

Reforms in teacher education programs to enhance the professionalization of the teaching profession

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Abstract

Sociologists have defined characteristics that distinguish full professions from other kinds of occupations. Literature on the teaching profession indicates that teaching is classified as a semi-profession because the attributes of the teaching profession do not fulfil the dimensions that characterize a full profession. The status of the teaching profession can be raised by making teaching more scientific, evidence-based, and informed by research. This paper emphasizes the important role of teacher education programs in realizing such improvements and raising the status of the teaching profession. Reforms in these programs can help prospective teachers acquire a profession-specific knowledge base and specialized pedagogical training. All these advancements contribute to enhancing the professionalization of the teaching profession.

Keywords: teaching profession, teacher education programs, reforms, professionalization.

Reformy v programech vzdělávání učitelů ke zvýšení profesionalizace učitelské profese

Abstrakt

Sociologové definovali charakteristiky, které odlišují plné profese od jiných druhů povolání. Literatura o učitelském povolání uvádí, že učitelství je klasifikováno jako polo profese, protože atributy učitelské profese nenaplnují vlastnosti, které charakterizují plnohodnotnou profesi. Status učitelské profese lze pozvednout tak, že se z výuky stane více vědecká, na důkazech založená a výzkumem informovaná profese. Tento článek zdůrazňuje důležitou roli programů vzdělávání učitelů při realizaci těchto zlepšení a zvyšování úrovně postavení učitelské profese. Reformy v těchto programech mohou pomoci budoucím učitelům získat odbornou znalostní bázi a specializovanou pedagogickou přípravu. Všechny tyto pokroky přispívají ke zvýšení profesionalizace učitelské profese.

Klíčová slova: učitelské povolání, programy vzdělávání učitelů, reformy, profesionalizace.

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Introduction

The study of occupations and professions has been an important topic in sociology (Ingersoll & Collins, 2018). The definition and meaning of the status of a profession have been long discussed by sociologists, and through their debates comes forth also a discussion about the status of the teaching profession (Guerriero & Deligiannidi, 2017). The traditional sociological approach considers law and medicine professions of high status and pay (Webb et al., 2004, in Demirkasımoğlu, 2010). Historians have heeded to the established professionals, or full professionals, such as individuals who work in the fields of law and medicine, while much less attention has been dedicated to the insecure professionals, or semi-professionals, such as teachers, healthcare workers, and social workers. For many historians, these semi-professions have often been characterized as minor. And although feminist historians have devoted some attention to these semi-professions, their main interest has been in gender issues (Nottingham, 2007).

Different scholars have categorized teaching and nursing as semi-professions since they do not satisfy the criteria of full professions stated in literature (Guerriero & Deligiannidi, 2017; Etzioni, 1969; David, 2000, in Demirkasımoğlu, 2010). Since the status of the teaching profession is perceived as lower than the status of other professions, such as engineering, medicine, and law (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2011, as cited in Guerriero & Deli-

giannidi, 2017), this poses challenges in the recruitment of teachers and the retaining of good teachers in the profession. To raise the status of the teaching profession, teaching should be made more scientific and evidence-based, teachers' pedagogical knowledge should be grounded in current scientific understanding about learning, and teaching practice should be informed by research (Guerriero & Deligiannidi, 2017). Teacher education institutions and programs play the most crucial role in realizing such reforms. It is in these programs that prospective teachers can acquire a specialized knowledge base and professional qualities. All these reforms contribute to the professionalization of the teaching profession. This paper will describe the status of teaching and examine the role of teacher education programs in professionalizing the teaching profession.

1 Full professions and the teaching profession

Established professions, or full professions, differ from insecure professions, or semi-professions, in factors such as the standards of conduct being unified and the discipline being self-regulated, in addition to the issue of control of entry to the profession (Nottingham, 2007).

To differentiate between professions and professionals and other kinds of work and workers, researchers in sociology have devised organizational and occupational attributes that define professions (Abbott, 1988; Etzioni, 1969; as cited in Ingersoll & Collins, 2018). The teaching profession is placed among the semi-professions since many dimensions that characterize a full profession are not evident in teaching (Guerriero & Deligiannidi, 2017).

