

# **Teachers' Professionalism: Prejudices, Problems and Promises**

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## **1. Introduction**

Is teaching a profession?

That question was posed to me almost thirty years ago when I started out as a young, naive teacher. That same question is still being posed to me now. Is a teacher a professional? Why is this question being asked at this age and time? Why is it so important that teaching must be a profession? Does the fact that we keep looking for answers to this question, suggesting that the answers are important to teachers and teaching? Will it give the teachers better status, salaries and autonomy? Runté (1995) thought that it is futile to talk about teaching as a profession: *“the profession has changed so much over the past 100 years that there is now little left to distinguish professionals from other workers.”* If we agree with Runté, then teaching, like any other occupation is a profession. So shall we then stop deliberating the case of teaching as a profession and move on to more pressing matters that are effecting the teaching profession, such as the issue of being professionals, the standard of professionalism among its members and the quality of service we provide to our students?

This paper will try to briefly distinguish the three terminologies of profession, professional and professionalism with the hope to clarify the confusion of their meanings and usage. I believe this is crucial as to facilitate the discourse and debate teacher professionalism and its fundamental concepts and the implications it holds to the teaching fraternity. I hope to then proceed to the core subject of this paper which is the issue of enhancing professionalism in the teaching fraternity. In this endeavour, I propose that we cannot escape discussing the issue of certification, standards and ethics of teachers. I also propose that the teaching vocation must be bolder by looking at other possibilities such as establishing a new breed of teachers and hybrid professionalism.

## **2. Profession, Professional And Professionalism**

In discussing the issue of professionalism we cannot totally ignore the issue of profession and professionals. Conceivably, it would be wise for us to get this issue out of the way as quickly as possible to enable us to focus on the more pertinent issues vis-à-vis professionalism. If we were to accept Runté's (1995) explanation that teaching is merely a line of work, a vocation, an

occupation, a job, a career, etc. than we should let this matter rest at that. Unfortunately it is not as easy as that to explain this matter.

In the literature, teaching is often related to one of four conceptions; as a craft, labour, art or a profession. This depends on the fraternity's hold of the conception of teaching (Hoban, 2005). If it was conceptualised as a profession, it implies that teaching is more than the development of a collection of techniques. It must embrace the issue of personal judgement which means having a theoretical basis for making that informed judgement as well as knowledge of the "unpredictability, personalized nature of teaching" (Day, 1999: 94). Viewing teaching as a profession means accepting the complex nature of the classroom and recognizing that there is no such thing as one size fits all where teaching strategies are concerned. This means the teacher has to be an expert and well trained.



There are many professions, less professionals and even less professionalism. Assuming all occupations are professions then all workers are professionals. But do all conduct themselves professionally? Do they have a work ethic to follow? It has never been disputed that medical doctors are professionals because of the training they received but there are bad doctors who do not adhere to proper medical practice. In such cases, are they professional? Some doctors have been debarred based on professional and ethical standards. Therefore not all people are professionals. And even when they are considered one, they may not adhere to certain standards, which is still labelled professionalism!

Figure 1: Attempt to place terminologies in a Hierarchy

Most teachers believe that their vocation is already a profession because they were educated and given training in the said field (Ronfeldt and Grossman, 2008). Again this explanation may not be enough as suggested by Goodlad (1990: 29); "A vocation is not a profession because those in it choose to call it one. It must be recognized as such." This recognition must come from our society and society tends to associate a profession with a high level of knowledge and not too long ago teachers were the most educated. However, as more and more members of that society become more and more educated it lessens the gap of knowledge between the teacher and the 'pupils'. Thus society's view of teachers, as professionals in terms of the level of knowledge, is no different from other college or university graduates' knowledge in their specific fields (Cohen, 1989) which would then make everyone with a college or university education, a professional.

For the sake of argument, let us suppose teachers are able to overcome all these prejudices and problems pertaining to their quest to consider their vocation as a profession – does that make them professionals? What constitutes a professional and what is professionalism?

## **From Profession to Professionalization**

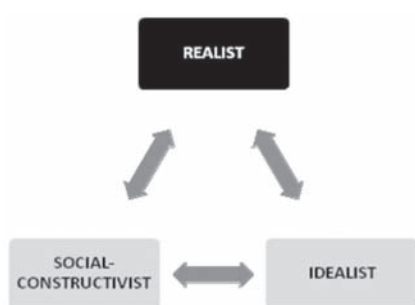
As can be seen, the term profession is highly contested. As suggested by Locke, (2001:558); *“Despite its widespread use ...it defies common agreement as to its meaning”*. But the term teaching as a profession is not and will not go away, so perhaps we need to at least have a general notion of what it entails. For that we need to look at least to two different schools of thought in relation to professions.

