

**TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM: A LITERATURE REVIEW**

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# TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM: A LITERATURE REVIEW

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this literature review is to establish the basis of teacher professionalism. In order to do so a number of questions need to be explored. The first one is whether it is valid to talk about teacher professionalism at all. There has long been contention about whether teaching can be termed a profession or whether it is more appropriately classified as a semi-profession. If so, what does that mean? Finding answers to these questions entails an examination of different formulations of 'profession' to establish how these relate to the occupation of being a teacher.

The review pursues a number of avenues of enquiry. It starts by drawing on the sociological, historical and philosophical literature around professions and professionalism to establish what are generally regarded as distinctive criteria for professionalism. This framework is then applied to the notion of teacher professionalism, with particular emphasis on the *knowledge base* of teaching.

Given that teachers are generally state employees the notion of professionalism also needs to be examined in relation to the school as representing state control over teaching. Here it is the *practice* of teaching that is pertinent. The second body of literature surveyed is thus that of school development. In the final section the findings of the above avenues of enquiry are put together to argue for a distinctive approach to teacher professionalism.

## Section 1: Professions and professionalism

### A brief historical overview

In the sociological and historical literature the concept of the 'specialist professional' can be traced back to the Middle Ages when young men were educated in cathedral schools to prepare them as church leaders. The association between professional status and specialist education, specifically in relation to what became known as the three classical professions of 'divinity, law and physic' can subsequently be traced through the shaping role, between the ninth and fourteenth century, of medieval Italian and French universities such as Palermo, Montpellier, Bologna and Paris and the English universities of Oxford and Cambridge to establish what was called the 'learned professions' based on a liberal university education, with Latin as the language of teaching and learning. A strong social class distinction existed between these professions and traders and artisans who acquired practical skills through apprenticeship (Crook, 2008: 11-12).

The rise of the classical or 'true' professions (Abel, 1979: 85) brought about another social class distinction, namely between 'professionals' and 'semi-professionals' or 'para-professionals'.

Those who served the medieval courts of Europe as physicians, jurists, ambassadors and bureaucrats were accorded professional status, in a social order maintained by ‘professional armies’ (Crook, 2008: 11). ‘Semi-professionals’ or ‘para-professionals’ performed similar services for ordinary people: the barber who shaved beards and trimmed hair but who also performed surgical procedures and extracted teeth, practitioners of folk medicine and midwives (Singman, cited in Crook, *ibid*)<sup>1</sup>.

It was only in the mid-nineteenth century that a broadening of professional groups started to occur across Western Europe and North America. Commenting on British developments in this period, Annan notes:

‘Not only were the old professions expanding to include attorneys and apothecaries, but the establishment in 1828 of the Institution of Civil Engineers to further ‘the art of directing the Great Sources of Power in nature for the use and convenience of mankind’ marked the rise of a new kind of professional man. Members of these intellectual families became the new professional civil servants at a time when government had become too complicated and technical to be handled by the ruling class and their dependents. They become school inspectors or took posts in museums or were appointed secretaries of philanthropic societies; or they edited or wrote for the periodicals or entered publishing houses; or, as journalists ceased to be hacks scribbling in Grub Street, they joined the staff of *The Times*. Thus they gradually spread over the length and breadth of English intellectual life, criticising the assumptions of the ruling class above them and forming the opinions of the upper middle class to which they belonged’ (Annan, cited in Crook, 2008: 13) [[The development and expansion of the professional classes accompanied the building of organically organised societies \(in Durkheim’s terms\), and are the foundation on which they rest.](#)]

