

TEACHER'S PROFESSIONALISM

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Abstract

Professionalism today is a much talked about word in education. As compared to Professionalization and profession, professionalism as a concept is a recent phenomenon. But since it is linked to the concept of profession and professionalization, it will be useful to understand first the concepts of profession and professionalization. Professionalism and how it is to be acquired should be a focus of every teacher education program. Despite the significant role professionalism plays there is a lack of a universally accepted definition of professionalism in teacher education programs. The purpose of this paper is to discuss how teacher professionalism is defined in scholarly debates in recent times. Within this purpose, the definitions of professionalism, criteria of professionalism, the characteristics of a professional teacher and the status of teacher professionalism will be discussed from different perspectives. This paper will offer an operational definition of teacher professionalism and an integrative approach about multiple interpretations of teacher professionalism in a sociological, political and educational context. In light of multiple approaches, it will be concluded that teacher professionalism means meeting certain standards in education and it is related to proficiency.

Keywords: Teacher professionalism, professionalization, Teacher Education, professional characteristics of teachers

Introduction

The word of professionalism in teaching is commonly discussed on sociological, educational and ideological bases in the literature. The key ideas of professionalism approaches underlying these bases are reflected in brief. Then, the light of multiple perspectives and arguments, a workable definition for today's teacher professionalism notion and an interpretation embracing these perspectives are tried to be presented. The need to attain and develop certain standards and benchmarking criteria for all professions has increased in today's competitive work conditions. Standards create a professional environment of "best practice" procedures enabling organizations to confidently create systems, policies and procedures; they also assure high operational quality. This phenomenon makes a current issue of improving the occupation standards and qualifications of teachers to comply with contemporary developments like other occupation groups in other organizations. At this

point, the concept of professionalism comes into prominence which is considered to be one of the key elements of effectiveness in work life. When the subject is teacher professionalism, the meaning of the term changes as a response to external pressures, public discourses and scientific developments. However, it seems possible to make a workable professionalism definition in the field of education based on these different approaches. So, it would be useful, to begin with, some definitions.

The Concept of Professionalism

It is important to locate conceptions of teacher professionalism in relation to changing historical, political and social contexts because multiple meanings have changed and developed over time and in contestation between rival stakeholder groups and their interests (Hilferty, 2008). The concept of professionalism is used in different senses and somewhat difficult to define. For example, in daily language, it is generally used to mean an activity for which one is paid as opposed to doing voluntarily. The terms “profession” and “professor” have their etymological roots in the Latin for profess. To be a professional or a professor was to profess to be an expert in some skill or field of knowledge (Baggini, 2005). In 1975, Hoyle defined professionalism as ‘those strategies and rhetorics employed by members of an occupation in seeking to improve status, salary and conditions’ (Evans, 2007). In his other work, Hoyle (2001) states that professionalism is related to the improvement in the quality of service rather than the enhancement of status. Before deepening the teacher professionalism discussions, it would be useful to mention the distinction between the two terms “professionalism” and “professionalization” which usually accompany each other in scholarly discourses. Professionalization is related to “promoting the material and ideal interests of an occupational group” (Goodson, 2000) so it includes “the attempt to gain professional associated with professions” (Whitty, 2000) whereas professionalism “focuses on the question of what qualifications and acquired capacities, what competence is required for the successful exercise of an occupation (Englund, 1996).

Barber (1965) explains four main characteristics of professional behaviour as follows: (a) a high degree of generalized and systematic knowledge, (b) orientation primarily to community interest rather than to individual self-interest, (c) a high degree of self-control of behaviour through codes of ethics in the process of work socialization, (d) a system of rewards seen primarily as symbols of work achievement.

Autonomy is one of the main focuses featured in professionalism characteristics. Forsyth and Danisiewicz (1985) contribute professionalism debates stating that the tasks of professionals are important, exclusive and complex, so professionals should have the autonomous decision-making powers free from external pressures. Another author states that one of the major objectives and attractions of movement to professionalize teachers is to provide professional autonomy (Bull, 1998). Autonomy is a component of teacher professionalism and it provides both an individual decision-making area to achieve one’s aims and an effect on controlling the situations related to his/her work. Autonomy not only functions as a buffer against the

pressures on teachers but also means of strengthening them in terms of personal and professional sense (Friedman, 1999, Boyt et al. 2001, David, 2000).