An idealist approach to this issue is criterion based, where the performance of a subject can be measured. The normal criteria of measurement are; length of training; body of knowledge; high levels of skills; a code of ethical conduct; client – centeredness; autonomy, independent decision-making and adaptability; self-governance and the requirement that it play a central role in relevant public policy-making. Even among idealists there may be differences in the criteria but they agree that an occupation must subscribe to the stipulated criteria before it can be called a profession. Despite their differences, according to Hoyle and John (1995) there is agreement on the following criteria; knowledge; autonomy and responsibility. On the other hand the social constructivist approach sees a profession and professionalization as a socio-political task which is designed to improve the interest of an occupational group. They believe that it is society that gives an occupation its status; therefore the social context is very important.

Is there a tension between these two schools of thoughts? For example, the idealist firmly believes in safeguarding autonomy but for the social constructivist the stakeholders (mainly society) also have a say and there must be transparency. The idealist sees professions as a set of criteria operating in a social context. The social-constructivist views professions as agendas of the socio-political setup which is constantly under restructuring to cater to the needs of society. From these two perspectives Locke (2001) believes there are concurrences. These beliefs are not necessarily on a collision course. According to Locke (ibid.), this is a question of professionalization and a place exists for both approaches. Combining both we get the strength of both approaches. As shown by Freidson (1994) the idealist preset standard of status and conduct of a profession can be measured and compared amongst members at different points in time and place. The social-constructivist brings forward the social contextual nature of a profession such as the changing nature of its status, definition, labor and actions based on the needs of society.

I believe that there must be a set standard to benchmark a profession (as proposed by the idealist), however, this benchmark must take into consideration the social-constructivist view of the changing nature of a profession. This is because a profession is not a static terminology. According to Hilferty (2008), the term is constructed by society and it is constantly being redefined through changes in theory, policy and practice. We know that the medical fraternity still has not been able to find a cure for the simple cold, yet society will never call them anything but professionals. This is because the profession has been able to constantly upgrade their quality of service through information and new knowledge garnered from research. And the Hippocratic Oath has not gone out of fashion! We on the other hand need to get rid of the tag; ‘Those who can do and those who can’t teach’!

Figure 2 shows the relationship between the two and to a third which I call the REALIST approach.



In the REALIST Approach (the new professional teacher) I believe two important elements (one from each approach) must be taken into consideration; a set benchmark and the changing nature of society. The benchmark cannot remain static forever but must be stable enough to be measurable. There is also the issue of professionalization of occupation.

Figure 2 : The Realist Approach and the New professionals

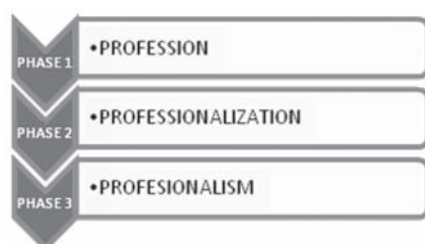
### From Professionalization to Professionalism

A professional is said to be an expert, specialised, qualified, proficient, skilled, trained, practised, certified, and licensed. This is the view as compared to amateurs. Baggini (2005: 10) defines:

*“A professional is someone who is able to deal with the challenges and tasks that are specific to the job they do, using skills, experience and expertise which are also specific to that job. As the challenges facing teachers have changed, so then has the meaning of professionalism in teaching.”*

The debate on the terminology of the profession went through three phases: the trait theory by Johnson; the theory of professionalization and; finally to professionalism (Wong, 2008). Professionalization theory focused on the process of occupational groups gaining professional status (see Vollmer and Mills, 1966; Larson 1978).

Historically professionalization is seen as a process which some occupations have taken to gain professional status. However, this is not a specific process that all other occupations must take to achieve the same goal. There are however, certain essential qualities that the occupations must have before attaining the professional status (Soder; 1990). This means the processes of professionalization undergone by certain occupations do not necessarily serve as guidelines for teaching's long struggle to achieve professional status. This issue of professionalization is dependent on society and the strength of the occupational group.



Sedlak (2008), a historian of professional education and educational history, lamented the lack of courage and determination among educators to vigorously and assertively pursue and secure professionalization. According to him many other occupations have attained professional status while we have been too timid and this does not argue well for our course.

Figure 3 : The Phases of Debate

Nonetheless, debates for the professionalization of the teaching fraternity more often than not have centred on the privilege and prestige of previously established professions and as a rule, medicine is the hallmark - as aptly put by Soder (1990: 35) "the ultimate in status, the elite position in the world of work". The teaching fraternity has often claimed its right to professionalization by virtue of some unclear knowledge base which they argue can guide practitioners' behaviour, similar to that of doctors' medical knowledge.