From a North American perspective Kimball (1992: 200) ascribes these developments to a shift in the ‘fundamental source of cultural inspiration and legitimacy ... from “polity” to “science”’, with education becoming the institutional locus for the cultural ideal of science. Kimball argues that this was by no means an inevitable relation, as the institutional locus could just as easily have been the military or government or growing industrial corporations or a professional locus in engineering. However, for many reasons, it was education, and particularly the university sector, that assumed the role of institutional locus, not only in North America but also in Western Europe, with a concomitant shift from university teaching having theological connotations to its ascendance as the preeminent secular profession – a shift prompted by the founding of civic rather than church-affiliated universities in the late nineteenth century; the establishment of modern business schools such as the *École Supérieure de Commerce de Paris* in 1819, the Harvard Business School in 1910 and the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business in 1920; the founding of Schools of Economics such as the *École Libre des Sciences Politiques* in Paris in 1872 and the London School of Economics in 1895, to serve professionals in the areas of politics, public administration and commerce; the establishment of the

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<sup>1</sup> We return to the distinction between professional and semi-professional status in later sections. At this stage we simply note the early social class origins of this distinction.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1861 (Crook, 2008: 14). Crook (2008: 15) also notes developments further afield in that in China the distinction between 'profession' and 'occupation' was first made in 1929, when doctors, lawyers, accountants, engineers, professors and journalists were officially identified as elite professionals.

### **An analysis of professions and professionalism**

*'The authority of knowledge is central to professionalism' (Freidson, 1994: 36)*

The somewhat bland chronological account of the origins and expansion of the professions offered in the previous section belies the complexity and controversial nature of this terrain. The mental-manual division of labour emerges clearly, as do distinctions between professional and semi- or non-professional status in a labour market hierarchy. But what is it that distinguishes professions as 'unusual occupations' (Abbott 1988: 4)? Are they just symbols of ensconcement of middle-class privilege in terms of power and status in the labour market? Rather than attempt explanations of a definitional nature it is more instructive to consider the ways in which the professions have been analysed and to note the issues and vocabulary that emerge from different analytical approaches. This will enable us to develop a conceptual framework with which to interrogate the notion of teacher professionalism.

#### ***'Trait' or 'inventory' interpretations***

There is common consensus in the literature around professions and professionalism (e.g. Abbott, 1988; Crook, 2008; Esland, 1980; Freidson, 1994; Johnson, 1972) that three broad approaches can be discerned in the systematic analysis of these concepts. Starting in the structural-functional tradition of the 1930s that focussed on the role of professions in maintaining social order, what is commonly known as the 'essential trait' or 'inventory' approach involved naturalistic case studies and the compilation of typologies or lists of common attributes of the accepted professions (usually with American medicine and law as the benchmarks) to show the determining role of the established professions in achieving social cohesion. These traits were then used as criteria to decide whether an occupational grouping aspiring to professional status really fitted into the category of 'profession'. Essential common traits documented in the above and other sources are succinctly summarised in the list provided by Beck and Young:

- 'that "established" professions historically achieved an exceptional measure of collective *collegiate* autonomy over their conditions of professional training, certification of professional competence, and conditions of work and practice
- that such professions themselves largely defined the boundaries of their own knowledge base, which in most cases was eventually institutionalised in the form of a curriculum taught by a "professional school" based within institutions of higher education and which therefore partook of the liberal educational ethos associated with such a location; [\[also, an essential element of this training was practical, when certified practitioners – and generally highly specialized ones at that, such as professors of medicine in medical schools – mentored initiates into the intricacies of professional practice \(eg also the 'articles' mandatorily undertaken by trainee lawyers and](#)

accountants. This point is partly covered by the last bullet below, under ‘socialisation into the habitus of the profession].

- that as a condition of maintaining trust on the part of both their clients and the State, such professions were constrained to develop and implement a code of ethics through which individual professionals could be held to account by the profession itself; and
- that professional training typically involved more than the imparting of specialist expertise; it also involved intensive socialisation into the values of a professional community and its standards of professional integrity, judgement, and loyalty—in other words, the creation of a professional habitus’ (Beck and Young, 2005: 188).

