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The Status of Teaching as a Profession

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Schools and Society

A Sociological Approach to Education
Sixth Edition

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READING 21

The Status of Teaching as a Profession

Richard M. Ingersoll and Gregory J. Collins

Teachers are often considered the backbone of schools; without them there would be no school. Thus, understanding teachers' roles is key to understanding the educational system. Discussions of organizations often include information about the roles people occupy within them. One aspect of roles that distinguishes organizations is the type of workers they employ. Professionals have a high degree of control over their work environments, high prestige, and relatively high compensation compared to nonprofessionals. This designation is not without controversy, and it is often at the foundation of many labor disputes. Whether teachers qualify as professionals is one of these debates. Richard M. Ingersoll and Gregory J. Collins evaluate the criteria of professionalization as they apply to teachers and conclude that teachers generally fall into a category called "semi-professionals."

Questions to consider for this reading:

1. What criteria differentiate professionals from other types of workers?
2. Where do teachers meet or fall short of these criteria?
3. Will teachers ever gain professional status? What organizational or occupational changes would have to take place in order for teachers to gain professional status?

Professionalization has long been a source of both hope and frustration for teachers. Since early in the 20th century, educators have repeatedly sought to promote the view that elementary and secondary teaching is a highly complex kind of work, requiring specialized knowledge and skill and deserving of the same status and standing as traditional professions, like law and medicine. This movement to professionalize teaching has, however, been marked by both confusion and contention, much of which centers on what it means to be a profession and to professionalize a particular kind of work. To some, the essence of a profession is advanced training, and hence the way to best professionalize teaching is to upgrade teachers' knowledge and skills through enhanced training and professional development. For others, the essence of a profession lies in the attitudes individual practitioners hold toward their work. In this view, the best way to professionalize teaching is to instill an ethos of public service and high standards—a sense of professionalism—among teachers. For even others, the focus is on the organizational conditions under which teachers work; in this view, the best way to professionalize teaching is to improve teachers' working conditions. As a result of this wide range of emphases, it is often unclear whether education critics and reformers are referring to the same things when they discuss professionalization in teaching (Labaree, 1992, 2004; Lortie, 1969, 1975).

Although education reformers often disagree over what is meant by profession, professionalism, and professionalization, students of occupations, notably sociologists, do not. The study of work, occupations, and professions has been an important topic in sociology for decades, and researchers in this subfield have developed what is known as the professional model—a series of organizational and occupational characteristics associated with professions and professionals and, hence, useful to distinguish professions and professionals from other kinds of work and workers (Abbott, 1988; Etzioni, 1969; Freidson, 1986, 2001; Hughes, 1965; Larson, 1977; Starr, 1982). These include rigorous training and licensing requirements, favorable working conditions, an active professional organization or association, substantial workplace authority, relatively high compensation, and high prestige. From this viewpoint, occupations can be assessed according to the degree to which they do or do not exhibit the characteristics of the professional model. The established or “traditional” professions—law, medicine, university teaching, architecture, science, and engineering, in particular—are usually regarded as the strongest examples of the professional model. There are, of course, large variations both between and within these professions in the degree to which they exhibit the professional model. Moreover, most professions have been and are currently undergoing change in the degree to which they exhibit the attributes of the professional model, that is, in their degree of professionalization or deprofessionalization (Freidson, 2001; Simpson & Simpson, 1983).

Sociologists have also been careful to distinguish professionalization from professionalism. The former refers to the degree to which occupations exhibit the structural or sociological attributes, characteristics, and criteria identified with the professional model. The latter refers to the attitudinal or psychological attributes of those who are considered to be, or aspire to be considered as, professionals. From the latter perspective, a professional is someone who is not an amateur, but is committed to a career and to public service. Although professionalism is often considered part of the professionalization process, sociologists do not consider it a reliable indicator of the professional model. Members of established professions do not necessarily exhibit a higher degree of the attitudes associated with professionalism than do those in less professionalized occupations. For instance, those with a strong service orientation—who place more importance on helping others and contributing to society and less importance on material rewards such as income and status—are less likely to be found in some of the traditional professions, such as law, and more likely to be found in occupations such as nursing and teaching that traditionally have not been categorized as full professions (Ingersoll, 2003; Kohn & Schooler, 1983; Rosenberg, 1981).