Different Perspectives on Teacher Professionalism

Behind the arguments that teaching is a professional or a semi-professional occupation, the questioning whether teaching meets the criteria attributed to professional occupations lies. Traditional sociological approach delineates key traits of a professional occupation, largely based upon law and medicine. According to this approach, while the classical occupations like medicine and law are associated with high status and pay, the others seek an opportunity to attain such rewards through a “professionalization” process (Webb et al. 2004).

According to the authors supporting this approach, (Etzioni, 1969), the reason why nursing and teaching are accepted as “semi” or “quasi” professionals is that they couldn’t meet the criteria of professionalism wholly commonly referred in the literature. Leiter (1978) states that occupations such as teaching and nursing claim professional status but are not completely accorded this status because their individual autonomy is often under organizational control. More specifically, teachers are monitored by their administrators in terms of the consistency between their performance and the standards set before. As a result of this, they are directed and shaped by the administrators to achieve organizational goals so their autonomy is restricted.

Depending on the educational context, it is possible to say that definitions of teacher professionalism focus on teachers’ professional qualifications such as “being good at his/her job”, “fulfilling the highest standards”, “and “achieving excellence”. For example, Baggini (2005) claims that for today’s teachers, professionalism is interpreted in terms of what extent the teacher’s outcome the difficulties and what extent they are able to use their skills and experiences related to their profession. On the most basic level, ‘professional teacher refers to the status of a person who is paid to teach’; on a higher level, it can refer to teachers who represent the best in the profession and set the highest standards (Tichenor and Tichenor, 2005). Phelps believes professionalism is enhanced when teachers use excellence as a critical criterion for judging their actions and attitudes. In other words, professionalism is measured by the best and the highest standards (Phelps, 2006).

In scholarly debates, two versions of teacher professionalism are portrayed as “old professionalism” and “new professionalism”. These two approaches emerged upon the changing social, political and cultural circumstances. However, these two approaches are not completely opposite to each other. Sachs (2003) who developed this classification differentiates these two approaches as those:

Old professionalism is concerned with;

- a. exclusive membership
- b. conservative practices
- c. self-interest
- d. external regulation

- e. slow to change and
- f. reactive

The characteristics of new (transformative) professionalism are;

- a. inclusive membership
- b. public ethical code of practice
- c. collaborative and collegial
- d. activist orientation
- e. flexible and progressive
- f. responsive to change
- g. self-regulating
- h. policy-active
- i. enquiry-oriented
- j. knowledge building

New understanding of teacher professionalism provides professional space and conditions for the teachers to take responsibility in their practices. Sachs calls this transition from old to new understanding as “transformative professionalism” (Sachs, 2003). Sachs’s approach to teacher professionalism can be interpreted as an attempt to revitalize the concept in a rapidly changing work environment. He considers the teacher professionalism issue as a social and political strategy to promote the status of the teaching profession. His approach is an alternative and contemporary one when compared to the traditional approach.

Hargreaves (2000), analyzes the development of teacher professionalism as passing through four historical phases in many countries. The key features of these phases could be summarized as follows:

1. The pre-professional age: In this age, teaching was managerially demanding but technically simple so the teachers were only expected to carry out the directives of their knowledgeable superiors.
2. The age of autonomous professional: This age was remarked by a challenge to the singularity of teaching and the unquestioned traditions on which it is based. “Autonomy” was considered as an important component of the teaching profession. The principle that teachers had the right to choose the methods they thought best for their students was questioned. Also, the teachers gained considerable pedagogical freedom.
3. The age of collegial profession: This age draws attention with the increasing efforts to create strong professional cultures of collaboration to develop a common purpose, to cope with uncertainty and complexity and to response the rapid changes and reforms effectively.

4. The post-professional age: This age is marked by a struggle between forces and groups intent on deprofessionalizing the work of teaching, and other forces and groups who are seeking to re-define teacher professionalism and professional learning in more positive and principled postmodern ways that are flexible, wide-ranging and inclusive in nature.

Hargreaves defines today's professionalism as postmodern professionalism -a new era-marked by polarized directions. In the first direction, professionalism is portrayed as an exciting broad social movement that protects and advances teachers' professionalism by providing them learning to work effectively with groups and institutions beyond school; on the other hand, it is portrayed as the de-professionalization of teacher's crumble under multiple pressures and intensified work demands (Hargreaves, 2000).