1.1 Characteristics of a full profession

Literature about professions presents important dimensions that characterize a full profession. One crucial aspect of full professions is the expert knowledge and skills gained by the professionals, or specialization (Ingersoll & Collins, 2018). Full professions have a specialized body of knowledge and skills that can be applied in work, with the body of knowledge based in theoretical foundations that require the practice of prudence. Another important dimension of full professions is a training program which can grant the necessary qualifications to prospective professionals (Freidson, 2001, as cited in Nottingham, 2007). Full professions require high qualifications, or degrees, and thus entry into such professions is highly restricted that any worker who does not satisfy the strict credential requirements would not be hired (Simpson & Simpson, 1983, as cited in Ingersoll & Collins, 2018).

Having a service orientation is another distinct dimension of full professions (Larson, 1977, as cited in Gore & Morrison, 2001). Such professions adopt an ideology that

emphasizes dedication to doing good work than to financial compensation (Freidson, 2001, as cited in Nottingham, 2007). Another aspect of full professions is remarkable ethics to serve as a justification for being given self-regulation (Larson, 1977, as cited in Gore & Morrison, 2001) and a philosophy based on superior ideals (Freidson, 2001, as cited in Nottingham, 2007).

A comparison with other professions features the dimensions of prestige and autonomy of full professions (Larson, 1977, as cited in Gore & Morrison, 2001). Full professions are characterized by a large degree of self-governance, and they enjoy a significant amount of authority, which in turn grants them considerable amounts of control. This type of control can be applied on several aspect of the profession, such as admission into the program, the curriculum of study, accreditation of the training institutions, and ethical standards of practice (Ingersoll & Collins, 2018).

Additionally, full professions call for a division of labour that is controlled occupationally, and a labour market in which the entrance and career advancement oblige educational qualifications (Freidson, 2001, as cited in Nottingham, 2007).

1.2 The profession of teaching benchmarked against the attributes of a full profession

Three important dimensions that constitute the core of a full profession are: a scientific and profession-specific body of knowledge, a long period of higher education and continuous professional development, and autonomy of decision making in practice and in governance of the profession, and these core dimensions are not evident in teaching (Guerriero & Deligiannidi, 2017). Firstly, the body of knowledge acquired in teacher education is not considered profoundly arcane since almost everyone in society appears to know about how teaching is done (Gore & Morrison, 2001). Secondly, regarding pedagogical knowledge and the teaching profession, compared to other more prestigious professions, teaching is perceived to be of lower status because it can be learned simply by observation, in contrast to the full professions for which long periods of specialized training and professional development are required to gain the necessary knowledge, skills, and expertise (Hoyle, 1995, as cited in Guerriero & Deligiannidi, 2017). This lack of a profession-specific knowledge base and absence of specialized pedagogical training have led to the perception of teaching as having low prestige and being a semi-profession (Guerriero & Deligiannidi, 2017). Thirdly, the autonomy of the teaching profession is under organizational control and being monitored by administrators constrains the autonomy of teachers (Leiter, 1978, as cited in Demirkasimoğlu, 2010). Professional autonomy is achieved through governance and self-regulation; hence, a profession with low control over itself is considered to be of a lower status (Guerriero & Deligiannidi, 2017). Regarding the autonomy and prestige

of the teaching profession, they are not on the same level as those found in the full professions (Gore & Morrison, 2001).

A discrete aspect that differentiates between a semi-profession and a full profession is the relationship with the client. In full professions, the relationship is initiated by the client, is personal, and the main purpose is the best interest of the client. While in semi-professions, most of the time it is not the client who commences the relationship, and it is unclear whom the professional is serving. Moreover, semi-professionals find themselves sandwiched between their managers and their clients. For example, teachers instruct their students under the inspection of their supervisors, and nurses prepare their patients for their directors' review (Nottingham, 2007).

Other factors that determine the status of the teaching profession and differentiate it from full professions are salary, ease of access to the profession, and working conditions. In most countries that are part of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), teacher salaries are lower than the salaries of other professions which require the same level of education. This discrepancy in salary is considered a main reason in perceiving a profession in a lower status (OECD, 2016, as cited in Guerriero & Deligiannidi, 2017). Several initiatives have been made to ease admittance into the teaching profession for the purpose of attracting talented candidates into teaching. Examples of such initiatives are certification programs that serve as alternatives to actual university education. Such programs allow the attainment of teaching certificates in shorter durations and facilitate entry into the teaching profession. Unfortunately, following this route leads to a decrease in the professional status of teaching (Ingersoll & Collins, 2018). Regarding working conditions, large class size, long working hours, excessive workload, poor job security, lack of instructional resources, and little access to professional development are among the factors that negatively impact the status of the teaching profession (Leitwood, 2006, as cited in Guerriero & Deligiannidi, 2017).