This chapter attempts to theoretically and empirically ground the debate over the status of teaching as a profession. Our purpose is neither explanatory nor evaluative. That is, we do not seek to provide a historical account of the sources behind teachers' status, nor do we seek to assess the benefits and costs, advantages, and disadvantages of professionalization. Moreover, our purpose is not normative; while we personally feel teaching should be treated as a profession, our purpose here is analytic and descriptive. Our objective is to define and describe teaching's occupational status. The focus of this analysis is on professionalization or the characteristics of school workplaces and teaching staffs, and not on professionalism or the attitudes of individual teachers. Our primary point is that much of the educational discussion and literature on teaching as a profession has overlooked some of the most basic characteristics that sociologists have used to distinguish professions from other kinds of occupations. We empirically ground the subject by presenting a range of nationally representative data from the best sources available. From these data we develop a series of indicators of the traditional characteristics of the professional model and use them to assess the professionalization of teaching across the nation. These include:

1. Credential and licensing levels
2. Induction and mentoring programs for entrants
3. Professional development support, opportunities, and participation
4. Specialization
5. Authority over decision making
6. Compensation levels
7. Prestige and occupational social standing

These, of course, are not the only characteristics used to define professions, nor are they the only kinds of criteria used to distinguish or to classify work and occupations in general. But they are among the most widely used indicators of professions and professionals and are the subject of much discussion in reference to teachers and schools.

In background analyses of these empirical indicators, we have found large differences in professionalization among different kinds of schools. Consistent with other research on school organization, we found school sector (public/private) and poverty level, in particular, to be the most significant factors related to professionalization (Ingersoll, 1997, 2003).

Below, we will briefly describe each of the classic indicators of professionalization we examined, and then we will summarize what the data tell us about levels of professionalization in teaching and, where possible, the extent to which it varies across these above different types of schools.

How Professionalized Is Teaching?

Credentials

To sociologists, the underlying and most important quality distinguishing professions from other kinds of occupations is the degree of expertise and complexity involved in the work itself. In this view, professional work involves highly complex sets of skills, intellectual functioning, and knowledge that are not easily acquired and not widely held. For this reason, professions are often referred to as the “knowledge-based” occupations. But even if laypeople were to acquire these complex sets of skills and knowledge, rarely would they be able to practice as professionals. Entry into professions requires credentials. That is, entry into professions typically requires a license, which is obtained only after completion of an officially sanctioned training program and passage of examinations. Indeed, it is illegal to do many kinds of work, professional and not, from plumbing and hairstyling to law and medicine, without a license.

These credentials serve as screening or “gatekeeping” devices. Their rationale is protection of the interests of the public by ensuring that practitioners hold an agreed-upon level of knowledge and skill, and by filtering out those with substandard levels of knowledge and skill. The importance of such credentials is evidenced by the practice, commonly used by professionals, such as physicians, dentists, architects, and attorneys, of prominently displaying official documentation of their credentials in their offices.

Given the importance of credentials to professions, not surprisingly, upgrading the licensing requirements for new teachers has been an important issue in school reform. (Licenses for teachers are known as teaching certificates and are issued by states.) But it has also been a source of contention. On one side are those who argue that entry into teaching should be more highly restricted, as in traditional professions. From this viewpoint, efforts to upgrade certification requirements for new teachers will help upgrade the quality and qualifications of teachers and teaching.