Stevenson et al., (2007) follows the same line with Ozga stating that "it is more useful to approach professionalism as an ideological construct that is neither static nor universal, but located in a particular socio-historical context and fashioned to represent and mobilize particular interests". According to Ozga and Lawn (1981), professionalism could operate "as a strategy for control of teachers manipulated by the State, while also being used by teachers to protect themselves against dilution". Furthermore, they claim that professionalism is used as an ideological weapon aimed at controlling teachers, at the same time as a weapon of self-defence for teachers in their struggle against dilution.

Goodson (2000) claims that there is a considerable antipathy to teacher professionalization. According to him, this antipathy stems from, cost-cutting central government; from well-entrenched education bureaucracies; and, perhaps most potently of all, from a range of business and corporate interests. Some of these oppositions are ideological but behind this ideological antipathy are a range of financial changes which sponsor the notion of retrenchment and cutback. It will be concluded that there is a consensus to a great extent that the purpose behind teacher professionalization attempts in the ideological base is viewed as occupational control and authorizing teachers by intensifying the work demands.

The importance of professionalism and exhibiting the dispositions associated with that of a professional can be conveyed both overtly and covertly. Overtly, the program can explain to the students what the programmatic expectations are for each person upon admission to the program, and then address how these expectations will be assessed throughout the curriculum. When considering professionalism in teacher preparation programs, this author advocates that consideration should be given to The Framework for Teaching (Danielson, 2013). Professional Responsibilities are including reflecting on teaching, maintaining accurate records, communicating with families, participating in the professional community, growing and developing professionally and showing professionalism. These components are further broken down into "indicators" of the fulfilment of professional responsibilities. One institution of higher learning has adapted these indicators to more readily fit, not the professional responsibilities of teachers, but the professional responsibilities of teacher candidates.

Professional Responsibility Components:

Reflecting on Teaching

- articulates an understanding of lessons' goals and objectives
- states the strengths and weaknesses of lessons based on data
- analyzes students' participation in terms of content comprehension
- encourages participation from diverse student populations
- writes reflections about lessons and refines subsequent instruction
- accepts feedback and implements recommendations
- develops written plans for improvement

Maintaining Accurate Records

- records and updates the results of students' assignments
- collects information about students' progress in a systematic manner
- analyzes the performance of students with diverse learning styles
- maintains records of non-instructional activities

Communicating with Families

- maintains confidentiality in all situations/settings
- communicates positive information and concerns to parents/caregivers
- engages family members/caregivers in the instructional program

Working in and Contributing to the School and District

- establishes rapport with members of diverse populations
- seeks assistance from other professionals concerning teaching and learning
- participates in school-related activities

Growing and Developing Professionally

- participates in student teaching seminars and other required university events
- attends all required school and district professional development programs
- shows evidence of participation in at least one professional organization
- integrates information from professional publications into daily instruction
- articulates a philosophy of education that includes critical self-reflection
- assesses personal cultural perspective and its influence on interactions with others

Showing Professionalism

- attends promptly and regularly
- dresses professionally in the school setting
- practices personal hygiene and neat grooming
- completes schedules, assignments, and other paperwork on time
- completes work in the manner prescribed by the university and/or the school district
- complies with school and class rules

- uses relevant codes of ethics for the teaching profession
- follows proper procedures for reporting students' welfare and safety
- acts responsibly regarding school and personal property
- challenges stereotypical attitudes
- ensures that all students receive an equitable opportunity to succeed

With this realization, it becomes vital for the faculty of teacher education training programs to agree upon the dispositions/characteristics on which the teacher candidates will be evaluated. From these indicators, teacher candidates will formulate their own definition in striving to meet the standards set for them.

Conclusion

The different approaches to teacher professionalism in scholarly debates, it is obvious that the meanings attributed to teacher professionalism and the status of teaching have a dynamic characteristic.

This dynamism stems from the political and social changes and results in the shifting meaning and status of the teaching profession in historical context. Contemporary interpretations of teacher professionalism have a shift in meaning from the earlier notions in the sense that teachers confront with multiple pressures, intensified work demands and more occupational control in recent times. It could be concluded from the discussions that we cannot talk about an agreement on the conceptualization of the term. On the other hand, considering the scholarly debates up to now, "teacher professionalism" could be interpreted as a professional work field with its sociological, ideological and educational dimensions aims at achieving the highest standards in teaching profession which are based upon the professional formation, knowledge, skill and values.

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