It is ironic that “teaching is in fact, the mother of all professions” (McDonald 1956: 8)—essentially the foundation and starting place for all professionals—yet teaching continues to be seen as a semi-profession (Addi-Raccah and Arviv-Elyashiv 2008; Darling-Hammond and Goodwin 1993; Glazer 2007; Kerchner and Caufman 1995; Wilson and Tamir 2008), and the notion of teacher as professional remains an open question. Thus, while the underlying stance of this chapter may be that teaching is a profession, it must be acknowledged that many have, and many still do, challenge this stance. Why then? Why still?

Perhaps the current and ongoing debates surrounding teacher quality have helped to complicate anew the professionalization movement in teaching, and have called into question again the professional status of teachers. What might be the relationship between how “good” teaching is defined, how teacher competence is measured, the nature of accountability mechanisms in teaching, and progress towards the professionalization of teaching? In what way do decisions about entry into the field, training and preparation, and standards of practice, shape whether teaching is perceived as professional or specialized work?

This chapter will examine these questions, within the U.S. context, by analyzing research and literature over the past twenty years that focus on teaching as a profession alongside that which talks about teacher accountability and quality. The discussion will be framed by common markers and accepted definitions of profession and professional, in an effort to determine the ways in which teaching is, or is not, moving closer towards being included among established professions. The chapter will conclude with some lessons learned that might offer insights to colleagues in the global community.

What makes a profession?

There is a great deal of literature explicating the characteristics of a profession (e.g. Abbott 1988; Becker 1962; Elliott 1972), and an equally hefty collection of writings that delve into the topic of teacher professionalism and professionalization (e.g. Darling-Hammond & Goodwin 1993; Holmes Group 1986; National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future 1996, 1997; Shulman 2004). An examination of this extensive body of work reveals widespread consensus about what constitutes a profession and consequently, what constitutes professionalism in teaching.

In an extensive analysis of the literature on professionalism and professions, Darling-Hammond and Goodwin (1993) concluded that professions are fundamentally defined by 1) a codified body of specialized, expert knowledge and well-articulated practices; 2) an over-riding commitment to the welfare of the
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client; and 3) rigorous standards governing training, entry, and permission to practice. Indeed, “independence, a defined knowledge base, and control over access” are essential “occupational characteristics” of professions (Kerchner and Caufman 1995: 108), and the teacher as professional is “knowledgeable and aware of professional norms and responsibilities and is committed and willing to be held accountable for meeting high standards of practice (Bartell 1998: 24).” A profession is therefore defined by its specialized knowledge, skills, commitments, and by its ability to ensure that every one of its members—everyone allowed to enter—possesses said knowledge and skills, and abides by said commitments (Wise 2005).

Indeed, one might argue that the primary hallmark of a profession is its exclusionary nature (Tamir and Wilson 2005), its power to define and apply specific criteria for entry and continued membership based upon clearly articulated and agreed upon understandings—expert or technical, as well as consensual or normative—and behaviors or codes of conduct. In fact, professions are often accused of raising standards as a “protectionist move” (Wise 1986); higher standards can be simultaneously interpreted as a mechanism for increasing quality or as a mechanism for further exclusion of some candidates over others. This argument has been mounted against university-based teacher preparation programs, accused of monopolizing teacher education and controlling who can enter teaching in order to protect their own interests.

The double-edged sword of autonomy and accountability must be balanced by all professions if they are to first earn, and then maintain, the public’s trust in their expertise (Abbott 1988; Darling-Hammond and Goodwin 1993; Goodson and Hargreaves 1996). Professions are afforded autonomy over their work along with the freedom to make decisions without surveillance or fear of reprisal (Addi-Raccah and Ariv-Elyashiv 2008; Burbules and Densmore 1991; Labaree 1992), if they can, in return, assure the public that they will uphold stringent standards, police their own ranks, and ensure high quality “best” practice. An examination of the teaching profession reveals that educators have consistently been unable to assure the public of their ability to control quality, nor have they been able to speak in a uniform voice about “what works,” how best to close the achievement gap, and how to define and recognize good teaching. There are many reasons why this is so, and has as much to do with the various contexts—political, economic, social—within which teachers work, as it does with the internal dilemmas with which the field has wrestled. What follows then is a discussion that uses the key attributes of professions—knowledge and study, control over entry, and commitment to clients—as analytical lenses through which to examine teaching professionalism and performance in order to gain insight into the why teaching remains the “not quite” profession (Darling-Hammond and Goodwin 1993).