On the other side are those who argue that entry into teaching should be eased. Proponents of this view have pushed a range of initiatives, all of which involve a loosening of the entry gates: programs designed to entice professionals into midcareer changes to teaching; alternative certification programs, whereby college graduates can postpone formal education training, obtain an emergency teaching certificate, and begin teaching immediately; and Peace Corps–like programs, such as Teach for America, which seek to lure the “best and brightest” into understaffed schools. These alternative routes into the occupation claim the same rationale as the more restrictive traditional credential routes—enhanced recruitment of talented candidates into teaching—but the ultimate consequence of such initiatives,

intended or not, could be a decrease in the professional status of teaching. That is, traditional professions rarely resort to loosening licensing standards to recruit and retain quality practitioners.

Conflict over the ease of entry into teaching is reflected in the degree to which employed teachers actually hold a full state-approved certificate. The data (the first row in Table 21.1) show that most, but not all, teachers in public districts do, indeed, hold full teaching certificates. In contrast, teachers in private schools are far less inclined to hold a full license to teach; approximately half of private school teachers do so. This reflects different standards in public-private state regulations; many states do not require private school teachers to hold state certification (Tryneski, 2007). It also contrasts sharply with traditional professions. Hospitals, whether they are public or for-profit, for instance, would rarely hire unlicensed doctors and nurses to fill regular physician and licensed nurse positions (Simpson & Simpson, 1983).

This does not mean, of course, that private schools are not selective in who they hire as teachers. Private schools can, indeed, often be very selective in their choice of teaching candidates, but they far less frequently use licensing criteria associated with professions. They are, however, not uniform in this indicator of professionalization. There are distinct differences in the use of these hiring criteria among private schools, depending upon their orientation. Catholic schools, in particular, are far more likely than other private schools to require certificates and tests of their new hires. For instance, in 2011-12 69 percent of Catholic school teachers were fully certified, as compared to 41 percent of non-Catholic private school teachers.

Induction

In addition to initial formal training and preparation, professional work typically requires extensive training for new practitioners upon entry. Such training is designed to pick up where pre-employment training has left off. That is, while credentials and examinations in many professions are usually designed to ensure that new entrants have a minimum or basic level of knowledge and skill, induction programs for practitioners are designed to augment this basic level of knowledge and skill. As a result, entry to professions typically involves both formal and informal mechanisms of induction—internships, apprenticeships, or mentoring programs. Sometimes these periods of induction can be prolonged and intensive, as in the case of physicians' internships. The objective of such programs and practices is to aid new practitioners in adjusting to the environment, to familiarize them with the concrete realities of their jobs, to socialize them to professional norms, and also to provide a second opportunity to filter out those with substandard levels of skill and knowledge.

In the teaching occupation, the mentoring, apprenticeship, and induction experiences have been the subject of much discussion among reformers. The teaching occupation has long been plagued by high attrition rates among newcomers (Ingersoll, 2012), and, reformers argue, one of the best ways to increase the efficacy and retention of new teachers is to better assist them in coping with the practicalities of teaching, of managing groups of students, and of adjusting to the school environment.

The data suggest these attempts at professionalization have had some success: over the past two decades the numbers of schools with assistance programs has increased. Our background analysis of the data shows that in 1990–1991 in the public sector about one half of first-year teachers participated in formal induction programs of one sort or another. By 2011–2012, this had increased to 88% (see Table 21.1). The proportion of beginning teachers in private schools who participated in formal

Table 21.1 Level of Teacher Professionalization in Schools, by Type of School

	Public	Public, Low Poverty	Public, High Poverty	Private
Credentials				
% teachers with full or regular certification	91	91	90	50
Induction				
% beginning teachers participating in induction program	88	92	87	64
Professional development				
% schools providing teachers with time for professional development activities	99	99	99	94
% teachers participating in professional organization activities	94	93	96	83
% teachers receiving funding for professional development activities	51	53	51	57
Specialization				
Mean % in-field teaching	77	81	71	58
Authority				
<i>Over teacher hiring</i>				
% schools with influential board	23	18	25	28
% schools with influential district staff	32	29	33	–
% schools with influential principal	91	92	88	94
% school with influential faculty	27	27	27	33
<i>Over teacher evaluation</i>				
% schools with influential board	13	11	15	16
% schools with influential district staff	26	27	28	–
% schools with influential principal	94	93	94	95
% schools with influential faculty	19	22	20	18
Compensation				
% schools with retirement plan	94	90	94	59
Mean starting salary (\$)	35,800	38,933	34,845	26,531
Mean maximum salary (\$)	62,691	65,295	58,566	41,272

