report of the Debates of the Legislative Assembly*, 27 October, 2011). Nearly all MLAs who spoke to this Bill seemed to assume that the regulation of the teaching profession is necessary in order to guarantee the safety of students, although what exactly was meant by ‘student safety’ (safe from *what*, for example) was never clearly articulated. The Bill was passed for this reason – in the words of Liberal MLA Jane Thornthwaite, this Bill was supposed to “regain the confidence with the public for teachers” (*Official Report of the Debates of the Legislative Assembly*, 27 October, 2011).

The need to “regain” public confidence is a foundational assumption in the government’s conception of teacher professionalism. While some of this assumption can be attributed to the strong influence of Avison’s (2010) report on this legislation, it is also indicative of the way

politicians seem to view teachers and their role in the public education system. According to Donna Barnett (Liberal), public education “is a system where teachers are to provide the education, and those in the management are to provide the rules, regulations and guidance” (*Official Report of the Debates of the Legislative Assembly*, 27 October, 2011). In other words, teachers alone cannot assure the public that children are safe and receiving a high-quality education; there must be another body responsible for overseeing teachers and their work.

This is not to say that the role of teachers in the regulation of their profession is entirely disregarded. The primary author of this Bill, George Abbott, describes a need to strike a balance between teachers’ input and that of other educational stakeholders. NDP Education Critic Robin Austin asserts that “there is an attempt here to ensure that the teaching profession is seen to have input but not to dominate” the regulation of teachers in BC (*Official Report of the Debates of the Legislative Assembly*, 27 October, 2011). Expanding on this, Robin states that any professional regulatory body has two major goals: “the most important thing is to put the public interest first,” but “secondly, it’s also there to serve the interests of the profession it purports to be supervising” (*Official Report of the Debates of the Legislative Assembly*, 27 October, 2011). While this quote seems to coincide somewhat with professionalism as conceptualized in the academic literature, the emphasis on the external regulation of teachers is a considerable divergence.

The government’s emphasis is on “accountability and transparency” (George Abbott, *Official Report of the Debates of the Legislative Assembly*, 26 October, 2011). While accountability is certainly an important aspect of professionalism, professionals are generally accountable to *themselves* in the form of a professional body made up of members of the profession, rather than held accountable by an external framework. Regarding the work of public school teachers, however, politicians show a clear preference for external accountability over

internal accountability. As Liberal Donna Barnett questions, “who is being accountable to our students, to the taxpayer and to the public?” (*Official Report of the Debates of the Legislative Assembly*, 27 October, 2011). A prerequisite of accountability, in the eyes of government, is transparency (accountability and transparency are at times even used synonymously). For NDP Robin Austin, “there needs to be some transparency as to what the [disciplinary] outcome was so that other people can feel safe” (*Official Report of the Debates of the Legislative Assembly*, 27 October, 2011). In other words, it is important “that we know how that system works; and that it is not, I hesitate to say, done behind closed doors; and where we all have an opportunity, as parents and those with vested interest, to make sure that any issues of confidence in teaching or of protection here are dealt with fairly for both sides of the issues, and dealt with transparently” (McIntyre [Liberal], *Official Report of the Debates of the Legislative Assembly*, 31 October, 2011). For this reason, the new Bill states that “discipline hearings will be open to the public” (Abbott, *Official Report of the Debates of the Legislative Assembly*, 26 October, 2011).

**The government and teacher professionalism.** Of the five dimensions of professionalism defined in the literature, the government stakeholders in this debate clearly emphasize one: public accountability. While this stakeholder certainly acknowledges that teachers have some role in regulating their own profession, public safety is seen to trump professional autonomy and self-regulation. Public safety, however, is not a well-defined concept. While frequent reference is made to both public and student safety, and George Abbot refers repeatedly to his government’s “commitment to safer schools” (Abbott, *Official Report of the Debates of the Legislative Assembly*, 26 October, 2011), it is never clearly articulated how exactly students or the public are considered to be unsafe. Nonetheless, the vulnerability of the children in teachers’ care and the taxpayer-funded nature of the educational system leads to

almost unanimous support<sup>21</sup>, from major parties, several independent MLAs, and for the external enforcement of professional standards as established by a council made up of many different educational stakeholders. In the words of George Abbott:

...this isn't just about the employer and employee. This is not just about government and teachers and the possibility of adversarial relationships here, but there are other stakeholders. There are parents. There are parents' councils. There are superintendents. There are principals. There is a whole group of people – the school trustees. There are all sorts of groups that we have delegated authority and responsibility in our education system that should have a say in what this system looks like. (*Official Report of the Debates of the Legislative Assembly*, 31 October, 2011)

The provincial government's perspective coincides neatly with a bureaucratic understanding of professionalism. A hallmark of this understanding is the belief that a profession must be accountable to the public that it serves, and that the importance of this service necessitates oversight and external regulation. In this sense, teachers are employees (albeit, very important ones) who provide a crucial public service. While a proponent of a fully autonomous profession would say that such an important service is best left in the hands of expert professionals, those ascribing to the government's discourse may conclude the opposite: that public education is far too important to be left to teachers.

The discussion now turns to the two remaining relevant stakeholders: the BCSTA and the BCPVPA. While every effort has been made to examine documents from these groups in the same manner as the previous three, a relative dearth of publications prevented as extensive an analysis as with the BCTF, BCPSEA, and the provincial government.

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<sup>21</sup>George Abbott notes that "I don't believe I've had a bill before the House ... which has enjoyed such wide support" (*Official Report of the Debates of the Legislative Assembly*, 31 October 2011).

## The BCSTA

The BCSTA has published only one document relevant to this study. Nonetheless, it is clear from that document that the BCSTA is primarily interested in the public nature of teachers' work.

**Protecting the public interest.** Specifically, the “public interest in K-12 teaching” is seen as “distinctive from the public interest in other professions such as medicine, law, etc., because:”

- The clients are children who require special care and custody;
- Parents have very limited ability to choose the teachers in whose hands they place their children; and
- K-12 teachers are salaried employees, not fee-for-service professionals and are wholly or partially funded by the public. (BC School Trustees Association, 2004)

This emphasis on the public nature of teachers' work has several implications. Namely, the “public interest in K-12 teaching requires *protection* on four key elements of teaching practice:” teachers' academic qualifications, teachers' “code of conduct based on public expectations,” the maintenance of “appropriate standards of teaching competence,” and public access to “a fair and timely complaint process” (BC School Trustees Association, 2004, emphasis added). In other words, the public interest in education needs to be protected by holding teachers to a high standard of training, conduct, and competence while ensuring public transparency.