Do lawyers actually make the world a better place to live in? Many of us have heard about lawyers absconding 'professionally' with public funds entrusted to them. But more often than not, these lawyers are disbarred for breaching their code of ethics. Nevertheless, the respect for the legal profession never wanes. Every so often we hear rhetoric that teachers are the ones who will determine the future of a nation - so why is it so difficult to recognize teachers as "professionals? If the education of a nation is imperative, then teachers are indispensable. If this is the case, then teaching should be in a much better position, both socially and economically, relative to other occupations. Unfortunately it is within this rhetoric that the problem starts.

Very often we hear calls for the professionalization of teachers. These calls come from the government and the public at large. In reality it is difficult to find anyone who opposes the concept of teacher professionalism. Unfortunately these calls do not come with the same esteem or the social respect for doctors and lawyers.

### **3. Professionalism**

Professionalism is about the 'quality of the practice' (see Johnson 1984, Eraut 1994, and Nixon 2001). Sockett (1993) identifies four central categories in quality of practice; character; commitment; subject knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. Based on Goodson and Hargreaves (1996), professionalization is seen as the social and political mission designed to enhance the interests of an occupational group. Professionalism, on the other hand is seen as the quality of communication and character of that particular group. So professionalism in simple terms refers to the nature of a specific occupation; origination, continuance and preservation of its individual and collective standards in relation to knowledge, skills and behavior.

Lack of professionalism can from the works of Hilferty (2008), Locke (2001), Bloomfield (2009), Reeves (2007), Rizvi and Elliott (2007) and Wood (2007) and many other similar works, be attributed to:

- lack of any effective system of licensing.
- lack of agreed standards for performance.
- Lack of incentives for competent and dedicated people to join the profession.
- work settings that do not provide a collegial atmosphere and appropriate set-up for the growth and development of 'professionalism'.
- assortment of prevailing systems of teacher education and the lack of interaction, which hinders standardization in the teaching profession.

*... on the critical teaching skills all teachers must learn. In particular, all teacher preparation programs must provide teachers with solid and current content knowledge and essential skills. These include the abilities to use research-based methods appropriate for their content expertise; to teach diverse learners and to teach in high-need schools; and to use data to make informed instructional decisions. Successful and promising strategies for promoting these skills include making teacher education a university-wide commitment; strengthening, broadening and integrating field experience throughout the preparation programme; strengthening partnership; and creating quality mentoring and support programs* (in Townsend and Bates [eds.] 2007:iii).

Arguably most teacher preparation institutions have followed the above criteria to different degrees. Unfortunately, and as correctly pointed out by Norcini and van Zanten (2010), there is no formal framework for coordinating efforts across boundaries in teacher certification. Consequently, this apparent lack of global or even regional legal sanctioning results in little global cooperation and limits the mobility of teachers whose credentials do not have common understanding nor universal standards.

### **Teaching Standards**

Professions must have an established right to privileged communication and relatively great autonomy. It must be based on the general confidence in the individuals and collective maintenance and preservation of those standards in the profession. In most countries, the public perception is that some teachers fall short of their expectations. Perhaps this is one of the reasons contributing to their withholding the professional status of the teaching vocation.

Professionalism is not a collection of static qualities because a profession changes over time. Information and knowledge increases and new skills and expertise are needed. Put simply it recognises the need for new virtues but not in absolute and universal values but in the practise to achieve and live out those virtues (Bradbeer, 2007). The honourable teachers' life; *"...cannot be read off from tradition, dogma, creed or community, although each may provide guidance. It can only be constructed through the living of it"* (Nixon, 2001: 117). Nixon went on further to conclude that the present professionalism debate is "callow assumptions" (Nixon *ibid*: 126) and brushed it off as simplistic ideas of programmed learning outcomes which view learning exclusively as an individualistic action and notions and learning and teaching as being all about technique separated from the real worlds of learners and teachers.