Teaching and the attributes of professions

Codified, specialized and expert knowledge

The idea of specialized and expert knowledge as an important marker for a profession must be considered in three ways. First, there is the what, the actual body of knowledge that would-be-members of the profession must master before being deemed “ready” or “prepared” for practice within the profession. Second, there is the how, the nature and content of the curriculum through which this body of knowledge will be “delivered” to professionals-in-training. Third, there is the why, if the acquisition of this body of knowledge by new professionals makes a difference in either the quality or quantity of outcomes.

There certainly have been extended debates in the U.S. about the what, whether a body of knowledge for teaching actually exists, and—if it does—what it includes. There is the widespread perception that teaching ability is innate versus learned, fueling arguments that pedagogy is unnecessary because good teaching relies primarily on content knowledge and “verbal ability” (Ballou and Podgursky 2000; Hess 2004; U.S. Department of Education 2002). This opinion refutes the idea of a specialized knowledge base in teaching, and argues instead that teaching is a field that applies knowledge from other (established) disciplines. Therefore, teachers simply need to know their subject well so they can transmit that subject to
students. Proponents of this perspective perceive teaching as “natural” (Murray 2008) and believe that smart people have all that it takes to teach (Hess 2002).

A contrasting—and equally compelling—opinion is that teaching is a complex endeavor that requires the acquisition of “scholarly understanding” (Shulman 2004)—specialized knowledge and methods through formal study and apprenticeship (Berliner 2000; Darling-Hammond and Bransford 2005; National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future 1996, 1997). Proponents of this viewpoint highlight the work of numerous scholars who have carefully conceptualized what teaching knowledge includes. For example, in the 1980s, Shulman and his colleagues outlined “categories of the knowledge base” for teaching:

- content knowledge;
- general pedagogical knowledge;
- curriculum knowledge;
- pedagogical content knowledge;
- knowledge of learners and their characteristics;
- knowledge of educational contexts;
- knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values.

(Shulman 2004: 227)

Shulman’s groundbreaking work moved the conversation beyond “general dimensions of teacher knowledge that were the mainstay of teacher education programs at the time,” because the concept of pedagogical content knowledge clearly articulated that knowledge of content and knowledge of pedagogy are insufficient in isolation … that it is “a kind of amalgam of content and pedagogy that is central to the knowledge needed for teaching (Ball et al. 2000: 391–2).” Shulman’s work spurred substantial activity in the field around the articulation of specialized knowledge for teaching. His ideas were instrumental to the development of the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) “model ‘core’ standards for what all beginning teachers should know, be like, and be able to do in order to practice responsibly, regardless of the subject matter or grade level being taught” (Shulman 2004, emphasis in the original), and to the establishment of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, which defined standards for accomplished teaching. Professional organizations, such as the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, also joined these efforts by revising their subject-specific standards for teaching. Finally, “in 1989, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education published a seminal effort, the Knowledge Base for the Beginning Teacher (Darling-Hammond and Bransford 2005: viii),” which influenced the subsequent revision of the standards applied by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).