The use of the word “protection” leads to an important, if unanswered, question: protection *from what?* While this question is not explicitly answered in this document or others examined in this study (much like politicians never define ‘public safety’), it seems that the perceived inability for teachers to self-regulate, as demonstrated in the 2010 Avison Report, is to

blame for this lapse in public protection. This has led to the creation of more stringent external regulation, a development welcomed by a wide range of stakeholders (with the notable exception of the BCTF). These efforts were couched in seemingly positive language, with then-president of the BCSTA speaking to “the need to find ways to improve public respect for the teaching profession and for the high quality of teaching that takes place in BC” (Comeau, 2004). Nonetheless, the underlying assumption in this language is that teachers’ lack of professionalism has put the public at risk.

**The BCSTA and teacher professionalism.** The BCSTA’s perspective on teacher professionalism is remarkably similar to that of the politicians examined in Bill 12. Like the BCSTA, provincial MLAs from multiple parties reveal the assumption that the public requires protection to ensure that their interests are respected by the teaching profession. The language used in the BCSTA document puts less emphasis on a need for transparency and accountability, but it nonetheless agrees with government documents that “the provincial government is obligated to establish ways and means, which are wholly accountable to the Ministry of Education, to protect the distinctive public interest in K-12 teaching” (BC School Trustees Association, 2004). This notion of professionalism deviates once again from the ideal described in the academic literature, an ideal in which a profession earns public trust through rigorous *self*-regulation rather than the external imposition of standards and accountability.

### **The BCPVPA**

As the organization representing school administrators in BC, the BCPVPA provides an important perspective on professionalism as it applies to public school teachers. A close reading of the documents I obtained indicates that, for the BCPVPA, autonomy means something quite different than it does for the BCTF. Rather than viewing autonomy and alignment as mutually

exclusive, it is precisely the alignment of a professional's autonomy with rigorous standards that defines the BCPVPA's notion of teacher professionalism.

**Alignment vs. autonomy.** The BCPVPA's former president Les Dukowski provides an excellent distillation of the BCPVPA's take on teacher professionalism. He first characterizes the current view of teacher professionalism as "unsupportable" in that it equates professionalism with "autonomy that allows one to justify actions on the basis of personal opinion whether or not informed by research and best practice" (Dukowski, 2007, p. 12). He then goes on to provide a more "defensible definition" whereby "professionals gain their social authority not by exercising autonomy but by subscribing to an externally-validated body of knowledge, by agreeing to have their discretion limited by that knowledge, and by facing sanctions if they operate outside that body of knowledge" (Dukowski, 2007, p.12). By placing such a strong emphasis on professional alignment, the BCPVPA displays an understanding in which alignment with professional standards is a feature of, rather than a detriment to, teachers' professionalism. It also provides justification for a rigorous set of professional standards that should be applied to teachers' work, which according to Krieger (2013a), is not currently the case: "teaching is one of the few professions that does not require its members to engage in continuous professional learning aligned with professional standards" (p. 19).

For the members of the BCPVPA (school administrators), these rigorous professional standards are already in place. According to Dukowski (2007), "principals and vice-principals have the BCPVPA Leadership Standards as our 'externally validated body of knowledge'" (p. 12). This document (BCPVPA, 2007) states that "standards ... engender public trust in the profession" in that "they offer the public assurance that members of the profession are discharging their duties as defined in a way that builds confidence in them individually and as a

whole” (p. 6). These standards also “ensure that there is alignment among provincial and district curriculum, instructional practices, student needs and assessment” (p. 16). The positioning of standards as an assurance to the public is an important one, as it suggests that these standards should provide a kind of anchor for the autonomy that is often associated with professionalism. This anchor provides a direct link between autonomy and other important dimensions of professionalism, such as public accountability, professional development, and alignment of practice. However, this anchor also limits this autonomy.

**The BCPVPA and teacher professionalism.** As I have described, the academic literature considers self-regulation to be the keystone dimension of professionalism. Standards, accountability, autonomy, and external knowledge all stem from this crucial professional responsibility. The BCPVPA, however, seems to focus on only one aspect of professionalism: the alignment of a professional’s practice with some externally validated set of standards. Rather than the ideal of professional autonomy being justified and supported by standards, it would have professional autonomy *replaced* by these standards, a view much criticized in the academic literature<sup>22</sup>. This emphasis on external accountability *over* autonomy places the BCPVPA in the same territory as the BCPSEA and in clear opposition with the BCTF, which, as we have seen, tends to reverse this hierarchy.

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<sup>22</sup> See Goodson (2003), for example, for whom “attempts to standardize teaching puts into question teachers’ professional knowledge, which threatens to undercut and subvert their professionalism” (p. 127).

## Chapter Six – Conclusion

### Competing Discourses of Teacher Professionalism

In the academic literature, five key dimensions of professionalism are identified by scholars: self-regulation, public service, knowledge and expertise, a code of ethics or standards, and autonomy, which together form a “social contract” between members of a profession and the public<sup>23</sup>. These dimensions, however, tend to be framed differently by different educational stakeholders, which leads to competing notions of teacher professionalism. In the context of public education, two essential discourses of professionalism emerge: ‘Fully Autonomous Professionalism’ (characterized most importantly by self-regulation of the profession, by the profession, for the profession) and ‘Bureaucratic Professionalism’ (in which professionalism is bound by bureaucratic, external regulation justified by the publically funded nature of teachers’ work)<sup>24</sup>. These discourses differ on two key dimensions of professionalism; the former stresses the need for professional autonomy and self-regulation, while the latter focuses on accountability (rather than autonomy), and external control (rather than self-regulation).

In British Columbia, these discourses are highly relevant in the contentious debate surrounding public education, because stakeholders use these competing discourses in ways that are often contradictory, even adversarial. The same word, “professionalism,” is used in different ways by different groups, but for the same purpose – to exert power over the work of teachers. As the primary providers of public education (those on the ‘front lines’ of education), there is no occupational group more essential to the functioning of the education system than teachers. Thus, using a particular discourse of professionalism as a pretext to justify controlling teachers’ work is a powerful and influential means to direct educational policy-making and

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<sup>23</sup> See page 35.