Nonetheless, whatever virtues we may talk about be it in the past, present or future, we still have to come back to the subject of the standard of a profession. In the teaching profession a standard normally refers to what teachers or educators are expected to know and be able to do (Ingvarson 1998). This is because there is a growing list of researchers that show that teacher quality is one of the most important factors influencing student achievement, far ahead of factors such as class and school size (Darling-Hammond, 2000, 2003; Lovat, 2003). Darling-Hammond (2003: 10) states;

In this scenario, there are at least three groups of participants in this 'great' debate on reforming teacher status to professionals. They speak from different perspectives and use different standards, terms and conditions to deliberate their case. Each group believe their views and expectations are clear but unique to their group: administrators insist on issues of compliance and conformity; parents view it from the perspectives of competence and how well their own children are treated and teachers think of power, prestige, and income. Furthermore, teachers in modern times according to Baggini (2005:11) believe professionalism means:

- maintenance of authority in the absence of deference;
- maintaining a sense of vocation without allowing one's job to dominate one's entire life
- the ability to promote firm, shared values in the face of moral pluralism;
- being able to acknowledge shared interests and experiences with students without eroding the teacher/pupil distinction;
- to be comfortable with the self one is at school, even though it is different to the self one is at home;
- the ability to conform to the demands of a prescriptive system without losing sight of one's own values and distinctive skills.

Professionalism, as defined by authorities, according to a study by Simons and Kelchtermans (2008), means teachers need to respond to the needs of society. They concluded; *"...we can conclude that 'entrepreneurial' or 'market-oriented' virtues (competency/effectiveness, responsiveness and flexibility) take the place of 'profession oriented virtues' (expertise, responsibility and autonomy)..."* (Simons and Kelchtermans 2008: 294). This is in line with Wong's (2008: 267) assertion: *"In this context, teachers should be able to develop their professionalism in a broader social context"* due to the audit culture that is currently surfacing. This means teachers are accountable to the stakeholders.

In all fairness the public seldom queries the professional capabilities of teachers as a whole but have from time to time made query to the competence of some. Dornbusch, Glasgow and I-Chun (1996) maintain that professionalism refers to the nature of a specific occupation which entails, for origination as well as continuance and preservation, certain *individual* and *collective* standards in relation to knowledge, skills and behaviour. As such teachers need to assert their professionalism individually and collectively now as never before. And off course teachers *"Increased concern with professionalism also goes hand in hand with the tendency to see teaching as more of a profession and less of a vocation"* (Baggini, 2005: 5).

However, sheer concern is not enough as pointed out by Evens' (2008:29) professionalism as:

*"...influenced practice that is consistent with commonly-held consensual delineations of a specific profession and that both contributes to and reflects perceptions of the profession's purpose and status and the specific nature, range and levels of service provided by, and expertise prevalent within, the profession, as well as the general ethical code underpinning this practice."*

It is often said that a profession must have a standard to benchmark the quality of their practice – so doctors, lawyers, engineers, and architects have it! But what is the standard for teachers? Is there an objectively measurable level of competence and commitment, from which standards afford the profession a legitimated status? We cannot continuously give the same excuse that we are different but want to be accorded the same benefits. If we are different where then is the yardstick? More importantly, how do we differentiate competent teachers from ineffective teachers – what is the yardstick used?

### **Teacher Certification**

When we talk about professionals, we are targeting people who have received some form of professional certification and licensing that accredits their competence and qualifications – meaning those who have achieved a set standard. Therefore this also concerns the issue of qualification, certification and licensing. Are our teachers qualified, certified and licensed? Who ascertained their expertise and who certified and licensed them? There is also the issue of accountability (Locke, VuUiamy, Webb, & Hill, 2005). The growing need for more teachers has seen more and more institutions churning out numerous types of teacher education programmes and with it the certification of new teachers. We are in an age where we even have online programmes for teachers. On what basis are these teachers licensed? What are they licensed to do?

Goodlad (1990) states that four conditions must be put in place before teaching can be considered a viable profession: a coherent body of knowledge and skills; some form of ‘professional’ control over admission to teacher education programs and of autonomy in deciding the appropriate knowledge, skills, and standard; a level of homogeneity in teacher education candidates and; a clear demarcation between qualified and unqualified candidates and legitimate programs and illegitimate programs. Thus it is not surprising that Goodlad’s (ibid.) suggestions are employed by professions in engineering and medicine.

In order to follow this tradition teachers are required to have professional practice as a foundation of professional knowledge upon which they can base instructional decisions so that they can promote inquiry and the discovery of new knowledge among their learners. And there exists a scholarly albeit rather still weak knowledge base of teaching (Yinger and Daniel, 2010). As such the teaching vocation has to move away from intuition and convenience and towards knowledge production and scholarly norms (Zionts, Shellady, & Zionts, 2006). So research in practice is a strong credential for the certification process. Therefore, knowledge production from research must be incorporated in student teacher education programs.