An internal tension (within the profession itself) between ‘autonomy’ to determine its own standards and conditions of practice and ‘accountability’ to the norms set by the profession for its members emerges as a defining feature that sets the established professions apart from other occupational groupings. Beck and Young also point out that this particular form of autonomy and the insulation it offered from unrestricted ‘free’ market competition and external ‘interference’ and ‘contamination’ was key to the development of what Bernstein (2000) calls the inner dedication of a specialised identity ‘to ends and values that transcended (at least in some respects and to some extent) mundane considerations of profit, the demands of powerful clients, and so on’ (Beck and Young, 2005: 188). [It may be instructive to unpack the notion of ‘autonomy’ to include the element of responsibility and self-motivation this an essential part of the professional habitus].

### ***Professionalisation as occupational self-interest***

Given the diversity of would-be professions, achievement of the idealised end-state characterised by trait theories was not the point at which systematic analysis could achieve illuminating findings and in the 1960s the emphasis shifted to what is generally called professionalisation. This approach focussed on the stages by which occupational groups achieved professional status and attempted to explain sequences or common patterns of professionalisation towards elite status. Challenging the assumption of neutrality inherent in trait theories, professionalisation theories focussed on issues of power and conflict to show how professional groupings achieved both knowledge and economic monopoly and dominance. Earlier ‘trait’ theory work was ‘unmasked’ as ideological (Abbott, 1988: 5) and professionalism was often portrayed as representing ‘unjustified elitism that reinforces the class system and ... and interferes with the operation of a free and putatively efficient labour market’ by using social closure to limit opportunity (Freidson, 1994: 4) or as ‘elites of practitioners who seek personal reward through collective mobility’ (Abbott, 1988: 13). Abbott also notes that many of the influential works in this period (e.g. Larson, 1977) ignored professions where expertise was not formalised independently of the State. Analysis of the army, civil service and clergy, or subordinated professions such as nursing, was thus excluded.

### ***Professionalism as occupational control***

A third approach, which is currently dominant, is to study professions as a means of occupational control. Wilkinson argues:

‘Professions, then, are those occupational groups which have, by virtue of their formal knowledge, been granted collective licence by the state to control the training, the qualification process and the regulation of qualified practitioners. Moreover, only those whose qualifications are recognised by the profession, usually represented by the professional body, are entitled to engage in professional work and so professions have a monopoly over the provision of the services they control’ (2005: 423).

*Abstract knowledge as the basis of professional jurisdiction*

In this tradition it is especially Abbott’s (1988) notion of control of ‘professional jurisdiction’ that offers a theory of the knowledge base on which professionalism rests. He argues that an occupational grouping’s ability to gain and maintain control depends on possession of a form of abstract knowledge which uniquely qualifies the occupational grouping to exercise professional jurisdiction. It is the degree of abstraction of the knowledge base that is ‘the ultimate currency of competition between professions’ (: 9).

‘The evolution of professions in fact results from their interrelations. These interrelations are in turn determined by the way these groups control their knowledge and skill. There are two rather different ways of accomplishing this control. One emphasises technique per se, and occupations using it are commonly called crafts. To control such an occupation, a group directly controls its technique. The other form of controls involves abstract knowledge. Here, practical skill grows out of an abstract system of knowledge, and control of the occupation lies in control of the abstractions that generate the practical techniques. The techniques themselves may in fact be delegated to other workers. For me this characteristic of abstraction is the one that best identifies the professions. For abstraction is the quality that sets interprofessional competition apart from competition among occupations in general. Any occupation can obtain licensure (e.g. beauticians) or develop an ethics code (e.g. real estate). But only a knowledge system governed by abstractions can redefine its problems and tasks, defend them from interlopers and seize new problems – as medicine has recently seized alcoholism, mental illness, hyperactivity in children, obesity and numerous other things. Abstraction enables survival in the competitive system of professions. If auto mechanics had that kind of abstraction, if they “contained” the relevant sections of what is presently the engineering professions, and had considered taking over all repair of internal combustion engines on abstract grounds, they would, for my purposes, be a profession’ (: 8 – 9).