<sup>24</sup> See page 50.

implementation. This is done by selectively emphasizing different dimensions of professionalism, which then reframes other dimensions as subordinate to the initial, catalytic dimension.

### **Teacher Professionalism and Autonomy**

The main driver of the BCTF's understanding of teacher professionalism is teacher autonomy. Trumpeting itself as both the defender of public education and the teaching profession, the BCTF is perpetually protesting the limitation of teachers' individual autonomy in classrooms and their collective autonomy as a union of professionals. This overemphasis of teacher autonomy at the expense of other important dimensions of teacher professionalism (such as public accountability and self-regulation) fundamentally skews the balanced notion of professionalism identified in the academic literature, a notion in which high autonomy (a professional's right) must accompany rigorous accountability to the public (a profession's responsibility). Regulation, accountability, transparency, and discipline are seen as unnecessary external attacks on teachers' professionalism rather than potential bulwarks. Even the BCTF's definition of professionalism reflects an unbalanced perspective – autonomy and the public good are well-defined, but there is scant evidence of any attempt to establish public accountability from within. Rather than promoting self-regulation, the BCTF opts for *no* regulation. An incomplete understanding of professionalism, detailed only to the extent that it benefits teachers, is used by the BCTF as a defense against what it views as threats to autonomy and public education.

### **Teacher Professionalism and Accountability**

The BCTF's primary antagonist – the BCPSEA – as well as the BCPVPA are on the opposite end of the spectrum. For these two stakeholders, the concepts of accountability,

transparency, regulation, and evaluation (but rarely ‘discipline’) are the most important aspects of professionalism. For them, it is the dimension of public accountability that dominates. These stakeholders assert that a professional should above all be accountable to the public. External regulation backed up by robust and rigorous professional standards are needed to ensure this accountability, which is framed not as a *threat to*, but a *requirement of* professionalism. The BCPSEA does allow for some autonomy among teachers, although this autonomy must be balanced against the need for an employee (a word avoided by the BCTF) to align their practice with that of the bureaucracy in which teachers operate. For the BCPVPA, this alignment should take the form of externally-validated standards. Professional development and other trappings of professionalism should reflect this alignment, requiring external regulation rather than self-regulation. For the BCPSEA and the BCPVPA, professionalism is framed as more of an employment contract (between teacher-employees and their employers) than a social contract (between a profession and the public). Framed this way, the responsibilities of being a public employee (such as alignment, employer-directed professional development, and ongoing evaluation) are of primary importance, while the rights inherent to a profession (such as full autonomy, self-regulation, and internal accountability) are secondary. Unfortunately, just as the BCTF marginalizes these dimensions, the BCPSEA and the BCPVPA marginalize the importance of teacher autonomy – a perspective viewed by the BCTF as an unjustified lack of trust in the teaching profession. This de-emphasis of teacher autonomy also puts these organizations at odds with understandings of teacher professionalism expressed in the academic literature, wherein autonomy is seen as an integral dimension of professionalism that allows professionals to be effective in their delivery of an important public service. In short, these

stakeholders demand professional responsibility from teachers without granting them professional rights.

This emphasis on external accountability has been framed in much of the academic literature on education as one impact of neo-liberalism on governments' understanding of teacher professionalism (see Bottery, 2009; Evetts, 2009; Poole, 2008). Policy reforms articulated around a neo-liberal understanding of public education have introduced market elements in the provision of public schooling by promoting consumer choice and competition among providers coupled with a considerable degree of public accountability and government regulation over policy-making, assessment, and curriculum. This has also led to a perceived need for external accountability to ensure quality control of educational service providers (teachers and schools). The question of whether or not this emphasis on external accountability is unique to neo-liberalism, however, was not addressed in the literature I examined. It may be that other forms of state ideologies could lead to an actualization of teacher professionalism within a similar process of external public accountability but not necessarily as a quality control technology. Other forms of external accountability may be focused on the alignment of teaching practices with imposed teaching and assessment practices. This is a topic that would benefit from future research. Regardless of the ideology informing governmental decisions, however, the fact that teachers working in a public education system are subject to direction from their school board and the provincial bureaucracy seems unlikely to change.

In theory, the trend towards greater top-down hierarchical direction in public education systems is premised on the need to cut costs and increase efficiency. When politicians demand greater external accountability from schools and teachers and introduce measures such as provincial examinations, they usually speak in terms of ensuring that the taxpayers are getting

quality schooling for their money. In practice, the real impact of these measures has been to de-professionalize the work of teachers while concentrating control over the school system in the hands of a few key government officials. The introduction of external testing to ensure quality control, for example, removes an important pedagogical dimension from teachers' domain, while centrally developed curriculum may prevent teachers from having input over an integral part of the educational system, or having the professional autonomy to create curriculum reflecting local needs. By telling teachers what and how to teach, the provincial Ministry also controls what and how students will learn. In BC, as my research has shown, this external direction has been justified by demanding that teachers align their practice with the wishes of the bureaucracy, while framing this alignment as a professional responsibility.

### **Redefining Teacher Professionalism**

The working definition of professionalism I utilized in this study (see page 35) was essentially conceptualized as a *contract* between a profession and the public, wherein the public gives both individual and collective autonomy to a profession, while demanding high levels of internal accountability in the form of professional *self*-regulation. Replacing self-regulation with external regulation, as the provincial government has done in British Columbia, removes a fundamental underpinning of professionalism from this definition - thus redefining professionalism as it applies to teachers. The importance of self-regulation, as it applies to teacher professionalism, seems to have been lost on the BCTF as well – in focusing solely on *protecting* teachers' individual and collective autonomy, it has failed to provide a viable accountability framework to compete with the government's legislative institution of external regulation. Thus the BCTF has also attempted to redefine teacher professionalism by equating it with individual and collective autonomy – no less, but no more.

This has resulted in a slow but unmistakable power shift over the control of teachers' work. While it is still understood that teachers are professionals, many of the assumptions that stem from this understanding have begun to be questioned and challenged. Teachers no longer have the right to determine what tests are used to assess their students in their classrooms, what criteria will be applied to professionally certify newly-trained teachers, what standards of practice will be enforced, or even *how* these standards will be enforced. Public school teachers in BC are increasingly being viewed as Bureaucratic Professionals rather than Fully Autonomous Professionals (see Table 2 on page 50), and their power over the educational system is being reduced as a result.