In so far as a standard is concerned, we need to build upon each set of standards, so that teachers meet and satisfy the standards (Bousted & Johnson, 2005). This is because “*Professional learning communities exert their effects slowly, yet sustainably over time* (Hargreaves in Frost, 2008 15). In this scenario we need to ensure that all current teacher preparation programs satisfy the future needs of learners. As such education programs especially at the undergraduate level for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century must according to Townsend and Bates focus:



*“... teachers’ qualifications, based on measures of knowledge and expertise, education and experience, account for a larger share of the variance in students’ achievement than any other single factor, including poverty, race and parent education.”*

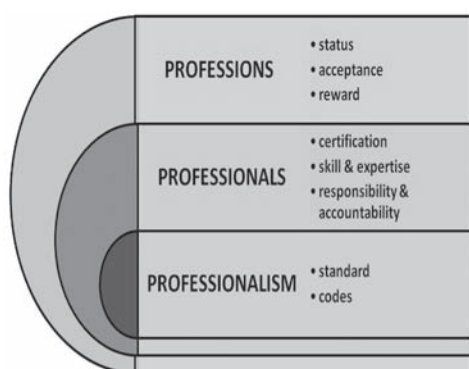
Two aspects consistently keep surfacing with regards to teacher professionalism and teaching standards: Teacher content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge as to teacher effectiveness. Bradbeer (2007: 222) was more detailed in suggesting the following be included in the standards:

#### Areas of activity

- design and planning of learning activities and/or programmes of study;
- teaching and supporting student learning;
- assessment and giving feedback to learners;
- developing effective learning environments and student guidance and support system;
- integration of scholarship, research and professional activities with teaching and supporting learning;
- evaluation of practice and continuing professional development.

#### Core knowledge and understanding of:

- the subject material;
- appropriate methods for teaching and learning in the subject area and at the level of the academic programme;
- how students learn, both generally and in the subject;
- the use of appropriate learning technologies;
- methods for evaluating the effectiveness of teaching;
- the implications of quality assurance and enhancement for professional practice.



There are professionals even among dubious vocations. So professionals can be separated from professions. However to be considered one brings with it status, acceptance and reward. Professionals must be certified to be skilled and a specialist in their areas of expertise. They are responsible for the task they perform and accountable to its outcome based on their professional standards and professionalism in ethics and practice.

Figure 4: Relationship between Professions, Professionals and Professionalism

There are many varieties of requirements used in professional recognition; however most professional bodies require at least two of the following criteria: an approved educational

experience, a practical experience, and successful examination performance. For example the American National Council of Examiners for Engineers and Surveyors (NCEES) requires candidates to satisfy at least four requirements: “(1) *graduation from an accredited engineering program*, (2) *successful performance on a test of fundamentals*, (3) *a period of approved work experience*, and (4) *successful performance on a discipline-specific examination*.” (Norcini and van Zanten 2010: 5)

Professionalism is not something that comes overnight. Nonetheless, some people seem to possess certain traits and characteristics that make it easier for them to adopt professionalism. For those who lack these characteristics, it must be impressed upon them. Nevertheless, all concern must be inculcated through role modelling and situations that can bring out the qualities of a professional. For this to happen we must not only select the best candidates but have the best programme that permits these candidates to develop the qualities of a true professional. As such, it is imperative that the education component of our curriculum focus on this component to enable professionalism to breed.

### **Teachers’ Ethics**

Normally the connotation of professionals and professionalism comes with a very small but highly loaded word – ethics! Professional ethics is needed for political legitimation and to be accorded “protection from competition in the labor market” (Freidson 1986: 33). Professionalism is the quality of being professional and must yield to a synchronization of an internal code of ethics. So “In the longer term then, to fix this requires ethics to become part of the educational mainstream, and certainly of teacher training” (Baggini, 2005:7).

‘Ethics’ comes from the Greek word, meaning character or ideal, or from the abstract idea of examining rules and the value of judgments. However, there are many different connotations to the word which encompasses moral values and legal limitations on behavior and community standards (Öztürk 2010). The American Counseling Association (ACA) expresses ethics as the clarification of “*the nature of the ethical responsibilities held in common by its members*” (Hill, 2004:132). The dimension of professional ethics or code of practice is essentially ethical principles which allow for an increased quality in the occupation concerned and the betterment of client welfare (Hill, 2004).

According to Vogt (2002); the early years saw professional concepts in education related to the caring of emotional labour and are connected with discourses of nature, ethics and mothering. Hiferty (2008: 64) believes that ethical standards can make a difference in the professionalism of teachers;

*“These components include knowledge of ethics as a field of intellectual endeavour; induction into the moral and professional codes of conduct that guide teachers, including national standards and accreditation structures; and a conviction that values education can make a difference.”*

But then as rightly questioned by Wilkinson (2005: 423) why then should a state legitimate

an occupational group's control over work?