Source: Original analyses by the authors of the U.S. Department of Education's nationally representative *Schools and Staffing Survey* (SASS). To date, seven independent cycles of SASS have been completed: 1987–1988, 1990–1991, 1993–1994, 1999–2000, 2003–2004, 2007–2008, and 2011–2012 (see Cox et al. 2016). The SASS data presented here are primarily from the 2011–2012 cycle, with the exception of the second indicator of teacher professional development, from the 2003–2004 SASS, authority indicators from the 2007–2008 SASS, and the indicator of in-field teaching, from the 1993–1994 SASS. Low poverty refers to schools where 10% or less of the students receive publicly funded free or reduced price lunches. High poverty refers to schools where more than 50% do so.

induction programs has been lower than that for public schools, but this percentage has also dramatically increased over the past two decades. However, the data also show that induction programs vary widely in the number and kinds of activities and supports they include. The most comprehensive include a wide range of components, such as mentoring by veterans, structured planning time with teachers in one's field, orientation seminars, regular communication with an administrator, a reduced course load, and a classroom assistant. Moreover, importantly a growing body of empirical research has shown that induction has positive effects on beginners' classroom teaching practices, on their retention, and on their students' academic achievement (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

Professional Development

Beyond both pre-employment basic training and on-the-job induction for beginners, professions typically require ongoing in-service technical development and growth on the part of practitioners throughout their careers. The assumption is that achieving a professional-level mastery of complex skills and knowledge is a prolonged and continuous process and, moreover, that professionals must continually update their skills, as the body of technology, skill, and knowledge advances. As a result, professionals typically belong to associations and organizations that, among other things, provide mechanisms, such as periodic conferences, publications, and workshops, for the dissemination of knowledge and skill to members. Moreover, professionalized workplaces typically both require and provide support for employee development. These include on-site workshops, financial support for conferences, course work, skill development, and sabbaticals.

Professional development has been one of the most frequently discussed and advocated teacher reforms in recent years. Again, the data present a picture of success in the provision of support for, and teacher use of, professional development.

Data on three indicators of teacher professional development are displayed in Table 21.1: the percentage of schools that provided professional development programs for the teaching staff during regular school hours; the percentage of teachers who participated in workshops, seminars, or conferences provided by their school or by external professional associations or organizations; and the percentage of teachers who received financial support for college tuition, fees, or travel expenses for participation in external conferences or workshops during that school year.

What is striking about the data on professional development is the consistency across schools. Most schools, both public and private, provide professional development, most teachers participate in workshops or activities either sponsored by their schools or sponsored by external professional organizations, and most teachers also receive financial support of some sort for external professional development activities. These data are an impressive set of indicators of this aspect of professionalization. However, they, of course, do not tell us about the quality or length of these professional development programs and activities.

Specialization

Given the importance of expertise to professions, it naturally follows that one of the most fundamental attributes of professions is specialization—professionals are not generalists, amateurs, or diletantes, but possess expertise over a specific body of knowledge and skill. Few employers or organizations

would require heart doctors to deliver babies, real estate lawyers to defend criminal cases, chemical engineers to design bridges, or sociology professors to teach English. The assumption behind this is that because such traditional professions require a great deal of skill, training, and expertise, specialization is considered necessary and good. In contrast, the other part of the assumption is that nonprofessions and semiskilled or low-skill occupations require far less skill, training, and expertise than traditional professions, and hence specialization is assumed less necessary.