I believe it is important to view this change as much more than a simple attack on teacher professionalism. As I have shown in this paper, there are many stakeholders in a public education system, not all of whom hold teacher welfare as a primary concern. The politics surrounding the system are multi-faceted, and conservative governments have been keen to be seen as fiscally responsible. Politically speaking, the provincial government and the BCPSEA have a great deal of power in BC (see Fleming, 2001), and may be more effective than other stakeholders (especially the BCTF) in imposing their agenda on public education as it pertains to teacher professionalism. Nonetheless, the BCTF has chosen to defend rather than sustain teacher professionalism, a stance that seems to have been ineffective at reversing the trend from Fully Autonomous to Bureaucratic Professionalism. Perhaps it is time teachers placed professionalism above politics; rather than defending professionalism by acting as a political organization, they may have more success strengthening teacher professionalism by acting as a professional association.

## **A Way Forward**

What is at stake in this debate is essentially the power to control the work of teachers. The BCTF, perhaps understandably, sees teachers as fully autonomous professionals, and therefore exempt from the type of external oversight that the BCPSEA insists upon. The BCPSEA, also understandably, views teachers as employee-professionals working in a regulated and bureaucratic system with specific contractual responsibilities which necessarily shape the scope of their autonomy. But what of a way forward in this debate? Given the polarization between stakeholders, especially the BCTF and the BCPSEA, how can the vast distances between them be bridged? For this, one can return to Finland, where stakeholders are in much better agreement regarding the type of teacher professionalism that should be implemented in their educational system.

In Finland (see page 47), it is impossible to say what came first: high public regard for teachers, enviable working conditions for teachers, high autonomy, or rigorous teaching standards that are defined and enforced by teachers themselves. What *can* be concluded, however, is that teachers in Finland, in contrast with those in BC, have an understanding of teacher professionalism that is much more closely aligned with what is found in the academic literature: a mutually beneficial give and take between a trusting public and a profession left to regulate itself. Autonomy is balanced with internal accountability, which is demonstrated through high standards enforced by the profession rather than an externally imposed bureaucratic accountability framework. Finnish teachers reap the rewards of membership in a highly autonomous profession as promulgated by the BCTF, but they also demonstrate the rigorous accountability demanded by the BCPSEA. This is made possible when, in the words of Schleicher (2012), teachers become the “protagonists” of their own profession.

In the protracted debate between the BCTF and the BCPSEA, both sides are firmly entrenched in their positions. The BCTF frames externally imposed accountability measures as anti-professional, while the BCPSEA frames unfettered teacher autonomy as anti-accountable. For the BCTF, *no one* has to control the teaching profession. For the BCPSEA and the BCPVPA, the *employer* must control the teaching profession by imposing contractually and politically motivated restrictions on the autonomy of both individual teachers and the profession as a whole. For the rest of the stakeholders, *someone* has to control the teaching profession. It is my contention that, in order to find a way forward, teachers in this province must take the first step to bridge the gap, and to understand that *teachers* should control the teaching profession by demanding the right to *self*-regulation, establishing their own rigorous and transparent accountability framework, and thereby regaining control over the profession. The goal should not be to protect the interests and promote the welfare of individual teachers, nor to meet some set of externally imposed professional standards, but to strengthen and legitimize the profession from within. In this way, the type of professionalism described earlier in this paper (see page 35), in which self-regulation both justifies and guarantees teachers' individual and collective autonomy, could be actualized in British Columbia. Not only would this empower teachers to better educate their students, it would also offer a way to increase the public's trust in the teaching profession, while providing the accountability that other stakeholders demand.

Of course, the bureaucracy in which teachers work will not soon dissolve. The case in Finland has shown, however, that it *is* possible for a robust profession to function within a larger regulated bureaucracy. There, teachers have carved out room to operate as a Fully Autonomous Profession by embracing, rather than opposing, an accountability framework that supports their professionalism. By balancing professional rights with professional responsibilities, teachers in

Finland actualize the ideal definition of professionalism found in the academic literature that emphasizes *self*-regulation rather than external regulation. Satisfied by teachers themselves that the social contract between the public and the profession has been met, the external bureaucratic oversight of teachers' work so prevalent in BC is simply not needed in Finland.

If the BCTF wants to halt the increasing de-professionalization of teachers in this province, and ensure that teachers are seen as Fully Autonomous rather than Bureaucratic Professionals, I believe it must encourage teachers to establish their own rigorous internal accountability framework, and to actively demonstrate to the public that their professional responsibilities are at least as important as their professional right to full autonomy. Rather than defending teacher professionalism as mainly a label, teacher professionalism must first be *established* with a transparent form of self-regulation. Naylor (2011e) addresses this idea in his discussion of the union's need to "balance their industrial and professional goals" (p. 2), and even suggests that this may be possible by taking a "pro-active approach" to supporting the teaching profession rather than the "reactive stance" often associated with the "industrial and political agenda" of teachers' unions (p. 13).

The BCTF is not the only organization that would benefit from a more balanced approach to teacher professionalism. Employer groups, school administrators, the Ministry and the provincial government have all focused on external accountability as teachers' professional responsibility, while overlooking the importance of having a highly skilled group of autonomous teacher professionals with the latitude and discretion to effectively teach their students. It is not difficult to imagine how the continued and increasing emphasis on alignment and external oversight will eventually lead to the de-professionalization of teachers. This is not in the best interest of the public, as it allows the continued erosion of teachers' autonomy which places at

risk not only their own self-fulfillment and empowerment, but the education of students, and the very foundation of democratic society.

To counter this trend toward de-professionalization, I believe that teachers need to do a more compelling job of justifying their demands for autonomy by establishing a system of collegial enforcement of the profession, by the profession. They need to reject the notion of external accountability, but not in the same way they have done in the past, with political grandstanding and a perennially reactive stance. Rather, they need to pro-actively carve out a role for themselves as founders of their own professionalism, to proudly demonstrate to the public and to their employers that they place the integrity of their profession above the welfare of any individual practitioner. As members of a Fully Autonomous Profession, they would be accountable to each other through a rigorous set of standards that would be transparently defined and enforced by members of the profession, not politicians or bureaucrats. This could be done by establishing a council of teachers whose responsibilities would include establishing standards, communicating these standards to teachers and to the public, and crucially, enforcing them. One possibility could be the re-instatement of an organization much like the BC College of Teachers, but this time, to ensure that it has “the capacity to strike a proper balance between the interest of members and the public interest” (Avison, 2010, p. 15). (Re)establishing a *self*-regulatory body of teachers to uphold these standards would strengthen the entire profession’s claim to full autonomy. If teachers are serious in their demands for individual autonomy, they must demonstrate a collective will to justify these demands.