2 Professionalism in the teaching profession

How can the teaching profession achieve a more professional status? What are some standards of professionalism for teachers? Several initiatives have been undertaken to improve the status of the teaching profession. One such initiative is the Adey Report, a report on teacher education published in Australia in 1998. The report is entitled "Preparing a Profession" and is part of a bigger project designed to develop national Standards and Guidelines for initial teacher education. The work was managed by the Australian Council of Deans of Education and overseen by Professor Kym Adey, hence the name of the document. The political and economic conditions that led to the rise of this report are similar to conditions in other countries involved in teacher education reform; hence, this report can be applicable to countries other than Australia (Gore

& Morrison, 2001). The Adey Report presents National Standards and Guidelines for Initial Teacher Education and discusses the development and implementation of those standards and guidelines (Australian Council of Deans of Education, 1998). The aim of the Adey Report is to prepare a profession; in other words, the “professionalization” of the teaching profession, the enhancing of the status of teaching. The primary concern of the Adey Report is to increase the governance of teacher education with the purpose of regulating its quality. To realize this purpose, the report presents standards and guidelines for the teacher education programs and institutions as well as for graduates. The Adey Report contributes to teacher education reform (Gore & Morrison, 2001).

2.1 Definitions of teacher professionalism

In literature, teacher professionalism is frequently discussed sociologically, educationally, and ideologically. However, this concept has been debatable among scholars (Demirkasımoğlu, 2010). Since teaching has an important effect on student learning and achievement, and since highly competent teachers contribute to excellent education systems, the teaching profession has been on the policy agenda of most OECD countries in recent years (Guerriero & Deligiannidi, 2017). Due to political and social changes, both the definition and the status of the teaching profession have evolved throughout the years. Hence, the definition can be described as dynamic, with no final agreement on the conceptualization of the term. How, then, can teacher professionalism be defined? Focusing on teachers’ professional qualifications may be one way to attain this definition. The degree to which teachers overcome difficulties and use their experience and skills to achieve excellence can also serve as a measure to define teacher professionalism (Baggini, 2005, as cited in Demirkasımoğlu, 2010).

When defining teacher professionalism, there has been a differentiation between “old professionalism” and “new professionalism”. While old professionalism is characterized by conservative practices, external regulation, self-interest, exclusive membership, and slow change, new professionalism involves responsiveness to change, self-regulation, and inclusive membership. New professionalism has emerged in response to the changing cultural, political, and social conditions. Therefore, it embodies flexibility, collaboration, collegiality, inquiry, and knowledge building. In today’s fast-changing work environment, this approach to teacher professionalism can help revive the concept and promote the status of the teaching profession (Sachs, 2003, as cited in Demirkasımoğlu, 2010). Practitioner control and proactivity are important features of new professionalism (Evans, 2007, as cited in Demirkasımoğlu, 2010).

2.2 Standards of professionalism for teachers

The question regarding the professionalism of teaching is, “Does teaching meet the criteria ascribed to full professions?” In the field of education, improving the quality and principles of teachers’ works and their public image is linked to teacher professionalism (Demirkasımoğlu, 2010). Therefore, professionalism in teaching can be achieved when teachers benchmark their attitudes and actions against the standards of excellence (Phelps, 2006 as cited in Demirkasımoğlu, 2010). The Adey Report highlights such standards of excellence by stating that standards and guidelines for teacher education graduates should cover domains such as the professional attributes a graduate should possess, content and curriculum studies, relationship with students, behaviour management, technology, assessment and evaluation, and working with others (Australian Council of Deans of Education, 1998).

Teacher professionalism has developed through four chronological phases: in the pre-professional age, teachers were not technically advanced and would implement the orders and instructions of their more knowledgeable managers; in the age of autonomous profession, autonomy was regarded as an important element in the teaching profession, and teachers were given pedagogical freedom; in age of collegial profession, professional cultures of collaboration were created in order to tackle the complexity of teaching and to deal with changes and reforms effectively; in the post-professional age, while some groups have the objective to de-professionalize teaching, other groups intend to redefine teacher professionalism in more positive and postmodern ways that are flexible, comprehensive, and inclusive in nature (Hargreaves, 2000, as cited in Demirkasımoğlu, 2010).

Regarding the contribution of teacher education programs to teacher professionalism, the Adey Report emphasizes program development and monitoring procedures, which serve the purpose of assuring high quality educational outcomes from the perspective of students, schools, universities, stakeholders, and the teaching profession. Standards and guidelines for the program include areas such as criteria for developing, implementing, and monitoring the program, program staff, selection and entry of students, and approaches to teaching and learning. The Adey Report also states that institutions should endorse academic standards of higher education. Organizational standards and guidelines discuss the teacher education institutions, the faculty, and field experience schools (Australian Council of Deans of Education, 1998).