Despite the centrality of specialization to professionalization, there has been little recognition of its importance among education reformers, even among proponents of teacher professionalization. Indeed, some school reformers have argued that teacher specialization, especially at the elementary school level, is a step backward for education because it does not address the needs of the “whole child,” unduly fragments the educational process, and hence contributes to the alienation of students (e.g., Sizer, 1992).

To assess the degree of specialization in teaching and the degree to which teachers are treated as professionals with expertise in a specialty, we examine the phenomenon known as out-of-field teaching—the extent to which teachers are assigned to teach subjects that do not match their fields of specialty, preparation, and training. Out-of-field teaching is an important but little understood problem. Many researchers and reformers assume, wrongly, that out-of-field teaching is due to a lack of training or preparation on the part of teachers. The source of out-of-field teaching lies not in a lack of pre-employment education or training on the part of teachers, but in a lack of fit between teachers’ fields of preparation and their teaching assignments once on the job. Out-of-field teaching is a result of misassignment—when school principals assign teachers to teach subjects in which they have little background. It is important because otherwise-qualified teachers may become highly unqualified when assigned out of their fields of specialty.

Assessing the extent of in-field or out-of-field teaching is one way of assessing the importance of professional specialization in the occupation of teaching—it provides a measure of the extent to which teachers are treated as if they are semiskilled or low-skilled workers whose work does not require much specialized expertise or, alternatively, as if they are professionals whose work requires expertise in a specialty. Table 21.1 presents a measure of in-field/out-of-field teaching we have developed—the average percentage of secondary-level classes in which teachers do have at least a college minor in the fields taught (Ingersoll, 1999).

The data show that an emphasis on specialization in one’s area of expertise often does not hold in secondary-level teaching. Teachers at the secondary school level are assigned to teach a substantial portion of their weekly class schedules out of their fields of specialty. For example, in public schools, teachers, on average, spend only about three quarters of their time teaching in fields in which they have a college major or even a minor. Further analyses of the data show there has been little change in these levels in recent decades.

This lack of specialization is more widespread in high-poverty schools. But, again, these comparisons are overshadowed by public-private differences. Private school teachers are far more often assigned to teach subjects out of their fields of training than are public school teachers—just over half of a private school teacher’s schedule is in fields for which the teacher has basic training. However, there are differences among private schools (not shown here). Teachers in nonsectarian private schools have higher levels of in-field teaching than do teachers in other private schools. On average,

teachers in nonsectarian schools spend about two thirds of their schedules teaching in field; in contrast, in-field levels in religious private schools are lower—about half their class loads.

Authority

Professionals are considered experts in whom substantial authority is vested, and professions are marked by a large degree of self-governance. The rationale behind professional authority is to place substantial levels of control into the hands of the experts—those who are closest to and most knowledgeable of the work. Professions, for example, exert substantial control over the curriculum, admissions, and accreditation of professional training schools; set and enforce behavioral and ethical standards for practitioners; and exert substantial control over who their future colleagues are to be. Sometimes this control is exerted through professional organizations. For instance, gaining control over (and sharply limiting) medical school admissions by the American Medical Association was a crucial factor in the rise of medicine from a lower-status occupation to one of the pinnacle professions (Starr, 1982). Professional authority and control are also exerted directly in workplaces, and as a result, professionalized employees often have authority approaching senior management when it comes to organizational decisions surrounding their work. In the case of hospitals, physicians traditionally have been the senior management. Academics, for another example, often have substantially more control than university administrators over the hiring of new colleagues and, through the institution of peer review, over the evaluation and promotion of members and, hence, over the ongoing content and character of the work of the profession.