Other stakeholders would also play a role. If they could be brought to the understanding that an autonomous, empowered, highly skilled and committed teaching profession was in the best interests of the public, while being assured that the standards of the profession were being

upheld in a rigorous and transparent fashion, I believe they may take a step back from their insistence on externally-imposed accountability. This would give teachers the space to form their own internal accountability framework, while also demonstrating to teachers that they are a trusted, valued, and integral part of BC's public education system. One need only point to the educational system in Finland, where "teaching is consistently rated as one of the most admired professions" (Sahlberg, 2011, p. 72) to make the case that a strong teaching profession and world-leading educational system to hand-in-hand. Unlike BC's educational system, Sahlberg (2011) notes that "the Finnish education system lacks rigorous school inspection and does not employ external standardized student testing;" instead, "teachers have professional autonomy" (p. 72) and are "provided time" to organize themselves in "professional learning communities" (p. 76). In other words, both teachers and the teaching profession are highly valued and trusted.

Although the debate surrounding teacher professionalism in this province is highly complex, the solution need not be. Both the BCTF and the BCPSEA find themselves at either end of a highly polarized and political spectrum. On one end, the BCTF demands increased teacher autonomy without specifying how that autonomy could or should be defined and justified. On the other end, the BCPSEA (as the provincial government's bargaining agent) actively seeks to limit teacher autonomy while demanding more and more external oversight. Both groups convey a profound misconception of how professionalism is conceptualized in the academic literature as a *balance* between autonomy and accountability, professional rights and professional responsibilities. The ideal definition of professionalism put forward in this paper is one in which this balance is maintained by the profession itself. If this balance is to become a reality, teacher professionalism is to flourish, and public education is to benefit as a result, it must be actively sought out by all stakeholder groups in BC. Until then, teacher professionalism

will remain a perpetually debated, poorly-defined political football rather than a defining characteristic of an effective educational system.

## Epilogue

Upon completion of my research, I decided to look back and reflect on the reasons that had motivated me to begin this research (see page 5). My motivation was essentially twofold: I wanted to learn how to think about teacher professionalism – to get some clarity regarding an ambiguous term – and I wanted to resolve some of the perceived contradictions surrounding the term.

In terms of providing clarity, I do think that conceptualizing professionalism as a multi-dimensional discourse was helpful. While some scholars have discounted the notion of a normative, check-list type of definition (see Martimianakis et al., 2009, for example), the five dimensions I was able to glean from my literature review allowed me to evaluate and contrast the conflicting ways in which professionalism can be used as a discourse. It also led to an intriguing question: am I, as a teacher, a professional?

The answer to this question, unfortunately, is not yet. My autonomy is highly limited by the bureaucracy in which I work. Important tests I administer are developed by someone else, I am told how and when to collaborate and my professional development is aligned with school and district goals. The BCTF, the TRB, and the provincial legislation all provide codes or standards that I am told to apply to my work, although it is unclear to me which of these codes should take priority, or even how they are to be enforced. While external accountability has been much discussed and much debated in the bargaining process between the BCTF and the BCPSEA, I feel no accountability to anyone but my students and my immediate co-workers, and even that sense of accountability is informal, self-generated, and ambiguous. Most significantly, the replacement of the BC College of Teachers with the Teacher Regulation Branch means that I am no longer a member of a self-regulating professional body, and that I am now entirely

beholden to the bureaucrats at the Ministry of Education for my ongoing professional credentialization, rather than an organization of my peers. If I do have a claim to professionalism, it is by all definitions a Bureaucratic Professionalism, and certainly not the type of Fully Autonomous Professionalism that is alluded to in the literature. I am a professional to the extent that my professional responsibilities can be used as justification to direct my practice, but not to the extent that I have full autonomy, or feel a meaningful and formal sense of accountability towards the ongoing maintenance of my profession.

Even so, I continue to feel a strong sense of professionalism. I feel that my work is important, and I know that many of my co-workers feel the same way. While it is disheartening to learn that there is no institutional, organization, or legislative acknowledgement of the professionalism that most teachers assume they possess, I know also that there is a great deal of individual pride and strong sense of agency “from-within” that happens every day in classrooms, and more importantly, staff rooms. While teachers may not be able to check all of the boxes provided by my literature review, they nonetheless aspire and subscribe to a very strong sense of professionalism, one that does not need to be demonstrated by hanging a piece of paper on the wall. While I do hope that, one day, teachers in BC will come together to form an organization of professionals, one that places the integrity of the profession above the welfare of any individual member, I know that in the meantime, a sense of professionalism among teachers will persevere.

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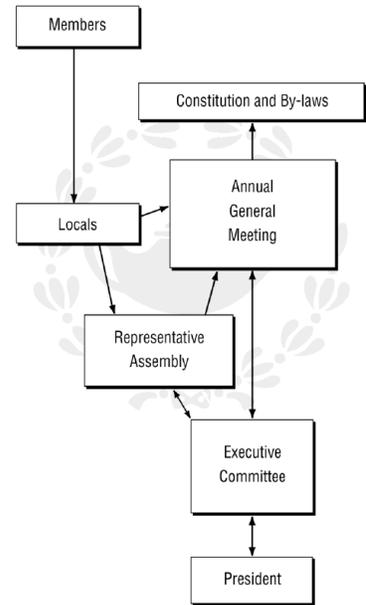
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## Appendix A – Detailed Stakeholder Summaries

### The British Columbia Teachers' Federation

**Organizational structure.** According to their website, “the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation (BCTF), established in 1917, is the union of professionals representing 41,000 public school teachers in the province of British Columbia” (BCTF, 2012a). Organizationally, the BCTF is a democratically structured collective of teachers, who “ultimately determine the decisions and directions of the BCTF in two very important ways” (BCTF, 2012c). The first is by electing, at the local union level, delegates to the BCTF Annual General Meeting (AGM) (there are usually approximately 670 delegates). The AGM makes key decisions for the organization and elects the Executive Committee, which



*Figure 3. BCTF organizational structure (Source: BCTF, 2012c)*

consists of 11 members, three of whom are elected President, First Vice-President, and Second Vice-President. The Executive Committee is charged with running the Federation. Members (mostly teachers) also elect staff representatives at the school level, who meet three times a year at a Representative Assembly, which, among other things, approves the Federation’s budget (BCTF, 2012c). The organizational structure of the BCTF is represented in Figure 3.