Specialized, professional study

Attention on the knowledge base for teaching has remained constant over the past two decades, resulting in further clarification of the field’s consensus around what teachers need to know in order to teach well. The cumulative wisdom about the knowledge base for teaching amassed over this period was recently reviewed by the National Academy of Education’s Committee on Teacher Education consisting of researchers, university- and school-based practitioners, academicians, and subject-matter specialists. The Committee conducted research, reviewed programs, documents, and other artifacts related to teacher education, and analyzed how other professions conceptualize and organize the task of professional preparation. Their inquiry focused “on content considered essential based on strong professional consensus and on research evidence” in order to inform their “recommendations for how knowledge deemed essential for beginning teachers can be incorporated into the initial teacher education curriculum (Darling-Hammond and Bransford 2005: ix).” The emphasis of their report was the how, the nature and content of the curriculum through which this body of knowledge should be structured and taught to new teachers.
Teaching as a profession

The search for the “best way” to prepare teachers harkens to a long tradition of practice which calls for the discovery of standard procedures that can be learned by all teachers (Sackett 1996). The early 1900s in the U.S. witnessed unprecedented advances in science and the application of technology to human problems. Educators, eager to identify with this burgeoning field, cast teaching as an applied science. Indeed, “Dewey [favored] the scientific orientation of the laboratory over the practical and traditional perspectives of the apprenticeship (Shulman 2004: 525).” Seeking greater efficiency in teaching, enthusiasts sought to isolate the variables that differentiate effective from ineffective teachers. Through the development of educational tests and measurements, which offered potential for linking best teaching practice with student outcomes, a “science” of teaching began to develop. Learning to teach, given this view, is a process of becoming increasingly skilled in applying universally proven techniques to a wide array of situations.

A contrasting perspective on teaching, with an equally long tradition, holds that human emotions, individuality, and values are at the heart of teaching and cannot be systematically categorized into a routine that may be uniformly applied in all classrooms. In this view, teaching is an art—a practical art. The art of teaching departs from recipes and combines skills and knowledge with intuition and creativity (Ayers 2001). Thus, the teacher needs to have knowledge as a tool for intelligent, and imaginative engagement in practice. Components of teacher preparation curricula, such as lesson planning, classroom management strategies, content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, plus a deep understanding of human development, are all necessary to complete the teacher’s repertoire. These are seen as material from which one learns how to invent appropriate practice, but not as steps to be memorized and duplicated.

The dichotomous characterization of teaching as either art or science—teaching as nature versus teaching as nurture—has long embroiled educators in sustained debates about teacher preparation. What qualities and preparation should teachers have? Where should teacher preparation take place (if at all)? What should this preparation include—or exclude (Cochran-Smith 2001b)? While all these questions remain perplexing, the recent work of the National Academy of Education which comprehensively lays out both the what and how of learning to teach and teaching knowledge, provides a coherent curriculum for the preparation of teachers. This curriculum represents consensus in the teacher education field that teacher preparation is necessary, that teaching is not “second nature (Murray 2008),” that professionals are distinguished by their specialized knowledge and training, and that certification is necessary to ensure that new entrants to teaching have met minimum standards of performance and quality. However, not everyone agrees with teacher educators.

Standards of teaching practice and performance: ensuring goodness

Undoubtedly, teacher educators would submit that conceptions of teaching “goodness” and quality are contained in the knowledge base and standards for teaching. Good teachers ought to know certain things, possess certain skills, and teacher certification serves a “gate-keeping” function (Goodwin and Oyler 2008), “a means to ensure that candidates … meet minimal requirements and are safe to place with young people (Imig and Imig 2008: 887).” However, there are many who disagree with teacher educators about what it takes to become a competent teacher, that teacher preparation is desirable or even necessary, or that teacher certification assures quality control. First, as stated earlier, over the past decade the U.S. and many other countries have seen the rise of an increasingly vocal opposition to the what, the idea of a codified knowledge base in learning to teach, an opposition that has included many prominent public figures, politicians, and well-funded, conservative think tanks. This vocal opposition vehemently resisted the professionalization agenda forwarded by the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (1996), and paved the way for alternative certification pathways (Imig and Imig 2008). Second, given this view of the dearth of knowledge for teaching, the notion of teacher preparation or how novice teachers learn to teach becomes debatable. Neoconservatives in particular have argued against “higher education’s long dominance of the ‘market’ for teacher education (Imig and Imig 2008: 891),” and have vigorously attacked substantive
preparation and certification as “barriers” to the field erected by teacher educators and universities. They have advocated for

a competitive model [which] would substitute meaningful professional development for what is essentially a guild system funded by levying a significant tuition-based tax on aspiring teachers before permitting them to enter the profession.