*“Different writers emphasize different aspects of professions’ settlements with the state. There is, for example, the matter of the state having trust or confidence in a profession stemming from its code of ethics which attempts to provide an assurance of its members’ compliance with ethical practice.”*

Public perception that a professional group possesses special knowledge is still important. Without the public's positive perception, it is impossible that any government would endorse professional control purely on the basis of an imaginary ethical practice. Although a code of ethics is important for the teaching profession, it is still dependent on the public perception of the professional knowledge of the teachers. According to Furlong (2008) the Blair Government in Britain was successful in putting powerful mechanisms into place to ensure that “teachers, in their day-to-day practice, did indeed conform to the centrally prescribed policy agendas and strategies, whether or not they agreed with them (Furlong, 2008: 737). The professional practice of teachers seems to be the basis upon which an ethical standard can be built again, regardless if teachers agree with them.

#### **4. New Breed of Teachers and Hybrid Professionalism**

As mentioned earlier professionalism is not a static matter. Professionalism is a dynamic affair. It changes as the characteristics of the profession changes. For example the changing nature of our society, its needs and aspirations or the simple realization that a society is no more mono-ethnic as in Australia which changes the landscape of teacher professionalism. As explained by Hiferty (2008: 67)

*“Within this policy context, teachers’ claims to professionalism based on traditional features such as autonomy, subject expertise, and altruism appear incongruous. An emerging form of professionalism, promoted by government agencies and defined within a context of rapid social and global change, instead values characteristics such as adaptability, broad public accountability, a commitment to national security goals and responsibility for students’ moral and cognitive development.”*

We can see that this form of regulatory assertion competes with a teachers’ version of professionalism. Teachers do not really have much of a choice since governments are elected by the people and as such represent the people. Therefore, they need to convert these policies into pedagogical practice and here is where they can assert their professionalism that goes beyond the boundaries of the classrooms and schools. This way teachers can contribute more specifically towards (Hiferty 2008 : 67);

*“...sustaining social cohesion, but it also privileges the needs of students. By teaching students the skills necessary to create and maintain a socially just, equitable and sustainable world, teachers are able to prepare students for global citizenship, as well”*

With recent developments and globalization the idea of an accreditation system that transcends national boundaries should be pursued more vigorously. Unfortunately, we hardly have many national level teachers' councils let alone regional ones. The idea of a National Council for teachers is not something new. The said council could work as an accreditation, certification and licensure body (see Norcini and van Zanten, 2010). In the face of teaching standard professionalization and professionalism, these teacher councils could perform very important responsibilities and could determine the standards for different levels of teacher competencies.

Furlong (2008) advocated the development of a more differentiated teaching workforce with greater importance put on leadership and better prospects for promotion accompanied by suitable remunerations. Furlong uses the term 'workforce remodelling' (2008: 730). Currently rewards and remunerations are based on years of service and criteria of promotions are mainly obscured. Remuneration and promotions must be made clearer if we are to encourage professionalism.

In order to facilitate professionalism among teachers, we need the support of external agencies such as teachers' unions, teacher councils, universities and ministries but; "... *it must be stressed that any external support has to be mediated through genuine partnership arrangements so that external agencies do not simply replicate their normal habits of thought and operation*" (Frost, 2008:18).

As aptly put by Waters (2009) there may be global warning but global yawning is definitely in the classrooms of the world. Furlong's (2008) idea of remodeling the teaching workforce does not sound too farfetched. It involves rethinking our certification and promotion criteria and processes. I would like to suggest that we look at certified teachers as assistant teachers, master teachers and chartered teachers.

### **The Idea of Master Teachers**

Certified teachers should start as teaching assistants before moving up to a master teacher's recognition. Some master teachers may, with appropriate and relevant skills and competencies, become chartered teachers. The notion of remodeling is about enhancing teaching and teacher quality, which have been widely recognized as influencing student achievement and success in schools (Blanton, 2006). We have already spent much time talking about teacher quality at the undergraduate or first level of certification (assistant teachers' level) and perhaps it is time we spend some time looking at the possibility of certifying and licensing master teachers and chartered teachers for higher competencies, responsibilities and accountabilities.

The idea of master teachers is actually an accepted phenomenon as mentioned by Davidson (2009). One of the extra competencies that a master teacher must have is the ability to conduct research that can guide practice. "*The idea of the teacher as researcher has been taken up with considerable enthusiasm over the years. University departments of education have adopted it as the basis of project work for a Masters degree*" (Frost, 2008: 17).

The idea of master teachers is also connected to the issue of educational and pedagogical

leadership. Such a notion is not directed at institutional leadership and management but more towards teachers' expertise and the provision for assisting the assistance teachers and others in professional education, in the role of qualified teachers, teaching colleagues within schools and districts.