By this Abbott does not mean to imply that professional knowledge is predominantly abstract in nature. Far from it. Professionals rely as much on practical knowledge that is continuous with experience as on abstract academic knowledge. The difference, however, is that abstract academic knowledge has the symbolic function of legitimating professional work. It does so by clarifying its foundations and tracing them to major cultural values.

'In most modern professions, these have been the values of rationality, logic and science. Academic professionals demonstrate the rigor, the clarity and the scientifically logical character of professional work, thereby legitimating that work in the context of larger values' (: 54).

The formalised nature of a knowledge base, in terms of knowledge elaboration at various levels of abstraction that make connections with the task areas of a profession, is what makes professional jurisdiction strong. It is also the level of abstraction of the knowledge base that determines the level of graduate or post-graduate entry qualifications.

However, where the knowledge base is too diverse in terms of its disciplinary origins professional jurisdiction is weakened. The case mentioned by a range of authors to exemplify this point is that of business management or business administration where the Masters in Business Administration (MBA) covers a diverse body of abstractions about how work ought to be done. Psychology, sociology administration, economics, law, banking and accounting all claim some jurisdiction in how work in business management ought to be done. As Abbott (1988: 103-104) argues, when task areas are open to jurisdictional claims by so many groups, each extending its own abstractions and claiming to cover the whole field, content is emptied.

The sociological theorist, Basil Bernstein (2000), refers to the above phenomenon as the regionalisation of disciplinary knowledge fields, such as psychology and economics, which, in singular form, are protected by strong boundaries and hierarchies. It is through the higher education curriculum process of modularisation that regionalisation is facilitated (: 52). Bernstein positions regions as the 'interface between disciplines (singulars) and the technologies they make possible, in that they operate both in the intellectual field of disciplines and in the field of external practice. Thus he argues, professional fields such as engineering, medicine and architecture are regions (*ibid.*) Beck and Young (2005) combine regionalisation and the emergence of 'generic skills'<sup>2</sup> in their use of the term 'genericism', to indicate how the dilution of disciplinary fields is progressing at an ever faster pace in favour of the concreteness of 'the world'.

For Abbott, 'contrary forces ... push abstraction in professional knowledge towards an equilibrium between extreme abstraction and extreme concreteness' (1988: 104). From this viewpoint it is not the fact of regionalisation but rather its nature and extent that determine the strength of a jurisdictional claim. The argument is that the optimum level of abstraction between extremely general knowledge and the extremely concrete knowledge is created by a combination of public ideas of legitimacy and public perceptions of efficacy suited to the public culture of the time.

[It strikes me that Abbott's view is overly political in both its characterisation of abstract knowledge, at the expense of an epistemological perspective, and its postulation of a motive of legitimation and the defence of privilege by the border guards of professional boundaries, at

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<sup>2</sup> See Muller (2008) for an extended discussion of the emergence of 'generic skills'.

the expense of the motive of defending good science (eg ARVs) against bad (eg Mbeki, Manto-Nsimang, beetroot and olive oil. In other words, there is too much suspicion in Abbott's account and not enough room for the legitimate concerns of the public good provided by the best professional knowledge. But I suppose Abbott would dismiss this critique and being ideologically naïve. Muller's epistemological approach which, following Bernstein, distinguishes between disciplines with high grammaticality, and hence high levels of empirical verifiability, and those with low grammaticality, is useful here.]

### *Professionalism downgraded*

We have thus far considered how professions ascend the occupational ladder on the basis of specialist knowledge and skill – whether in real terms, or by drawing on idealised images of professional authority and autonomy to secure greater recognition of their status from the public, thereby gaining the ability to increase control over their work organisation.

However, conditions of modern industrialisation brought about a massive growth of what has been called the 'professional servant class' (Aronowitz, cited in Esland, 1980: 223). Compared to the independent practitioners of the late-nineteenth century, most professionals, in the twentieth century, became salaried employees working for large corporations or for the civil service, thus leading to what is often called the 'bureaucratisation' or the 'proletarianisation' of professional labour. In his famous book, *White Collar* (1951), C Wright Mills refers to these new professional workers as representatives of the 'new middle class'.