(Hess 2002: 975)

Finally, there is the question of why or in what ways teacher certification makes a difference. Unfortunately, the evidence relative to this question has been inconclusive and often contradictory. Thus, research supporting the positive impact of teacher certification and preparation on student achievement sits alongside reports that argue the exact opposite (Boyd et al. 2006; Darling-Hammond 2000; Darling-Hammond 2001; Darling-Hammond et al. 2002; Darling-Hammond and Youngs 2002; Fetler 2001; Goldhaber and Brewer 2000; Walsh 2001; Wilson and Youngs 2005; Zunwalt and Craig 2005). This has only strengthened arguments against “traditional” or university-based preparation, and against teacher certification as “proof” that candidates are competent to practice.

Who can teach? Who decides?

The push to de-professionalize teaching found an ally in George W. Bush (Imig and Imig 2008) who signed into law the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2002, legislation that defined “a highly qualified teacher … as one who holds a bachelor’s degree, has full state certification and has demonstrated subject area competence in each subject taught (U.S. Department of Education 2005: 6).” Thus, while teacher certification was mandated by NCLB as a marker of high quality, “the law was markedly less explicit about what it means to have full state certification (U.S. Department of Education 2003: 5).” States were given the “green light” to “create alternative routes to full state certification that target talented people who would be turned off by traditional preparation and certification programs (ibid.).” These federal pronouncements along with the (almost sole) emphasis on content knowledge as the requirement for teacher certification and the simultaneous minimizing of professional knowledge and teacher preparation, opened the door for alternate pathways into teaching. This was made clear by the NCLB provision of “a variety of ways for teachers to demonstrate content mastery,” including “a state content assessment … an undergraduate major … course work equivalent to an undergraduate major, or … a graduate degree in the subject(s) taught (U.S. Department of Education 2005: 6).” Ironically, as “aggressive and persistent efforts to regulate and control teacher education from the outside” (Zeichner 2007: 37) became evermore plentiful and stringent, these same regulations were not equally applied to the myriad alternatives and creative constructions of teacher certification that found a firm foothold—with generous assistance from the federal government—in the educational landscape. The Bush administration:

promoted greater access to teaching as a way to improve teacher quality, embracing both “competitive” and “alternative” certification as policy tools. They also championed the greater regulation of “traditional” teacher education … while promoting efforts to bypass teacher education.

(Imig and Imig 2008: 899–900)

In fact, at the same time that university-based “traditional” programs were mandated to require more of their teacher candidates in all aspects of teacher preparation including fieldwork, liberal arts content, and professional knowledge about, for instance, English Language Learners, numerous entrepreneurial, private and fee-based efforts proliferated, offering “portable, time efficient and cost effective” (ABCTE: 4) teacher certification that required less and less of teacher candidates. One example, the American Board for
Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE), supported by US $35 million federal dollars, developed twelve certification-by-examination “passports” to teaching in (currently) eleven states. After passing a paper and pencil test—all but two of which are multiple choice—and paying a fee per test/certification ranging from $1,595 to $1,995, candidates earn “a credential that “deems [them] a highly qualified educator under the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (ABCTE: 30).” Interestingly, ABCTE’s “high quality credential” is based on standards that seem very low. For instance, the maximum score for all 12 multiple choice tests is 500; minimum passing scores range from 251 to 305 (50.2 percent to 61 percent), while candidates who achieve scores from 307 to 357 (61.4 percent to 71.4 percent, i.e. between a C and B grade), receive distinguished passes. Yet, in his second annual report on teacher quality, shortly after the passing of NCLB, Secretary Paige encouraged states to “adopt the new system being created by the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE)” describing it as “a rigorous assessment system for new teachers in both content areas and professional teaching knowledge (2003: 5).”