The rules of the Federation are established by a Constitution and a set of Bylaws. The Bylaws, in particular, provide insight into the power structures of the organization. While the Executive Committee (including the three Presidents) is elected democratically, once they are elected, they hold the majority of the power within the Federation. According to the Bylaws (BCTF, 2012c), the President has the power to call at any time a meeting of the Executive

Committee, who shall “exercise all the powers of the Federation” (p. 13). These powers include the appointment of advisory committees to “carry on the activities necessary for the attainment of the objects of the Federation” and an Executive Director who directs the activities of employees of the Federation (BCTF, 2012c, p. 14). The Executive Committee is also in charge of Federation finances in that they choose the bank and investment managers responsible for Federation funds, and possess additional power in their ability to “authorize expenditure in excess of the capital budget” (BCTF, 2012c, p. 14). As the head of the Executive Committee, the President “shall be the presiding officer of the Federation, and shall also be a member, ex officio, of all committees and sections appointed by the Executive Committee [and] he/she shall have general supervision of all matters and affairs of the Federation” (BCTF, 2012c, p. 17). While the Executive Committee and the President have a great deal of power, there are two important checks on this power: the annual AGM and the thrice-yearly Representative Assembly. The former may “censure the executive, countermand its decisions, or amend the by-laws to limit or remove any powers of the Executive Committee,” and “the latter has specific responsibility assigned to it, including the right to authorize or prohibit any action proposed by the Executive Committee that is beyond the scope of, or contrary to, BCTF policy” (BCTF, 2012c, p. 19).

**History.** The BCTF considers its history to have four distinctive periods: an infancy stage from 1919 to 1926, an adolescent stage from 1926 to 1947, an early maturity stage from 1947 to 1971, and a full maturity stage from 1971 to the present (BCTF, 2001). The infancy stage began with the founding of an organization with three objectives, one of which was “to raise the status of the teaching profession” (BCTF, 2012c, p. 169). The adolescent stage ended in 1947, when the provincial government “granted the BCTF statutory compulsory membership; there was a voluntary sign-up of 93% at the time” (BCTF, 2012c, p. 169). Compulsory membership lasted

until the end of the early maturity stage in 1971, a year that saw several government-initiated legislative changes to union membership requirements and teacher pensions that led to the first ever province-wide teacher strike. This marked the beginning of the current stage of the BCTF's history, "a period during which the BCTF has had to operate in an environment increasingly hostile to public education and to public school teachers" (BCTF, 2001). Chief among what Fleming (2011) calls a "constellation of issues dividing government and teachers" are notions of professionalism and related issues such as teacher regulation and autonomy (p. 117).

The increasingly militant and political nature of the BCTF and the growing conflict between the BCTF and the government is described by Kilian (1985) as the "school wars," during which time "the teaching profession in B.C. had become permanently more politicized, as it moved closer to the centre of the labour movement" (p. 97). As a result, "teachers had begun to see themselves less as aspiring professionals and more as workers, no longer kidding themselves that a university degree and a teaching certificate somehow elevated them above the ranks of the working class" (Kilian, 1985, p. 97). The BCTF has become a political powerhouse; according to Fleming (2011), "no union, public-sector or otherwise has proved a more capable or dangerous adversary for government" (p. 79). Indeed, in the 40 years since the conflict between government and the BCTF first began, "the federation has functioned more often as government's official opposition than the political party actually out of office – especially in matters of school policy and public sector spending" (Fleming, 2011, p. 78).

**Mandate.** The BCTF has a very ambitious mandate, which is partially expressed in a 13-point list of goals on the first page of their constitution:

1. To help ensure that public schools provide for the continued intellectual, physical, social, and emotional growth and development of each individual.

2. To promote the establishment and continued development in every school of sound learning and teaching conditions, including the provision of adequate support services.
3. To work toward the integration of social and educational services that contribute to the welfare and development of students.
4. To encourage full public participation in determining the overall objectives of education at the provincial, district, and school level.
5. To create public awareness of problems in society that hinder student growth and development and to stimulate the search for solutions.
6. To strive to eliminate from the school system discrimination on the basis of sex, race, religion, age, handicaps, economic status, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, number of dependents, or pregnancy.
7. To promote professional growth of teachers through the continuous development of pre-service, internship, and in-service education.
8. To establish a code of ethics and professional conduct, criteria of qualification, and criteria and procedures for the assessment of professional competence, and to ensure that teachers are effectively subject to the judgment of their peers in these matters, with guarantee of due process.
9. To ensure, through the development of democratic processes, professional autonomy for teachers and protection from capricious or malicious action, unjust regulations, and the abuse of authority.
10. To maintain for teachers a level of status and economic standing appropriate to the responsibility of the profession.

11. To work co-operatively with other groups and agencies to transform the public schools to make them more relevant and effective in preparing students for their futures.
12. To promote a working and learning environment in the public schools of British Columbia that is free from violence.
13. To support the right of all students, regardless of age, to free basic education as defined by the current K-12 programs. (BCTF, 2012c)

This list goes well beyond simply advocating for teachers. Rather, the BCTF sees itself as a defender of public education; in promoting the holistic development of each student and eliminating all forms of discrimination from public schools, the BCTF's goals are far-reaching (BCTF, 2012c). However, these multiple focuses do not mean that teachers are forgotten – the Federation clearly sees itself as a professional organization as well as a social-justice advocacy group.<sup>25</sup> They establish teacher codes of ethics and professional conduct, promote teacher autonomy, and encourage the development of democratic working conditions. Two objectives crown a list of priorities for the 2011-2012 school year: to “achieve significant collective agreement improvements” and “make funding and support for public education a priority for all levels of government”(BCTF, 2012c). Clearly, the BCTF is very much a political organization.

