

Session code: 1-3-A203**Title:** Histories, Cultures and the Social Construction of the Teacher**Contributer/s:** Elizabeth McNess**Abstract :**

There is currently a great deal of debate concerning the role, aims and structure of formal schooling in Western societies at the beginning of the 21st Century. National governments are having to respond to the twin pressures of economic expediency in the delivery of public services and a concern with a crisis of legitimation resulting, in part, from the growing permeability of national borders to global influences. These pressures have combined with changing social circumstances and advances in new technologies to call into question traditional ways of organising schools and controlling the work of teachers. Within Europe, national policy-making has begun to focus on a re-conceptualisation of the role of the classroom teacher, who is regarded as a key change agent in the process of raising standards, improving pupil attainment and enhancing the quality of schooling provision.

But the 'teacher' is a social construct viewed through the lens of national histories and situated cultures. Differences in the underlying values and aims of national education systems can determine not only the role of the teacher but also the way in which policy is developed and implemented.

This paper draws on the findings from a small-scale comparative study of teachers' work in England and Denmark. It uses a socio-cultural framework to examine the relationship between national structure and individual agency, and produces evidence from the study to discuss teachers' work and professionalism, highlighting contextually specific variations which impact on the implementation of national policy at the classroom level.