3 Required reforms in teacher education programs and institutions to improve the status of the teaching profession

3.1 Specialized knowledge and expertise

One of the fundamental dimensions of full professions is specialization, without which any occupation would be considered a semi-profession. Is there specialization in teaching? Are teachers considered professionals with specialized expertise in their fields? Research shows that the concept of specialization has not been in the focus of education reformers. The common notion of out-of-field teaching denotes the phenomenon of teachers teaching subjects that are not in the field of their expertise. The reason for this is the mismatch between the subjects that teachers are prepared in during their years of study and the subjects they are assigned to teach in schools. Out-of-field teaching conveys the unintended idea that in the teaching profession it is possible for teachers to teach subjects they are not qualified for, thus lowering the status of teaching. Hence, it is crucial for teachers to possess specialized skills, education, and expertise in their particular fields (Ingersoll & Collins, 2018).

For many researchers in education, pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) is an essential knowledge base that prospective teachers should acquire because it encompasses a unique kind of specialized knowledge particular to the teaching profession (Guerriero & Deligiannidi, 2017). PCK can be conceptualized as the knowledge required by teachers to be able to transfer the content to their students (Kleickmann et al., 2012). PCK is considered a merging of content and pedagogy; the outcome of this merging is an awareness and ability to organize and adapt subjects to suit the various student interests and abilities found in the classroom. Thus, PCK is what differentiates a pedagogue from an expert in content (Shulman, 1987). In addition to PCK, teacher education study programs should equip students with content knowledge (CK). CK is subject-specific; it can be defined as a thorough comprehension of the content that is going to be taught (Baumert et al., 2010). Prospective teachers acquire CK in formal learning environments. This type of knowledge, which is shared among a community of specialists, is considered highly specialized knowledge (Shulman, 1987). Therefore, teacher education institutions play a fundamental role in students' acquisition of specialized knowledge and expertise. When prospective teachers attain specialization throughout their years of studies, the status of the teaching profession may improve.

3.2 Scientifically validated and research-based knowledge

To achieve the professionalization of the teaching profession, it is important for teachers to adopt and implement scientifically validated knowledge and practices (Buchberger, 2000, as cited in Guerriero & Deligiannidi, 2017). Moreover, teachers are required to process and evaluate new knowledge provided by research and to update the knowledge base of the teaching profession. When teachers have control over the development and implementation of their knowledge, they can achieve autonomy (Guerriero & Deligiannidi, 2017). As a specific pedagogical strategy to improve the effectiveness of teacher education, Korthagen (2016) suggest teacher research, which means the collection of data by prospective teachers on their own teaching. This type of research, called practitioner research, generates practical knowledge and results in teacher development by fostering a relationship between knowledge and action. This can help in enhancing the status of teaching since a research-based knowledge base and autonomy are two important factors of full professions.

In full professions, associations and organizations require their workers to constantly upgrade their knowledge. Concerning the teaching profession, current research considers professional development as an important pillar in teacher reforms. Teacher education institutions should equip graduates with new knowledge emerging from research to improve teachers' pedagogical practice (Guerriero & Deligiannidi, 2017). Policy makers need to particularly focus on implementation of reforms and on building capacity for change at the individual and school levels. Education strategies that are grounded in empirical research can lead to positive changes and an effective implementation of reforms (Akkary, 2014).

The pedagogical knowledge base for teaching is not stagnant; the continuous empirical study of teaching and learning provides a body of scientific literature that communicates the effects of different teaching practices on student learning. For example, the fields of neuroscience, cognitive science, and developmental psychology help in understanding how the human brain processes information, how social interactions affect the brain, and how environmental factors may hinder learning (Guerriero & Deligiannidi, 2017). According to Gore and Morrison (2001), incorporating research into teaching practices would result in teachers being seen as knowledge generators. To sum up, teacher education programs should incorporate learning activities that provide opportunities for students to update their knowledge and stay informed by current research.

3.3 Graduates equipped with professional qualities

In an examination of how the Adey Report constructs graduates, the concept of a “well-rounded professional” is discussed. Such professionals should go beyond the mere acquisition of the body of knowledge and skills of a profession. They should possess essential qualities, such as an appreciation of entering a profession that requires great responsibility and provides profound value to society, development of talents, critical and reflective competences, and creative skills (Gore & Morrison, 2001). Such qualities are a crucial component of the 21st century skills, that help people thrive in education, work, and life (Geisinger, 2016).

