Citation:
Richard M. Ingersoll & David Perda. 2008. "The Status of Teaching as a Profession."
Chapter 12, pp 106-118 in Schools and Society: a Sociological Approach to Education.
Edited by Jeanne Ballantine and Joan Spade. Los Angeles: Pine Forge Press.

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THE STATUS OF TEACHING AS A PROFESSION

RICHARD M. INGERSOLL AND DAVID PERDA

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 evaluates each criterion of professionalization as it applies to teachers and concludes that teachers generally fall into a category called "semiprofessionals."

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. Could/will teachers ever gain professional status?
4. Compare the status of teaching as a profession with the description of teachers' status in the next reading by Dworkin. Does this comparison support Ingersoll's contention that teachers are not professionals?

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 around 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 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.[1]

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.[2] These include rigorous training and licensing requirements, positive 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, 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.[3]

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, 2003b; Kohn & Schooler, 1983; Rosenberg, 1981)

This chapter attempts to theoretically and empirically ground the debate over the status of teaching as a profession. 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. My 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. I empirically ground the subject by presenting a range of representative data from the best sources available. From these data I developed a series of indicators of the traditional characteristics of the professional model and used them to assess the professionalization of teaching. These include:[4]

1. credential and licensing requirements for entry
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 a series of background analyses of these empirical indicators, I found large differences in professionalization among different kinds of schools. Consistent with other research on school organization, I found school sector (public/private) and poverty-level, in particular, to be the most significant factors related to professionalization (Ingersoll, 1997, 2003b).

Below, I will briefly describe each of the classic indicators of professionalization I examined, and then I will summarize what the data tell us about levels of professionalization in teaching and the extent to which it varies across these 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 assuring 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 mid-career 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, can be deprofessionalization. That is, traditional professions rarely resort to lowering standards to recruit and retain quality practitioners.

Conflict over the ease of entry into teaching is reflected in the degree to which schools and districts actually require a full state-approved certificate in the field to be taught[5] and passage of a national, state or school examination by applicants for teaching positions. The data (the two top rows of Table 12.1) show that most, but not all, public districts do, indeed, require applicants to have certification in the field to be taught, and to have passed an exam. In contrast, private schools are far less inclined to use these restrictions. Less than one third of private schools require certificates and only a quarter required exams of new hires. This reflects a double standard 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 staff positions.[6]

Table 12.1 Levels of Teacher Professionalization in Schools, by Type of District or School

	Public	*Public*	*Public*	*Private*
		Low poverty	*High poverty*	
Credentials				
% requiring full certification for hiring	77	87	74	32
% requiring exam for hiring	71	79	75	25
Induction				
% beginning teachers participating in induction program	86	90	86	61
Professional development				
% schools with annual professional development activities	96	95	97	81
% teachers participating in professional organization activities	94	93	96	83
% teachers receiving funding for professional development	66	69	64	64
Specialization				
Mean % in-field teaching	77	81	71	58
Authority				
Over teacher hiring				
% with influential board/district	25	18	29	35
% with influential principal	88	93	83	91
% with influential faculty	27	33	24	13
Over teacher evaluation				
% with influential board/district	17	17	20	19
% with influential principal	93	95	92	93
% with influential faculty	20	23	22	18

(Continued)

(Continued)

Compensation				
% with retirement plan	91	88	93	60
Mean starting salary ($)	29,061	32,830	28,815	23,318
Mean maximum salary ($)	53,851	66,615	51,447	39,304

From *School and Staffing Survey (SASS)*, 1987–2004, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

This does not mean, of course, that private schools are not selective in who they hire as teachers. Private schools are, indeed, often very selective in their choice of teaching candidates, but they far less frequently use hiring criteria associated with professions. They are, however, not uniform in this deprofessionalization. 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.

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-service training has left off. That is, while credentials and examinations in many professions are usually designed to assure 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 and also to provide a second opportunity to filter out those with substandard levels of skill and knowledge.

In teaching, mentoring, apprenticeship and induction programs have been the subject of much discussion among reformers. The teaching occupation has long been plagued by high attrition rates among new staff (Ingersoll, 2003a) 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 decade the numbers of schools with assistance programs has increased. In the public sector, in 1990–1991 about one half of first-year teachers participated in formal induction programs of one sort or another; by 2003–2004 this had increased to 86 percent. The proportion of beginning teachers in private schools who participated in formal induction programs has been lower than public school teachers, but this has also increased over the past decade.

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, in an advanced statistics analysis of these data, we have found that while induction makes a difference for teacher retention, it depends on how much one receives. Beginning teachers who receive comprehensive induction packages have far higher retention than those who receive fewer supports (see Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

Professional Development

Beyond both pre-service basic training and mentoring 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, coursework, skill development and sabbaticals.