This is not just an issue of promotion and remuneration but more so of: "*Continued professional learning ... must be at the centre of teaching's professional values, since learning is our shared endeavour*" (Bartley, 2008: 68). There is also a need for mentors to supervise student-teachers in subject specific knowledge and who would be better suited than master teachers (Youens and McCarthy, 2007)? However, competency in subject knowledge is not enough as we need to move beyond it. This is also propounded by Capel (2007:493) who states the need to move beyond "*education subject knowledge to develop knowledgeable teachers of the subject*". This is because it has been shown that there is a strong relationship between teachers' knowledge of subject content, pedagogical knowledge and the effects of this on instructional practices across all subject areas and at different levels (Brophy, 1991; Grossman, Wilson, & Shulman, 1989).

So master teachers as the name suggests, are masters in subject content matter as well as pedagogical subject matter and have a proven track record in good practices. The job of the Teaching Council is to verify and certify this before a teacher is promoted as a master teacher. The certification body (such as the National Council of Teachers) should set transparent criteria and processes to determine its status of these master teachers.

### **The Notion of Chartered Teachers**

Reeves (2007: 56) wrote about Chartered Teachers:

*Chartered Teacher status is achieved by qualification against an occupational standard which positions those who attain it as leading teachers, exerting a significant influence with their colleagues to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools.*

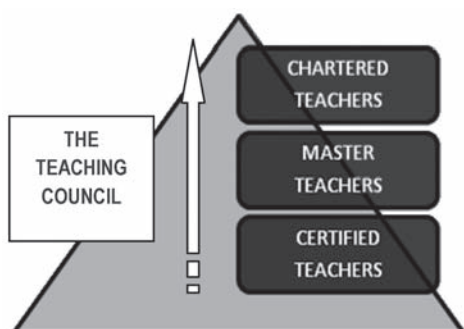
Reeves (ibid.) looks at some of the theoretical as well as practical complexities confronted by Chartered Teachers new 'status'. It sits squarely against the complex systemic and political aspects of changing professional practice in schools. The changing pattern of the teaching practice is often referred to as the new professionalization or re-professionalization. Although seen in different perspectives they do have common features and according to Reeves (2007: 59) these features are:

- learner-centred practice;
- clarity about moral and social purpose – ethical practice;
- commitment to evidence-informed practice and critical reflection;
- discretionary judgment exercised both collectively and singly;
- collegiality and collaboration with colleagues, other professionals, pupils and parents; and
- commitment continuing professional development and knowledge creation.

Carr and Skinner (2009) explain that the chartered teacher concept is to promote and enhance professionalism in the wake of the Scottish McCrone settlement. Many educationists considered it as a noteworthy advancement in in-service models of continuing professional development for teachers.

Under the McCrone Report (Reeves, 2007) it was recommended that two new Statuses be established for Scottish teachers i.e: Chartered Teachers and Advanced Chartered Teachers. The first category is similar to the master teachers we have discussed earlier. Here I see the Advanced Chartered Teachers as chartered teachers, the most competent, qualified, skilled and knowledgeable teachers. All teachers would have a chance to try for this status but very few would be able to attain it. Attaining this status is not like a ‘life peerage’ as the teachers need to maintain and advance their competencies otherwise they lose it. The Chartered Teachers would fulfil a more demanding role in serving as in serving and driving a nation’s educational standards (Reeves, 2007). This status was to be achieved through the completion of appropriate, accredited continuous professional development (Reeves, 2007) and maintained through rigorous standards.

This is a clear case of trying to achieve professionalism through the propagation of new professional standards. It offers those with the willingness, attitude and attributes to pursue the highest level of excellence. However, the role to be played by these teachers is still vague and needs to be clarified for it to work. Again the function of the Teaching Council or accreditation bodies should play its role in the process to clarify and gazette it. Nonetheless, it is heartening to see new ideas being promulgated in the process to professionalize the teaching vocation.



We need to remodel our workforce in our effort to re-professionalize our vocation. Teaching is often seen as a stagnated vocation – the only way up is administration and management. Good teachers must remain in the class thus the hierarchy in teaching status. Certified teachers should start as assistant teachers and work themselves up to master and chartered teachers. Hopefully this will ensure that professionalism is alive and well.

Figure 5 : Hierarchy of Professionalism

## 6. Conclusion

So does it matter if teaching is not considered a profession? Will the tag of “global yawning” become a label for teachers? Nobody can deny teachers are doing a very important job. It is indeed a noble vocation to nurture and develop young minds and future leaders not only individually but also collectively. It is not merely to give these young talents knowledge of subject matter but also life and living skills. Teachers are given the responsibility to develop character and with it to steer a nation’s future. Failure is not an option.