The distribution of power, authority, and control in schools is one of the most important issues in contemporary education research and policy. Indeed, this issue lies at the crux of many reforms, such as teacher empowerment, site-based management, charter schools, school restructuring, and teacher leadership. But this issue is also a source of contention. Some hold that schools are overly decentralized organizations in which teachers have too much workplace autonomy and discretion. Others hold the opposite—that schools are overly centralized in which teachers have too little influence over school operations. Part of this confusion arises because of differences in the domain analyzed; most focus on how much autonomy teachers have in their classrooms over the choice of their texts or teaching techniques. Others focus on how much power faculties collectively wield over school-wide decision making, such as budgets (Ingersoll, 2003; Ingersoll & Collins 2018). Here we focus on faculty influence over two issues traditionally controlled by professionals—peer hiring and peer evaluation.

Table 21.1 displays the frequency of schools across the United States in which principals report the school board, the district staff if in the public sector, the faculty, and the principals themselves to have substantial decision-making influence over two activities—staff evaluation and hiring. The data paint a picture of a steep organizational-level hierarchy, with principals at the top.

Overall, principals clearly view themselves as powerful actors in reference to decisions concerning teacher evaluation and hiring and view teachers as among the least powerful actors. In comparison to principals, boards and district staff far less frequently have authority over these school decisions, at least from the viewpoint of principals. In every kind of school, principals report faculty to be influential far less often than they are themselves. Teachers are also less often influential than district staff over these

issues. However, in comparison to school boards, teachers' professional authority is more often higher in both public and private schools.

Consistent with conventional wisdom, the hierarchy in some ways is less steep in affluent than in poor public schools; faculty in poor schools are less often reported to be influential, especially over hiring, and boards are more often influential. But, especially over hiring, private school teachers are less often empowered than those in public schools, counter to conventional wisdom that private school teachers are delegated more workplace influence than public school teachers (e.g., Chubb & Moe, 1989).

Compensation

Professionals typically are well compensated and are provided with relatively high salary and benefit levels throughout their career span. The assumption is that, given the lengthy training and the complexity of the knowledge and skills required, relatively high levels of compensation are necessary to recruit and retain capable and motivated individuals.

Teacher salaries have been a much discussed topic amongst teacher reformers. But, unfortunately, data on teacher salaries have often been misleading. Teacher salary analyses typically focus on the average salary levels of teachers of particular types or in particular jurisdictions. Comparing average teacher salaries for different kinds of teachers or schools can be misleading because teacher salary levels are often standardized according to a uniform salary schedule, based on the education levels and years of experience of the teachers. Especially with an aging teaching workforce, it is unclear if differences in average salary levels are due to real differences in the compensation offered to comparable teachers by different schools, or are due to differences in the experience and education levels of the teachers employed. That is, schools with older teachers may appear to offer better salaries, when in fact they do not.

A more effective method of comparison across schools is to compare the normal salaries paid by schools to teachers at common points in their careers. Start-of-career salary levels provide some indication of how well particular kinds of workplaces are able to compete for the pool of capable individuals. End-of-career salary levels provide some indication of the ability of particular kinds of workplaces to retain and motivate capable individuals. The ratio between starting salaries and end-of-career salaries provides some indication of the extent of opportunity for promotion, and the range of monetary rewards available to employees as they advance through their careers.

Table 21.1 shows data on the normal starting and maximum teacher salaries offered by different kinds of districts or schools in the 2011-2012 school year. Of course, salary data such as these quickly get "old" due to inflation. However, our analysis is concerned not with absolute salary values, but with comparisons—which have shown little change over time. We make four comparisons: how salaries vary across different types of schools; the ratio between teachers' start-of-career and end-of-career salaries; how beginning teachers' salaries compare with those of other recent college graduates; and, finally, how teachers' annual salaries compare to those in other occupations. These are revealing comparisons to make and get at the status of teaching as a profession. Data on the provision of retirement benefits are also displayed.