Professional development has been one of the most frequently discussed and advocated teacher reforms in recent years. In the 1990s improvement in the professional development of teachers was made one of eight major national education goals, introduced by a commission of governors and the President (National Education Goals Panel, 1997). 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 12.1: the percent of schools that provided professional development programs for the teaching staff during regular school hours; the percent of teachers who participated in workshops, seminars or conferences provided by their school or by external professional associations or organizations; and the percent 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 its 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 dilettantes, 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 non-professions and semi- 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, I examine the phenomenon known as out-of-field teaching—the extent to which teachers are assigned to teach subjects which do not

match their fields of specialty and training. Out-of-field teaching is an important but little understood problem. It is misunderstood because it is usually confused with teacher training. Most 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 education or training on the part of teachers, but in a lack of fit between teachers' fields of preparation and their teaching assignments. Out-of-field teaching is a result of misassignment—when school principals assign teachers to teach subjects for 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 semi- or low-skill workers whose work does not require much expertise or, alternatively, as if professionals whose work requires expertise in a specialty. Table 12.1 presents a measure of in-field/out-of-field teaching—the average percent of secondary-level classes in which teachers do have at least a college minor in the fields taught.[7]

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. 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 they have basic training. However, there are differences among private schools (not shown here). Teachers in non-sectarian private schools have higher levels of in-field teaching than do teachers in other private schools. On average, teachers in non-sectarian 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). Other times control is exerted directly in workplaces and, as a result, professionalized employees often have authority approaching that of senior management when it comes to organizational decisions surrounding their work. In the case of hospitals, physicians traditionally were 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 current reforms, such as teacher empowerment,

site-based management and school restructuring. But it 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.[8] Here I focus on faculty influence over two issues traditionally controlled by professionals—peer hiring and peer evaluation.

Table 12.1 displays the frequency of schools in which principals report the school board (and district if in the public sector), the faculty and themselves, to have substantial decision-making influence over two activities—staff evaluation and hiring.[9] 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. In comparison to principals, teachers appear to have little professional 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. However, in comparison to school boards, teachers' professional authority is equal or higher in public schools more, but lower in 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 schools 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 gap 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 12.1 shows data on the normal starting and maximum teacher salaries offered in the different kinds of schools in the 2003–2004 school

year. Of course, salary data such as these quickly get "old" due to inflation. However, my analysis is not concerned with absolute salary values, but with comparisons—which have shown little change over time. I make four comparisons: how salaries vary across different types of schools; the gap 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' 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.[10]

Consistent with conventional wisdom (Kozol, 1991), there are differences in the compensation afforded to teachers in public schools; for instance, public schools serving high-poverty communities pay less than schools in more affluent communities. But the differences between public and private schools are even greater. Teachers in private schools are paid far less than in public schools, and also are less likely to be provided with a retirement plan by their school. The average starting salary was about 25 percent 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 salary offered) for public school teachers was almost 40 percent more than for private school teachers. Among private schools, there are also large differences in compensation. Non-Catholic religious private schools pay their starting teachers a salary that is just above the official federal poverty line.

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 been called the "economic proletarians of the professions" and the data bear this out (Mills, 1951). Table 12.2 shows that the salaries of new college graduates who have become teachers are considerably below those of new college graduates who chose a number of other occupations. For instance, the average salary (one year after graduation) for 2000 college graduates who became teachers was almost 50 percent less than the average starting salary of their classmates who took computer programming jobs.

Table 12.2 Mean Annual Salaries of New Bachelor Degree Recipients in Selected Occupations (2000–2001)

Occupation	*Salary*
Managers/executives	$75,470
Computer programmers	50,158
Engineers/architects	47,205
Sales	36,521
Military	35,917
Mechanics	35,818
Editors/writers/reporters	29,506
Teachers (K-12)	26,609
Laborers	24,387
All occupations	$28,478

From *Baccalaureate and Beyond Survey: 2000–2001*, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

These differences remain throughout the career span. For instance, data collected in 2005 by the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that the average annual salaries of teachers were far below those of traditional professionals, such as college professors, scientists, pilots and lawyers (see Table 12.3).

Table 12.3 Mean Annual Salaries of Selected Occupations (2005)

Occupation	*Salary*
Surgeons	$177,690
Dentists	115,640
Lawyers	110,520
Pilots	100,300
Law professors	95,570
Physicists	91,480
Pharmacists	88,650
Veterinarians	77,710
Education administrators	69,430
Architects	68,560
Chemists	63,470

Psychology professors	61,980
Sociology professors	61,700
Accountants	58,020
Secondary school teachers	49,400
Middle school teachers	47,890
Elementary school teachers	46,990
Kindergarten teachers	45,250
Preschool teachers	25,150

From *National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates,* 2005, Washington, DC: Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Prestige

Professions are high status, high prestige occupations. In other words, they are respected and envied. 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 over fifty years sociologists have studied how the public evaluates the relative prestige of occupations. Table 12.4 presents some of the results from the best known studies of occupational prestige.[11] 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, such as truck drivers, and pink collar work, such as secretaries. The status of teaching also changed slightly from the early 1970s to the late 1980s. Both elementary and secondary teaching went up in prestige, but kindergarten and pre-school 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 pre-school teachers.