The curious paradox created by NCLB, whereby state certification and high quality teaching became synonymous—and mandatory—but the route to and nature of certification was opened to wide interpretation and practice, actively directed states to engage in what could be termed “makeovers” of temporary and emergency licenses. This would allow individuals without preparation to teach—emergency hires in practice but no longer in name. So, as outlined by the USDOE:

> Teachers who are participating in alternative route programs to teacher certification may be considered to meet the certification requirements of the definition of a highly qualified teacher (and not be counted as on a waiver) if they are permitted by the state to assume functions as regular classroom teachers, but only for a specified period of time not to exceed three years, and demonstrate satisfactory progress toward full certification in their programs as prescribed by the state. (U.S. Department of Education 2005: 12)

Thus, in New York State, for example, transitional certifications were created that endowed individuals with certification so they could assume full-time teaching positions as the “high quality” teacher of record after, at most, a brief period of summer training. This repackaging of certification also smoothed the way for candidates from a wide variety of alternate route programs to be state certified, thereby meeting NCLB standards for hiring. Certification, which critics have termed a “dubious screen” (Hess 2002), has apparently undergone a facelift that has, arguably, further increased its “dubious” quotient.

**Losing (more) control over entry**

The remaking of teacher certification and the opportunity for candidates to enter teaching via multiple pathways—paper-pencil tests; short-term “boot-camp” types of preparation plus on the job training; university-based, degree-granting programs on either the undergraduate or graduate levels; etc.—has fundamentally weakened claims that teaching is a profession. Teaching can no longer point to certification as an assurance that new entrants to the field embody a common core of specialized knowledge that all teachers ready to practice should possess; the understandings and experiences that lead to certification have been changed and newly minted teachers now differ widely in terms of their preparation and skill sets for teaching. The emphasis on content knowledge as central to high quality teaching has also diminished the progress made by scholars and teacher educators over the past twenty years in articulating a codified, and agreed upon, professional knowledge base for teaching (Imig and Imig 2008). The view that teaching is work that transmits knowledge from other disciplines, not work that has knowledge uniquely its own, has been reified. Thus, novice teachers who have undergone a program of professional study at the university level now work alongside and hold the same responsibilities as novice teachers who have never been exposed to professional preparation but hold a subject matter degree or possess “relevant” work experience. This comparison of
university-based or “traditional” versus alternate certification pathways is not meant to imply the superiority of one over the other. The literature is filled with all manner of debates that take up this question. Rather, the discussion above is designed to underscore how the politicization of teacher certification standards simultaneously negated notions of expert knowledge as a basis for teaching as a profession, and undermined teacher educators’ role as gatekeepers for the teaching field.

Historically, we know that teacher educators have not enjoyed much control over who could enter teaching. The movement of teacher education from normal schools into the universities as a state-initiated reform resulted in an implicit agreement between teacher educators and states that has positioned teacher education as subordinate to the state for the past 100 years (Goodlad 1990; Haberman 1983; Melnick 1996).

The state’s role in helping to establish teacher education departments in universities, became a legitimate license to exercise power and control over the curriculum in schools of education. … Once schools of education relied on the support of state education agencies for recognition and approval of their teacher education programs, they were compelled to accept the role and authority of the state in order to justify their own existence.

(Schneider 1987: 215)

University-based teacher preparation programs cannot exist without state sponsorship and therefore are not always in a position to resist or question state mandates. Indeed, “no higher education specialty approaches teacher education in the degree of influence exerted by outside agencies, particularly state agencies controlling entry into public school teaching (Goodlad 1990: 93).” Still, it is obviously difficult for states “to judge the performance qualifications of individual teacher candidates; it is that judgment that has been placed in the hands of teacher educators via state-approved programs (Goodwin and Oyler 2008: 477).” However, given the current U.S. political context framing the teaching enterprise, it is not surprising that teacher educators now find themselves to be the keepers of gates where keys have been indiscriminately distributed.