Teaching is perhaps one of the earliest vocations but is still struggling to be accepted as a profession. Even a cook gets better recognition than a teacher sometimes. The changing nature and roles teachers have to play as learning becomes more autonomous requires an educator who must be competent in their studies, perform well under the eye of the administration and parents, while maintaining good conduct to facilitate quality communication.

There will always be prejudices and problems in the quest for teachers to attain professional status for their vocation. Some of the tasks teachers do would not be considered professional enough and hence their professionalism is questioned. Nonetheless, there will always be promises of better acceptance, recognition, acknowledgment, status and remunerations. For these to happen teachers must act professionally and professionalism must be inherent in their practice i.e. the quality and character of teachers' actions.

Do teachers act professionally? Often teachers are overworked and underpaid struggling to be acknowledged by the same society who seems to think they know better than the teachers. Society's perception may be wrong but that does not mean the teachers are right! Ultimately teachers have to perform in changing roles as society's expectations and needs change.

Is professionalism inherent in teachers? People can be professional even in 'dubious' vocations! Teacher professionalism is very significant as it affects the role of the teacher and their pedagogy, which in turn influences the student's ability to learn effectively. Professionalism is the teacher's ability to reach students in meaningful ways by developing innovative approaches to mandated content while motivating, engaging, and inspiring young minds to prepare for life and living.

Teachers and educators must *actively and aggressively* pursue and defend their efforts at professionalization. Sedlak (2008), a historian of professional education and educational history, means that historically, as other occupations aggressively struggled for and achieved professional status, educators have typically been "timid" in their own efforts. Such timidity will only condemn current efforts to the all-too-familiar fate of their predecessors. There will always be prejudice against any occupation, even the established professions. Teaching has had more than its fair share of prejudice and discrimination against it being considered a profession. There are problems (real or imaginary) for teachers to attain the status of professionals. However, in my opinion the biggest issue we have to tackle is professionalism and the virtues of good teaching. This is where our efforts should be centred.

There will always be bad apples in any profession and teaching is no exception. There are bad doctors, lawyers and architects who do not measure up to their professional standards. Some are debarred and not allowed to practice their profession. The problem is do we have more than our fair share of bad apples? What do we do with our bad apples? To know who and what makes our apples bad we need to know what is the standard of our good apples. How do the good apples practice their trade – in short what makes them successful? What makes them professionals and what standard of professionalism do they attest to? Lest we forget that “...*much education research literature has vigorously critiqued the erosion of creativity and professionalism in favour of a regime of ‘managerialism’ and ‘performativity.’*” (Storey, 2007:

253).

We may have been barking up the wrong tree to claim our vocation as a profession. We may also have been giving the wrong credentials to claim our rights. We are the educators of the citizenry after all and as such the most scrutinized. We need to re-educate ourselves before we can even think of educating others. It would be almost impossible to eradicate all the prejudice society has towards us and as the status of our profession is in their hands it would be foolhardy to promote professionalism for the sake of claiming profession status. At the end of the road we may find that the status may not bring any quality to the vocation in terms of status, prominence or remuneration. We may never be considered a profession – so what’s in a name!

We also have many problems with professionalism in our fraternity. However, unlike prejudice these problems are in our hands. So perhaps it is better to promote professionalism through re-professionalization of our vocation. For that we need to be bolder and set our standards higher. We must ensure only the best are selected into our vocation and only the best are allowed to practice. We need to ensure that our teacher education programs are not only relevant but of the highest standards, our programs accredited, our student-teachers appropriately certified, and our teacher promotion exercises transparently conducted based on clearly spelled out criteria. We need a workable and practical code of ethics and not something to hang on the wall, and we must live by it. We must have a system that is able to retain the best, ‘professionalise’ the mediocre and weed out the inferior. Professionalism is about quality of service and that should be our concern.

It is heartening to see that many teacher education programs are responding to the current demands to change and become suitable for current and future needs. Research or more appropriately the lack of it, is seen as the main concern in prejudicing teachers against gaining the status of “professional” and in setting standards. However, it is also emerging as a great promise as there is a growing dedication to learn among teachers. This is especially true in regards to what works in classrooms and schools. There is a growing tendency to publish studies among teacher educators and teachers and this will lead to expertise that can be tested and refined with more research. When all these studies accumulate it will be a golden era for teacher education and teachers. I believe if we keep up at this rate it won’t be too long before we reach this golden era – now is the best time to be a teacher!

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