Consistent with conventional wisdom (Kozol, 1991), there are differences in the compensation afforded to teachers in public schools. In particular, public schools serving high-poverty communities pay less than schools in more affluent communities, especially for experienced teachers. But the

differences between public and private schools are even greater. Teachers in private schools are paid far less than teachers in public schools, and also are less likely to be provided with a retirement plan by their school. The average starting salary for an individual with a bachelor's degree and no teaching experience was about 25% more in public schools than in private schools. Moreover, the public-private salary gap widens as teachers progress through their careers. The average maximum salary (the highest possible) was 50 percent more than for private school teachers. We also found that among private schools, there are large differences in compensation. Non-Catholic religious private schools pay their starting teachers a salary that is just above the official federal poverty line. Teachers' salaries, in both public and private schools, are also "frontloaded." The ratio of teachers' end-of-career to start-of-career salaries in Table 21.1 is less than 2 to 1. This is far less than for many other occupations and traditional professions. Frontloading suggests limited opportunity for financial gains, can undermine long-term commitment to an occupation, and can make teaching less attractive as a career (Lortie, 1975).

In order to place teachers' salaries in perspective, it is useful to compare them to the salaries earned in other lines of work. Traditionally teachers have long been called the "economic proletarians of the professions" (Mills, 1951), and the data continue to bear this out. Different data sources have long documented that the salaries of new college graduates who have become teachers are considerably below those of new college graduates who chose many other occupations. For instance, data from the nationally representative 2008-09 *Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study* show the median salary (in 2010, one year after graduation) for college graduates who became teachers was below the median for all college graduates. Graduates working in business were paid 20 percent more than teachers, those working as nurses were paid 34 percent more, and those working as engineers were paid 57 percent more than their peers working as teachers (Cataldi et al. 2011).

These differences remain throughout the career span. For instance, data collected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics have long shown that the average annual salaries of teachers have been far below those of traditional professionals, such as college professors, scientists, pilots, veterinarians, accountants, pharmacists, architects, and lawyers.

Prestige

Professions are high-status, high-prestige occupations. In other words, they are respected and admired. Prestige and status, unlike salary, power, or professional development, at first glance, might seem very difficult to empirically assess because they are highly subjective. But, like other attitudes, public perceptions of which kinds of occupations are more or less prestigious can be assessed, and indeed, for more than 50 years, sociologists have studied how the public evaluates the relative prestige of occupations. Table 21.2 presents some of the results from one of the best-known studies of occupational prestige. These data are useful to illustrate how the status of teaching compares to other occupations and also to compare the relative status of different levels of teaching. The data clearly show that, as expected, the traditional professions are very prestigious. Teaching, like many of the other female-dominated occupations, is rated in the middle. Teaching is less prestigious than law, medicine, and engineering, but it is more prestigious than most blue-collar work, such as truck driving, and pink-collar work, such as secretarial work. The status of teaching changed only slightly over time in this study. Both elementary and secondary teaching went up in prestige, but kindergarten and preschool

Table 21.2 Relative Prestige of Selected Occupations (ranked by 1972 scores)

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Score</i>	<i>Score</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Score</i>	<i>Score</i>
	1972	1989		1972	1989
Physicians	82	86	Funeral directors	52	49
Professors	78	74	Athletes	51	65
Lawyers	76	75	Bank tellers	50	43
Judges	76	71	Police	48	60
Physicists and astronomers	74	73	Secretaries	46	46
Dentists	74	72	Mail carriers/postal service	42	47
Architects	71	73	Plumbers	41	45
Aerospace engineers	71	72	Tailors	41	42
Psychologists	71	69	Carpenters	40	39
Chemists	69	73	Barbers	38	36
Clergy	69	69	Bakers	34	35
Chemical engineers	67	73	Truck drivers	32	30
Secondary school teachers	63	66	Cashiers	31	29
Registered nurses	62	66	Painters/construction/ maintenance	30	34
Elementary school teachers	60	64	Cooks	26	31
Authors	60	63	Waiters and waitresses	20	28
Pre-K/kindergarten teachers	60	55	Maids	18	20
Actors and directors	55	58	Garbage collectors	17	28
Librarians	55	54	Janitors/cleaners	16	22
Social workers	52	52			

Source: From Davis, J., & Smith, T. (1996). *General social surveys, 1972–1996: Cumulative codebook*. Chicago: National Opinion Research Center.

teaching went down. The result is a distinct status hierarchy within the teaching occupation; secondary teachers are slightly higher status than elementary teachers. Both are substantially higher status than kindergarten and preschool teachers.