'In no sphere of twentieth-century society has the shift from the old to the new middle-class condition been so apparent, and its ramifications so wide and deep, as in the professions. Most professionals are now salaried employees; much professional work has become divided and standardised and fitted into the new hierarchical organisations of educated skill and service; intensive and narrow specialisation has replaced self-cultivation and wide knowledge; assistants and sub-professionals perform ... routine tasks while successful men (*sic*) become more and more the managerial type' ( 1951: 112).

At the extreme other end of the professionalisation continuum we find professions and professionalism described in arbitrary identity terms.

'In times of late or postmodernity, some may wish to argue that we can all – dog walkers and landscape gardeners no less than solicitors and archbishops – be professionals if we want to be professionals, and if we conduct ourselves in a manner that seems to be professional' (Crook, 2008: 23).

Whitty (2008: 32) also notes that that more recent sociological perspectives on professionalism have rejected normative notions of what it means to be a professional and rather sees

professionalism as a shifting notion; it is whatever people think it is at a particular time. [In fact, pretty much all the papers in the IOE collection adopt some or other variant of this relativistic view]

### A continuum of forms of professionalism

When the above positions on professionalism are linked together it allows us to set up a heuristic device that positions different forms of professionalism as a continuum rather than as discrete categories:

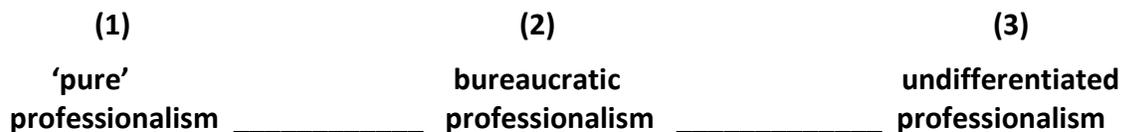


Figure 1: A continuum of forms of professionalism

While these positions are ideal-types that do not correspond neatly to permutations found in the empirical domain, they provide a vantage point from which to draw preliminary conclusions about the nature of professionalism. Disregarding undifferentiated professionalism, the distinctive traits of positions 1 and 2 can be summarised as follows:

- For ‘pure’ professionalism Beck and Young (as cited above) identified **an internal tension between ‘autonomy’** to determine its own standards and conditions of practice **and ‘accountability’** to the norms set by the profession for its members as a defining feature that sets the established professions apart from other occupational groupings, while Abbott (as cited above) argues that an occupational grouping’s ability to gain and maintain control depends on **possession of a form of abstract knowledge** which uniquely qualifies the occupational grouping to exercise professional jurisdiction.
- For bureaucratic professionalism the main characteristic lies in the **tension between [autonomy?] and professional authority on the one hand and the authority systems and technical division of labour of employing organisations** that undermine the notion of professional autonomy in favour of standardisation. To whom is the bureaucratic professional ultimately accountable? To the profession or to the employer?

[Nicely put, if a little cryptic: perhaps you could expand these two bullets just a little?]

Kerchner and Cauffman (1995) collapse these two forms of professionalism when they argue that even in the ‘pure’ professions, such as law and medicine, professionals increasingly work in large and complex private sector and civil service organisations. Thus, they argue, the key element of such professions is no longer the autonomy of individual conduct in practice but rather collective autonomy through the ability of professional associations (e.g. the bar or the medical council) to enforce high ethical and technical standards *in the workplace*, through ‘the collective establishment of widely recognised rules of good service and standards for admission

to practice' (1995: 108). This is what transforms ancient professions into modern professions and sets them apart from many other occupational groupings.