As a political organization, the BCTF can be best understood as having three main areas of interest. The first and most specific is the welfare of its members: public school teachers. As might be expected of any federation of teachers, two of its “priorities for 2012 (as set by the 2012 Annual General Meeting) are to affirm and defend (A) the freedom to associate and bargain collectively and (B) teachers’ professional autonomy” (BCTF, 2012c). The second area of

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<sup>25</sup> As social justice union, the BCTF “advocates for social change that will enhance equity, security and safety, sustainability of communities, participation of citizens in social change, and access to opportunities for personal growth and development” (BCTF, 2013).

interest relates to the provision of public education in BC, which is reflected in the Federation's advocacy for "public education as a fundamental right and as the path to a better world through a compassionate, socially just, and democratic society" (BCTF, 2012c). This quote provides a hint to its third area of interest, which is social justice both in BC and around the world. Indeed, its website states that "the BCTF is proud of its history as a social justice union" which "means that as an organization of professionals, we accept and act on our broad responsibility to be involved in the social development of the communities and the province we live in, and we do this in the interests of the children we teach" (BCTF, 2013). It is in this third area that the truly expansive mandate of the BCTF is most obvious: social justice initiatives undertaken include "poverty, child and youth issues, race relations, gender equity, homophobia and heterosexism, bullying, environmental issues, globalization, and violence prevention" as well as the formation of "an advisory committee on Aboriginal education" (BCTF, 2013).

### **The British Columbia Public School Employers' Association**

**Organizational structure.** The BCPSEA, according to its website, "operates under a co-governance model between public boards of education and the provincial government" (BCPSEA, 2012a). Members of the Association consist of every public school board in British Columbia, as well as (up to) four people appointed by the Provincial Government (BCPSEA, 2012b). Every year, representatives from each member association hold an AGM, where "votes to elect directors, including the Chair and Vice-Chair, and to amend the Constitution and Bylaws, shall be decided by weighted ballot" (BCPSEA, 2012b, p. 7). The weight of each ballot is determined by the population of the member school board casting that ballot (BCPSEA, 2012b, p. 15).

According to the BCPSEA Constitution & Bylaws (BCPSEA, 2012b), the Board of Directors “shall manage or supervise the management of the affairs and business of the Association and shall have authority to exercise all such powers of the Association” (p. 9). The composition of the Board is as follows:

- One elected Chair
- One elected Vice-Chair
- Seven elected Directors
- Four government-appointed Directors
- Three non-voting Directors (BCPSEA, 2012b, p. 8)

It should also be noted that the first nine directors must be acting board trustees at the time of their election.

Two major differences between the BCTF and the BCPSEA become obvious from an examination of their governances and power structures. The first is that the BCTF places much greater emphasis on the democratic influence of each member within the organization (as evidenced, for example, by the dominant super-positioning of “Members” in the BCTF governance chart; see Figure 3 on Page 136). The second difference is that the BCTF has a much more comprehensive structure; its constitution and bylaws make up a 212-page document, while the BCPSEA requires 17 pages. This is perhaps partially explained by the BCTF’s larger membership, with approximately 41,000 members (teachers), compared to the BCPSEA’s 60 (school boards). Effectively managing a democratic organization of this size means that the BCTF must have the internal structure and administrative capacity to consult its many members and carry out its ambitious mandate. While the BCPSEA does have several peripheral departments complementing its primary bargaining goal (such as a research department and

technology infrastructure consultation service; see BCPSEA [2013a]), it is unhindered by having to represent as many members as the BCTF, and even the duties of these peripheral departments are dwarfed by the long list of social issues taken up by the BCTF.

**History.** Compared to the BCTF, the BCPSEA is a relatively young organization. In 1992, the BC provincial government established a commission of inquiry in order to “examine the human-resources practices of the public sector” and “propose a new framework of management [...] to meet the public’s demand for services within fiscal limitations” (BCPSEA, 2012a). In the words of the commission itself, it aimed to “inquire into and report on ways to enhance the personnel and labour relations environment within which operate those bodies created, financed or maintained by the provincial government for public purposes” and to “recommend the most cost efficient and effective personnel policies and services” for such bodies (Korbin, 1993, preamble). The commission provided as justification for such an examination the following words from the Premier at the time: “in these tough economic times, we must tackle the issues of spending waste and make sure we make the most efficient use of government resources” in the hopes of “restoring a better system of checks and balances” on public spending (Korbin, 1993, p. 1). In short, the government established this commission in order to save money and thus benefit the public by serving their economic interests.

This 1992 commission led to the creation of six employers’ associations in different areas of the public sector, one of which was the BCPSEA, which is responsible for K-12 public education. In 1994, the Public Education Labour Relations Act was passed, formally establishing the BCPSEA as the “full-service employers’ association for the K-12 sector” (BCPSEA, 2012a). As such, the BCPSEA bargains on behalf of its members, provides “labour relations advice and

resources,” offers “pension and benefits management and administration,” and provides school boards with “accurate and timely information for decision making” (BCPSEA, 2013a).

**Mandate.** As expressed by its constitution, the mandate of the BCPSEA is much more succinct than that of the BCTF. A four-point list is topped by the coordination of “collective bargaining objectives, compensation for employees who are not subject to collective agreements, benefit administration and human resource practice” (BCPSEA, 2012b, p. 1). Furthermore, the BCPSEA (2012b) acts as the “accredited bargaining agent for the Association’s members, as prescribed by the *Public Education Labour Relations Act*” (p. 1, emphasis in original). This underscores the legislative foundation of its mandate, with other legislation such as the *Public Sector Employers Act*, the *Public Education Labour Relations Act*, and the *School Act* figuring prominently in its Constitution. The fundamentally legal justification of the BCPSEA’s existence is in sharp contrast with the BCTF, whose existence is predicated entirely on the support of its members. The scope of the BCPSEA’s mandate is also much narrower than that of the BCTF, which has many other goals in addition to its primary advocacy role. The BCPSEA is a much more focused organization. If the BCTF could be characterized as a shotgun, the BCPSEA would compare as a sniper rifle. The majority of its resources are used with much greater focus: human-resources and bargaining.

Comparing the mandates of the BCTF and the BCPSEA (see Table 7) provides some useful insights.