Prospective teachers should acquire the capability to adapt to and deal with the challenges of an ever-changing society in a positive manner. Moreover, they should develop self-awareness to discern what they can autonomously accomplish and when they should resort to consultation from more competent experts. They should also adopt a critical approach in all the dimensions of teaching, from applying knowledge to practicing reflection to conducting research to assessing curricula (Gore & Morrison, 2001). Teacher education institutions should not only teach content knowledge but also incorporate the cultivation of skills that provide graduates with the proficient qualities of critical thinking, creativity, reflection, and adaptability (Saavedra and Opfer, 2012).

4 Factors leading to the perpetuation of teaching as a semi-profession

According to Gore & Morrison (2001), the teaching profession will maintain its semi-professional status due to the current cultures in teaching and teacher education and government control over teacher education. For example, teaching lacks professional expertise, a criterion that characterizes full professions. While full professions have a common body of knowledge and skills that contribute to professional expertise and decision making, teaching does not. One negative effect of this lack is the poor quality of teacher preparation and induction into the profession. The profession of teaching is not fully based on validated theories. Moreover, teachers do not contribute to building a scientific knowledge base (Howsam et al., 1985, as cited in Guerriero & Deligiannidi, 2017).

Media is another factor that plays a role in determining the public's perception of the status of the teaching profession (Cameron, 2003, as cited in Guerriero & Deligiannidi, 2017). The public views the teaching profession as being overrepresented by females, a fact supported by international reports (Commonwealth Secretariat and UNESCO, 2011, as cited in Guerriero & Deligiannidi, 2017). Moreover, people perceive the teaching profession as being easily accessible since selection into initial teacher

education is not as competitive as selection into other professional occupations. And indeed, the quality of applicants and requirements of entry into teacher education are factors that determine the occupation's prestige (Guerriero & Deligiannidi, 2017).

Conclusion

While in some countries teachers seem to be experiencing a de-professionalization of their occupation, other countries, such as China, Mexico, India, Jordan, and Indonesia are focusing their efforts on professionalizing teaching. Reforms are being directed towards creating specialized education systems, making the study of teaching a university subject, providing professional development opportunities to upgrade the skills of in-service teachers, and restructuring teacher education curricula to provide specialized study of teaching. In high performing countries, such as Singapore, prospective teachers should acquire university preparation that provides specialization both in content and pedagogy, and in-service teachers should participate in professional development. No teacher can be hired without appropriate university preparation and qualifications. In such countries, teachers receive good compensation, and their contributions are highlighted (Goodwin, 2012). Finland is known for its high-quality teacher preparation; all prospective teachers are required to complete a master's degree before they start to teach. Canada, Australia, and the United States offer a combination of undergraduate and graduate level programs. The abovementioned countries have high-quality programs and offer teacher education in innovative ways. In almost all these countries, reforms focus on increasing the connection between theory and practice, and on helping teachers acquire capabilities to teach the various types of students that will be in their classrooms (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Today's teachers are expected to digress from the traditional methods of teaching to incorporate evidence-based teaching practices that are innovative and that contribute to the acquisition of 21-st century skills by the students, as required by OECD countries. This calls for an examination of the current state of teachers' pedagogical knowledge to get a full grasp of what the present knowledge base looks like. Doing this would provide insight into the required upgrade of the knowledge base within teacher education institutions, and into making evidence-based policy improvements in initial teacher preparation, induction and mentoring of novice teachers, and teachers' professional development (Guerriero & Deligiannidi, 2017). Such research-based advancement of the knowledge base of the teaching profession may contribute to raising the status of teaching.

Apart from reforms in specialization and innovation, the profession of teaching should have the welfare of learners as its principal aim. This endeavour is what can put teaching on the path towards professionalization (Goodwin, 2012).

In conclusion, reforms in teacher education programs contribute to the enhancement of the professionalization of the teaching profession. When the profession of teaching becomes a more evidence-based practice, informed by scientific research, and when reforms are implemented in initial teacher training, and when teacher education institutions strive to qualify graduates with specialized knowledge and professional qualities, the teaching profession may be permitted more autonomy over their practice and governance, and this would lead to higher prestige of the profession, hence a higher status. Notwithstanding, teaching is considered a noble profession as teachers practice their occupation having the best interest of their students in mind, regardless of whether their career is classified as a full profession or a semi-profession.

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