If we follow this argument and background individual autonomy we are left with three main if not uncontested elements relating to the notion of professionalism. These are:

- *level of abstraction [perhaps not just abstraction but also degree of grammaticality, which is what makes it amenable to practical use?] of a profession's knowledge base* in order to claim professional jurisdiction and defend it against competition or subordination,
- *collective autonomy*
- *accountability.*

We have already seen that the notion of autonomy is indelibly linked to control of the knowledge base on which a profession's claim to autonomy rests. [This sounds like Abbott again: who else would 'control' the knowledge base of not the adepts of the discipline? Would we want Mbeki to control the AIDS knowledge base, as he did, with disastrous consequences? It is a lot more than control, surely: it is about the existence and nature of the knowledge base.] In its turn accountability to the norms set by the profession is premised on the relation between the first two criteria. There is thus a reciprocal relation between these three elements of professionalism, which becomes the key criterion for deciding whether an occupational grouping can be termed professional. This is the litmus test that an occupation must pass if it is to sustain claims towards professional status.

## **Section 2: Teacher professionalism**

### **Is teaching a profession?**

Whether teaching counts as a profession or not has long been a vexed issue (e.g. Barton *et al*, 1994; Kerchner and Cauffman, 1995; Baggini, 2005; Wilkinson, 2005; Whitty, 2008). Using the conceptual framework developed thus far the first argument would be that no modern profession can emulate the ideal-type traits of the classical professions – not even modern versions of those professions themselves. It is thus perhaps not surprising that Etzioni's influential American study (1969) grouped teachers, nurses and social workers among the 'semi-professions'. Kerchner and Cauffman (1995: 108) argue that quasi or semi-professions fail the definitional test of a profession by their non-independent conditions of employment, lack of a clear definition of a knowledge base and lack of the boundaries necessary to distinguish between professional and lay activity. They also add that teaching was plagued by its association with women and children, both groups with low ascribed social status. Beck (2008: 122) concurs that one of the main reasons for its semi-professional positioning was that school teaching was and remains a strongly feminised occupation.

Professionalisation theory similarly finds that in no country has school teaching managed to achieve the common patterns of professionalisation, despite many efforts in this direction. As Whitty explains:

‘In practice, of course, in most countries the characteristics of a profession have been increasingly determined by the state, which became the major stakeholder in defining professionalism in the twentieth century. Most professionals are now employed, or at least regulated by governments. Professional status, therefore, is typically dependent on the sort of bargain an occupation has struck with the state – what is sometimes called its ‘professional mandate’. The nature of teachers’ professional mandate has become a key policy issue for governments in many countries, sometimes as part of a broader attempt to redefine professionalism, especially in the public sector, and sometimes as a specific aspect of education reform’ (2008: 32).

In South Africa, a paper prepared by the Wits Education Policy Unit for the South African Council for Educators (SACE) in 2005 argues that issues of teacher professionalisation or deprofessionalisation are not all or nothing, as there are both professionalising and deprofessionalising factors at play at the same time. However, the authors also assert that international trends show that the scale seems to be tipped more in favour of deprofessionalisation of teaching. It is argued that even though the post-apartheid policy framework is friendly to professionalisation of teaching, it contains contradictory elements and is out of alignment with the realities of teachers on the ground. In considering the improvement of school quality in South Africa Christie (1991) proposes that a way forward may be to build forms of teacher professionalism which go beyond conditions of work and which open debate on what teacher professionalism might mean.

In relation to the third analytical approach we have also already seen that teaching is viewed as having failed the test of occupational control over its knowledge base. Beck (2008: 121) argues, for instance, that because it has proved difficult to claim a ‘distinctive expertise’, teaching has long been a ‘fragmented profession’, not least because of what he calls ‘teachers’ allegiance to competing pedagogic ideologies’. Wilkinson puts it slightly differently when he argues that:

‘The crucial point at the current time regarding teachers’ knowledge is not whether a system of formal knowledge might be possible, rather that members of the education community have not united around any common body of knowledge which they collectively perceive to be essential for teaching... given this situation, it is unsurprising that the state and general public do not perceive that a licence to fuller professional control based on the education community’s possession of formal knowledge is a plausible policy option’ (2005: 428).