Skills, knowledge, and dispositions encompassing professional knowledge and behaviors that teacher educators believe are essential to good teaching do not always match what the state and the public underscore as essential teacher knowledge (Goodwin and Oyler 2008). Teacher educators find themselves caught in a paradox—over-regulation of their work on the part of state agencies alongside vociferous calls for the de-regulation of teacher preparation that takes place outside the university (Cochran-Smith 2001a). So, while teacher educators can, and do, offer or withhold their endorsement for certification, the absence of their endorsement does not necessarily keep low performing student teachers out of the classroom since graduates (and others) can still—now more easily than ever—achieve certification and entry to the field via alternate routes, certification through testing, emergency licenses, etc., even/often bypassing university-based teacher preparation altogether.

Consequently, the past twenty years have witnessed a proliferation of alternate pathways into teaching that challenge what has been termed the “orthodoxy” of the field, “the aggregation of individuals, groups, and institutions that hold and preserve a coherent line of ideas, interests, practices and visions (Wilson and Tamir 2008: 911).” While university-based teacher education still continues to prepare the majority of new teachers, this percentage has decreased fairly significantly as “public-choice economists” have aggressively forwarded “privatization through the introduction of market-based mechanisms (Tamir and Wilson 2005: 336–7).” They have argued that a “competitive certification system” would remove the barriers that hinder the entrance of talented candidates, and would enable the development of cheaper, more flexible and therefore more attractive options for preparation, as well as afford principals and school districts greater control over the selection and hiring of candidates they need (Hess 2002). Thousands of teachers now enter teaching through national alternate route programs such as Teach for America (TFA), and locally grown programs such as New York City’s Teaching Fellows. Programs such as these were recently praised
by Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, as “high-quality alternative certificate routes (Duncan 2009).” These programs are attracting many more takers because they offer employment, a steady paycheck with benefits, and a career change without any timeout required for preparation and no wage interruptions. In fact, the current economic crisis significantly boosted the rolls of such programs as job losses and lay-offs turned the attention of the newly unemployed and the newly graduated to fast track employment opportunities that guaranteed both a position and an income. For example, TFA boasted its “largest incoming corps in Teach for America’s history,” attracting 35,000 applicants for just over 4,000 slots (Teach for America 2009), at the same time that hiring freezes locked out newly credentialed graduates from “traditional” teacher preparation programs.

While educators are critical of these programs because they supply teachers who have the least experience and preparation to the hard-to-staff schools serving children who have the greatest needs (Darling-Hammond 2000), the counter-argument is that these programs fill critical teacher shortages and connect talented university graduates or career changers to students who would otherwise be taught by an endless procession of weak teachers (Hess 2002). Regardless of which perspective one might favor, the hard fact is that entry to teaching has become a market-driven process, where decisions about performance, opportunities to practice, and preparation are less and less informed or controlled by members of the education field. Thus, a second hallmark of a profession—its ability to assure the public that all those allowed to practice have been uniformly assessed as competent to do so—seems to be less and less applicable to teaching.

**Accountability and client welfare**

The development and implementation of strong accountability systems has been ... perhaps the most powerful trend in education policy.

*(Barber 2004: 7, emphasis in the original)*

The reauthorization of the Higher Education Act and the subsequent signing into law of NCLB, created stringent accountability demands that sought to link student achievement on standardized tests with teacher performance. The law also mandated multiple layers of public reporting on schools and school districts, states, and universities to ensure that they were meeting state standards and making “adequate yearly progress.” Universities are now required to publish the pass rates of their teacher candidates on certification tests mandated in 42 states. Annual testing of all students in grades 3–8 in reading and mathematics was instituted and test scores have become the measure of student progress and learning. Schools and school districts that fail to demonstrate progress from year to year are “subject to improvement, corrective action, and restructuring measures (NCLB 2009),” including the closing of schools or the withdrawal of federal funding.