Table 7

*A Comparison of BCTF and BCPSEA Mandates*

	<b>BCTF</b>	<b>BCPSEA</b>
<b>Governance structure</b>	Representative Assembly, headed by Executive Committee, an 11-member body elected by delegates at the BCTF's AGM	Board of directors (16 total, but only 13 voting members: 9 public school board trustees, and 4 government appointees), elected by members at AGM
<b>Representing</b>	41,000 individual public school teachers	60 public school boards
<b>Primary goals</b>	Teacher advocacy	Collective bargaining
<b>Secondary goals</b>	Defend and promote public education, eliminate discrimination, social justice initiatives (poverty, child and youth issues, race relations, gender equity, homophobia and heterosexism, bullying, environmental issues, globalization, violence prevention, Aboriginal education)	Benefit administration, human resource management

Both organizations have one common goal: to represent and advocate for their members. One fundamental difference, however, stems from the nature of this representation. As discussed, the BCTF has much greater membership than the BCPSEA, and through a very high level of democracy and representation attempts to be “the voice of the profession” (BCTF, 2012c). The BCPSEA, on the other hand, runs according to a more traditional business model, with a board of directors charged with representing, though not necessarily consulting, the member school boards of this province. A second fundamental difference between these organizations is in the scope of their mandate. The BCTF concerns itself with not only teachers' welfare, but also that of students, visible minorities, Aboriginal Peoples, impoverished individuals, victims of bullying, and even the environment. The BCPSEA does not tend to concern itself with issues outside of its purview – it is focused first and foremost on its role as an employers' association.

As such, the BCPSEA bargains on their behalf and limits its advice to a narrowly defined set of human-resources issues such as health and benefit administration and pension planning.

### **The Provincial Government (Bill 12)**

**History.** Bill 12 was passed by the provincial government in 2011 as a response to Don Avison's (2010) report on the BCCT. The Avison report raises serious concerns about the extent to which the BCTF "impaired the capacity of that entity [the College] to properly discharge the responsibilities assigned to it by the Legislature" (Avison, 2010, p. 4). Avison concludes that in placing too much emphasis on defending teachers and too little on the rigorous enforcement of professional standards, the BCTF creates an imbalance between "public interest" and the more dominant "interest of members" (Avison, 2010, p. 32). This results in a "dysfunctional" College that "falls well short of the standard set by other self-regulating professions" which needs to be "substantially re-structured" (Avison, 2010, p. 32). Avison recommends two solutions in his report. First, he proposes that the number of members on the Council that governs the College be decreased from 20 to 15 while "increased emphasis should be given to selecting a greater proportion of lay persons to serve on Council" (Avison, 2010, p. 33). His second recommendation is for "the Government of BC to re-assert control over the regulation of the teaching profession by bringing all related functions back within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education" (Avison, 2010, p. 34). The government responded to Avison by including both of these recommendations in Bill 12, which dissolved the BCCT and replaced it with a new section of the Ministry of Education: the TRB.

It is important to note that the TRB continues to give some regulatory responsibility to teachers themselves. BCTF-nominated teachers hold a majority on what has been called the British Columbia Teachers' Council, the body responsible for establishing standards of teacher

certification and conduct (due to their majority, teachers have the ability to dictate and define these standards). However, the power to enforce these standards has been given primarily to a government-appointed commissioner, a newly-created position with relatively broad powers to enter schools upon complaint, interview those involved, compel witnesses, and require disclosure. A three-person panel works together with the commissioner to suspend or rescind a public school teacher's certification, but a BCTF-nominated representative may fill only one position on this panel. This limitation removes the teaching profession itself from the disciplinary process, effectively resulting in external regulation rather than self-regulation.

### **The British Columbia School Trustees' Association.**

**History and mandate.** The BCSTA's seminal meeting occurred in 1905, when "20 school trustees from around British Columbia met" and "discussed common problems and ways to improve public education" (BC School Trustees' Association, 2013). In 1956, "the association was incorporated by an act of the provincial legislature, '*The British Columbia School Trustees Association Incorporation Act*'" (BC School Trustees Association, 2011). Since 1956, the *Act* has undergone several amendments and name changes; its most recent iteration, amended in 2007, called the *School (Student Achievement Enabling) Amendment Act*, with seven "objects of the Association":

1. to represent the public interest in public school education;
2. to advance the cause of education in the province and promote public interest in educational affairs;
3. to recommend changes in the School Act and any other Act which may affect the public education system;

4. to cooperate and provide liaison with municipal, provincial and federal governments and with organizations in Canada or elsewhere having aims and objectives the same as or similar to those of the Association;
5. to promote efficiency in the carrying out of the duties and exercise of power by boards of education;
6. to promote, conduct and direct research and the gathering of information and to make available the findings; and
7. repealed
8. to take any action, not inconsistent with this Act or any other Act, or any regulations or rules made under the authority of any Act, that the association deems necessary or advisable to give effect to any policy adopted by it with respect to any question directly or indirectly affecting the purposes and objects of the association.

In the first three points, it is apparent that the BCSTA is highly concerned with the *public* nature of education in BC. This emphasis on the public is consistent with other identified BCSTA documents, suggesting that this aspect of teachers work has the biggest impact on the BCSTA's conceptualization of teacher professionalism.

### **The British Columbia Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association**

**History and mandate.** According to its website, "the BCPVPA has been an autonomous professional association since January, 1988" (BCPVPA, 2013). The genesis of the Association was in the 1987 passage of Bill 20, legislation that resulted in separating principals from teachers by excluding administrators from the BCTF (Fleming, 2011). Formerly part of a provincial specialist group within the BCTF, principals and vice-principals sought to form a separate association, which today has six "strategic priorities":

- strive to ensure its members have the skills to be effective educational leaders;
- advocate for its members to have the time, resources and support to be effective educational leaders;
- work cooperatively with education partners to sustain and improve public education;
- proactively monitor emerging issues to inform, support and advise members;
- be recognized as an innovative, inclusive and vigorous community of educational leaders
- maintain a strong, efficient and effective organization. (BCPVPA, 2013)

More succinctly, the current Executive Director notes that “the BCPVPA is an organization devoted to serving the professional and economic interest of its members” (Krieger, 2013b).

Fleming (2011) describes the BCPVPA as primarily concerned with “serving the occupational and legal needs of its members” (p. 107). Finally, the 2010 BCPVPA President characterizes his association as “a well-positioned, credible and reliable voice for government and our partner groups when seeking input from principals and vice-principals” (Aziz, 2010).

## Appendix B – Document List

The following documents were analyzed to address my research questions.

### The BCTF

- Anderson, S., & Daly, H. (2012, May/June). 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of non-instructional days in the school calendar. *BCTF Teacher Newsmagazine*. Retrieved from <http://www.bctf.ca/publications/NewsmagArticle.aspx?id=27100>
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Shields, K., & Turner, J. (2011, April). Who is writing nasty things about us at the college?

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### **The BCPSEA**

British Columbia Public School Employers' Association. (2011a). Employee assessment in public education: Integrating roles, responsibilities and development. *Perspectives in Practice*.

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