Table 12.4 Relative Prestige of Selected Occupations (ranked by 1972 scores)

	Score			*Score*	
Occupation	*1972*	*1989*	*Occupation*	*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 & 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	Cashier	31	29
Registered nurses	62	66	Painters, construction, & maintenance	30	34
Elementary school teachers	60	64			
Authors	60	63	Cooks	26	31
Pre-K and kindergarten teachers	60	55	Waiters & waitresses	20	28
Actors & directors	55	58	Maids	18	20
Librarians	55	54	Garbage collectors	17	28
Social workers	52	52	Janitors/Cleaners	16	22

From *General Social Survey,* 1972 and 1989. Washington, DC: US Census Bureau.

Implications

This paper 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" (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. In most ways, the least professionalized of schools are non-Catholic religious private schools. This has important implications for current school reform and policy. It suggests there may be an overlooked but fundamental clash between teacher professionalization and school privatization reforms, such as some school choice initiatives. It also suggests that privatization may lead to an unintended consequence—the further deprofessionalization of teaching.

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 assumes 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 (e.g., Carnegie Forum, 1986; Holmes Group, 1986). 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 high levels of training, power, compensation and prestige accorded to physicians.

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, 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 for whom both of these apply.

In other follow-up research projects, I and colleagues have analyzed the effects of various

indicators of professionalization on teachers themselves—specifically their engagement or commitment to teaching; on conflict in schools and on teachers' actual rates of retention and turnover (see, e.g., Ingersoll, 1997, 2003b; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). We found that most of the above indicators of professionalization do, indeed, positively effect teacher commitment, school climate and teacher retention. Several, however, particularly stood out for their strong effects: faculty autonomy and decision-making influence; the effectiveness of assistance for new teachers; and teachers' salaries and benefits.

ENDNOTES

1. For examples of the literature on teacher professionalism and professionalization, see Lortie, 1969, 1975; Malen & Ogawa, 1988; Rosenholtz, 1989; Little, 1990; Rowan, 1994; Talbert & McLaughlin, 1993; Labaree, 1992.

2. For examples of the sociological literature on professions, see, e.g., Mills, 1951; Hughes, 1965; Etzioni, 1969; Vollmer & Mills, 1966; Hall, 1968; Larson, 1977; Collins, 1979; Starr, 1982; Freidson, 1984, 1986; Abbott, 1988; Hodson & Sullivan, 1995.

3. There is an important stream of sociological research on the proletarianization, bureaucratization and deprofessionalization of some traditional professions. See, for example, Freidson, 1984, 1986.

4. Unless noted, the data for these indicators are from the U.S. Department of Education's Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). This is the largest and most comprehensive data source available on elementary and secondary teachers. SASS was conceived to fill a long-noted void of nationally representative data on the staffing, occupational, and organizational aspects of elementary and secondary schools. To date, five independent cycles of SASS have been completed—1987–1988, 1990–1991, 1993–1994, 1999–2000, 2003–2004. Each cycle includes several sets of linked questionnaires: for each school sampled, for the principal or headmaster of each school, for the central district administration for each public school and for a sample of teachers within each school. In each cycle, the effective sample sizes are about: 5,000 school districts, 11,000 schools and 55,000 teachers. The SASS data presented in this analysis are primarily from the 2003–2004 cycle.

5. In Table 12.1, 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 over 50% do so. Small school size refers to schools with less than 300 students enrolled. Large schools are those with 600 or more students. Middle categories of school poverty and size are not shown. In Table 12.1, "full" certification refers to all those with regular, standard, full or advanced certification. It does not include temporary, emergency, alternative or provisional certificates.

6. Of course, many organizations, such as hospitals and universities, are characterized by a growing secondary labor market of "adjunct" jobs and positions. These are often very similar in work content to regular positions, but are otherwise highly deprofessionalized, i.e., with lower levels of compensation, authority, specialization, prestige, etc. For examples of the literature on primary and secondary labor markets, see Simpson & Simpson, 1983.

7. The data on % in-field teaching are from the 1993–1994 SASS. For a detailed report of my research on out-of-field teaching, see my article *The Problem of Underqualified Teachers in American Secondary Schools* (1999).

8. For a more detailed discussion of the debate over school control and centralization/decentralization and a more detailed analysis of the data on decision-making influence, see Ingersoll (2003b).

9. The measures of decision-making influence are drawn from principals' answers to the question: "how much actual influence do you think each group or person has on decisions concerning the following activities: hiring new full-time teachers and evaluating teachers." For three groups: school boards (or district if public sector), principals themselves and faculty. Each group or person is defined as being "influential" if the mean score for the activity was greater than or equal to 4, on a scale of 1 = none to 4 = a great deal of influence.

10. The retirement plan measure indicates only whether a school or district offers a retirement plan; it does not account for differences in the worth or coverage of plans.

11. In the early 1960s, sociologists, working with the General Social Surveys (GSS) and Census data, developed an occupational prestige scale based on rankings of the social standing of occupations by a nationally representative sample of respondents. These scales have been replicated and refined over the past two decades. For information on the GSS and the occupational prestige scales and data, see Davis and Smith (1996).

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