The various models of accountability—political, legal, bureaucratic, professional, and market—emphasize specific safeguards and mechanisms of control and exhibit different strengths and weaknesses (Darling-Hammond 1989). According to Darling-Hammond, under bureaucratic accountability, teachers are perceived as “functionaries ... [who] do not plan or evaluate their own work; they merely perform it,” and “accountability is achieved by inspections and reporting systems intended to ensure that the rules and procedures are being followed (Darling-Hammond 1989: 63–4).” In contrast, professional accountability places the welfare of the client at the center: “professionals are required to take into account the unique needs of individual clients in fashioning their judgments about what strategies or treatments are appropriate (Darling-Hammond 1989: 67).”

Current accountability structures in education seem to emphasize bureaucratic accountability (Sockett 1996; Tschannen-Moran 2009) so that decisions about what is best for students are being made by many others—politicians, policy-makers, legislators—placing teachers in the position of complying versus...
deciding. Teacher performance is now measured in terms of student “learning”, defined as achievement in the annual standardized reading and mathematics tests. Similarly, schools receive report cards according to standardized test scores and pass rates. For example, in New York City each school receives a grade from A to D based primarily (85 percent) on students’ test scores, both performance and progress. The accountability focus on test scores and “the increase of rewards and sanctions attached to assessment results” (Stevenson and Waltman 2006: 2) has had a narrowing effect on the curriculum. Numerous studies, including a comprehensive study involving all 50 states and 299 school districts (Center on Education Policy 2006), have shown that elementary and middle schools have dramatically increased the amount of instructional time devoted to reading and mathematics, and to test prep, and have consequently decreased the amount of time previously devoted to other subjects such as social studies, art and physical education (Azzam et al. 2006; FairTest 2007).

Teachers have been similarly affected; research studies examining the impact of high stakes testing on teacher behavior have revealed that teachers have also increased their focus on tested subjects, decreased their focus on non-tested subjects, and spent more time on teaching directly for the tests (Stevenson and Waltman 2006). Other, more troubling unintended consequences of high stakes testing and the new accountability measures have included educator behavior that contradicts principles of professional or ethical practice. A study conducted by the National Board of Education Testing and Public Policy found the majority of teachers admitting that state testing policies had caused them to teach in ways that they did not believe to be pedagogically appropriate (cited in Stevenson and Waltman 2006). There is evidence that states have manipulated state standards to ensure adequate yearly progress in the face of pressure to raise test scores (Azzam et al. 2006; Center on Education Policy 2006), while numerous exposés point to widespread cheating on tests by educators in California, Texas, New York, and Chicago, states that have received praise for their excellent rates of “improvement” (Green 2008; Hayasaki 2004; Jacob and Levitt 2003).

Professionals place the welfare of their clients first not simply because it is what should be expected of expert practitioners; they put their clients first because it is ethically incumbent upon them to do so. According to Sykes, “professionalism alone is not enough. There must be a social vision animating reform that encompasses but is not limited to the interests of teachers (1989: 270, cited in Burbules & Densmore 1991: 45).” Yinger concurs when he proposes that teachers should occupy “the role of public citizen with specialized knowledge and moral obligation to the common good (2005: 288).” Arguably, the pressure to produce test results has led teachers away from student interests to a focus on self-preservation, that prevailing measures of teaching performance have resulted in teachers making decisions driven by marketplace competition, and sanctions and rewards, not by learning, social justice, or client advancement. Teachers’ moral obligation to children is being severely tested by the punishing and restrictive socio-political context in which they are located, a context that renders them powerless to effect decisions, exercise professional judgment (Hilferty 2007), or apply their expertise, given the “deskilling” of their work (Apple 1987). Against this final criterion—that professionalism is characterized by the centrality of client welfare—teaching appears not to quite measure up.