Implications

This chapter attempts to ground the ongoing debate over teacher professionalization by evaluating teaching according to a series of classic criteria used to distinguish professions from other kinds of work. The data show that, on the one hand, almost all elementary and secondary schools do exhibit

some of the important characteristics of professionalized workplaces. On the other hand, and despite numerous reform initiatives, almost all schools lack or fall short on many of the key characteristics associated with professionalization. Clearly, teaching continues to be treated as, at best, a “semi-profession” (Etzioni, 1969; Lortie, 1969, 1975).

But there are also large variations in the degree of professionalization, depending on the type of school. Consistent with conventional wisdom, low-income schools are, in a number of ways, less professionalized than are the more affluent public schools. The most striking differences are those between public and private schools. The teaching job in private schools is in some important ways less professionalized than in public schools. Moreover, there are distinct differences within the private sector, often overlooked in public-private comparisons. Our background analyses show that in most ways, the least professionalized of schools are non-Catholic religious private schools. This has important implications for current school reform and policy. As school choice programs continue to expand, movement toward a more privatized system may result in changes to teacher professionalization, an often overlooked aspect of the policy debate.

These data raise some obvious questions. What difference does professionalization make for those in schools? What are the implications of variations among schools in professionalization? To be sure, research and reform concerned with teacher professionalization typically assume that professionalization is highly beneficial to teachers, schools, and students. The rationale underlying this view is that upgrading the teaching occupation will lead to improvements in the motivation, job satisfaction, and efficacy of teachers, which, in turn, will lead to improvements in teachers’ performance, which will ultimately lead to improvements in student learning. If we accept this assumption—in other words if we assume that professionalization attracts capable recruits to an occupation, fosters their expertise and commitment, and, ultimately, provides assurance to the public of quality service to the public—then these data do not yield a reassuring portrait of the teaching occupation.

This logic and these assumptions seem reasonable enough. Indeed, equivalent arguments are regularly used by proponents of professionalization in any number of other occupations and also by defenders of the status quo in the traditional professions. However, just as in other occupations and professions, very little empirical research has ever been done to test such claims. It is difficult to find, for instance, empirical research examining the direct effects of the relatively high levels of training, power, compensation, and prestige accorded to physicians and professors.

It is important, however, to ask these kinds of questions because proponents of professionalization, in teaching and elsewhere, ignore an important stream of literature in the sociology of work, occupations, and professions that illuminates the downside to professionalization. For instance, medicine, long considered among the pinnacle professions and the clearest example of work that has successfully become professionalized over the past century, has been the subject of a great deal of criticism. The focus of this criticism is the negative consequences of the power and privilege of professionalization—monopolistic control over medical knowledge and the supply of practitioners, antagonism toward alternative medical approaches, and a power imbalance in the physician-client relationship (e.g., Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 1986; Starr, 1982). From this viewpoint, professionalization in medicine has brought many benefits, but it also incurs costs. The implication of this line of thought is that it is important to distinguish both the benefits and costs of professionalization and also to specify to whom both of these apply.

In other research projects, we and colleagues have analyzed the effects of various indicators of professionalization on various outcomes—specifically on teachers’ job satisfaction, on school climate, on teachers’ rates of retention and turnover, and on student academic achievement (see, e.g., Ingersoll, 1997, 2003, 2012; Ingersoll & May, 2012; Ingersoll & Collins 2018). We have found that most of the above indicators of professionalization are, indeed, associated with positive outcomes. Several indicators of professionalization, however, particularly stood out for their strong positive effects: teachers’ authority, autonomy, and decision-making influence; and induction and support for new teachers.

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