Professionalism and teacher quality: lessons, insights, new directions

The issue of teacher quality is the contemporary global concern (Buchberger et al. 2000; International Alliance of Leading Education Institutes 2008; International Reading Association 2008) as all nations strive towards excellence at all levels, be it economic, social, cultural, or educational. In contrast to the de-professionalization process that teachers in the U.S., along with their counterparts in England, and Australia (Barber 2004; Beck 2008; Evans 2007; Hilferty 2007), appear to be experiencing, many nations in the world seem intent on professionalizing teaching. Countries such as Jordan, China, India, Indonesia, and Mexico are all at work upgrading the skills of practicing teachers through professional development and
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re-tooling; creating professional credentialing systems; (re-)designing teacher preparation curricula to support specialized study in and of teaching; establishing the study of teaching as a university subject; and initiating—or strengthening—the development of schools of education. High performing countries such as Singapore and Finland, whose students regularly outperform U.S. students in international assessments such as TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) and PISA (Program for International Student Assessment), insist that all teachers are university-prepared in content as well as pedagogy, require extensive professional development once graduates are in-service, restrict from practice individuals without appropriate preparation and credentials, compensate teachers well, and highlight teachers’ contributions. The question then is, given where teaching currently seems to (not) stand as a profession in the U.S., are there lessons to be learned that might inform colleagues in the global community?

The most obvious may be that the U.S. context provides a concrete exemplar of the immense power of “economic globalization,” and “how notions of professional autonomy are eroded in the globalization process” (Tang and Choi 2009: 3). The hyper-regulation of teacher education in the U.S., and the ever tighter control of teachers’ work has led to increased demoralization among teachers (Center on Education Policy 2006; Stevenson and Waltman 2006), who experience “uncertainty and alienation … [and] the de-humanizing effects of an increasingly managerialist and market-oriented approach to school education” (Tang and Choi 2009: 1). It could be argued that teachers as a sociological group and as a profession, have been ill-equipped to resist market forces and the “fiscalization” (McCarthy 2009) of education because of their historical vulnerability as a feminized profession that serves the needs of the least politically powerful—children (Beck 2008; Hinds 2002; Kerchner and Caufman 1995). Scholars have also theorized that despite progress made by the teacher professionalization movement in the U.S. over the past twenty-odd years, teaching remains semi-professional because professionalism in teaching has been “demanded” (Barber 2004) rather than enacted. This “outside-in view” of teaching as a profession (Glazer 2007) has focused on the attributes of teaching versus the practices (Elmore 2007). Professionalism is perceived as “externally-driven” as opposed to self-directed (Tang and Choi 2009), defined in terms of compensation, credentials and licensing, rather than the moral purposes of teaching (Burbules and Densmore 1991; Day 1999; Sackett 1996; Yinger 2005). Yinger hypothesizes that the practice of modeling the teaching profession after more established professions such as medicine and law, has focused educators on the struggle for “internal control,” even while this notion appears “no longer viable for most professions and may have been mistaken as a strategy for making true professions in the first place (Yinger 2005: 285).” Indeed, in many professions, the idea of internal control has been eroded. This certainly can be seen, for example, in the corporatization of medicine, where health care is managed by insurance bureaucrats, doctors’ decision-making power to do what is best for patients has been diminished, and cost-containment and profits outweigh social goals or wellness as a common good.

Ultimately, then, the “new” direction teaching must take towards professionalization is the direction that teaching must always take as an endeavor of social importance that has at its heart, and as its central purpose, the welfare of learners. As Glazer suggests:

questions about what makes a profession more or less professional should take practice as their starting point … this inside-out or practice-centered perspective raises new questions that can expand our view of educational professionalism.

(Glazer 2007: 171)

A practice-centered perspective focuses the energies of teachers on nurturing, supporting and transforming citizens who have the vision and courage to resist globalization that prizes standardization, conformity, and commodification, and threatens community, independence, and democratic action. Teachers who are professionals “review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents (Day 1999: 4),” engaging in daily social action on behalf of young learners so they can grow, take risks, dream, imagine, create, change...
our world for the better in just and loving ways. Ultimately, then, teachers’ “transformative stance” (Tang and Choi 2009) and their “work of forming persons and forming citizens … must become a cornerstone for [their] identities as educators (Yinger 2005: 289).”

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