Why this should be so becomes clearer in the next sections where we consider two main positions on the knowledge base of teaching.

### **The knowledge base of teaching as subject matter knowledge**

Given that teaching any subject involves both content knowledge and pedagogic knowledge it is understandable that literature on teacher knowledge do not refer to one knowledge base but usually provides lists of knowledge sets that a teacher should have. In a British study of the knowledge activities of primary school teachers Turner-Bisset (1999) referred, for instance, to eleven sets of knowledge that cover, *inter alia*, subject knowledge, general pedagogic knowledge, knowledge of learners, knowledge of self, knowledge of educational contexts and knowledge of educational ends, purposes and values. Bousted and Johnson's (2005) list includes: knowledge about learning, knowledge of curriculum content, a wide range of teaching practices and methods, knowledge and understanding of particular pupils, knowledge about the complex and compelling forces that influence daily living in a changing world, the ability to adapt teaching practices and methods (:18) In the South African context the overarching concept of an 'education, training and development practitioner' (which included school teachers) similarly identified subject knowledge, pedagogic knowledge (with philosophical, curriculum and procedural knowledge as sub-sets) and knowledge of social, institutional and learner contexts as teacher knowledge (NTB & GTZ, 1997)

Yet, it was not always so. Schulman (1986) provides a fascinating retrospective picture of the development of the knowledge base of teaching. Going back to the medieval universities and even further back to the writings of Aristotle he describes a tradition of 'treating teaching as the highest demonstration of scholarship' (: 7) so that 'content and pedagogy were part of one indistinguishable body of understanding' (: 6). The highest university degrees of 'doctor' and 'master', which were traditionally used interchangeably, both meant 'teacher' and entitled recipients to be called a teacher.

Shulman then goes on to show that by the 19<sup>th</sup> century the day-long essay-type examinations that were used for teacher entry at state and county level in the United States retained the focus of teacher knowledge as subject matter knowledge but broadened the range considerably to produce the 'educated teacher'. It is worth quoting the list that he cites (: 4-5) in relation to the California State Board examination for elementary school teachers where twenty categories were tested:

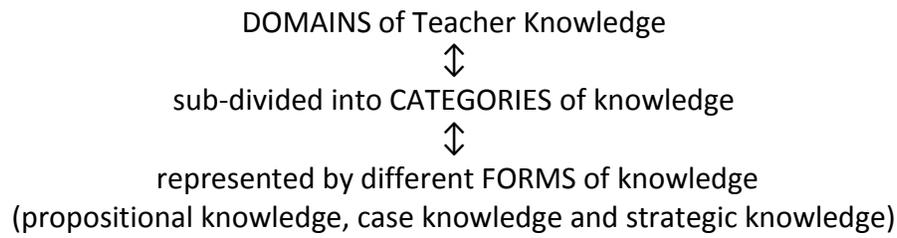
- Written Arithmetic; Mental Arithmetic; Written Grammar; Oral Grammar; Geography; History of the United States; Theory and Practice of Teaching; Algebra; Physiology; Natural Philosophy (Physics); Constitution of the United States and California; School Law of California; Penmanship; Natural History (Biology); Composition; Reading; Orthography; Defining (Word Analysis and Vocabulary); Vocal Music; Industrial Drawing.

Out of the possible 1 000 points, only 50 were allocated to the sub-test on Theory and Practice of Teaching, with test items ranging from, 'What course would you pursue to keep up with the progress in teaching?' to 'How do you succeed in teaching children to spell correctly the words commonly misspelled?' this could be called 'common sense' pedagogy, with little if any underpinning in formal knowledge.

In contrast, by the 1980s, the seven categories proposed for teacher review and evaluation in some states were:

- Organisation in preparing and presenting instructional plans; evaluation; recognition of individual differences; cultural awareness; understanding youth; management; educational policies and procedures - what Schulman calls 'teaching procedures' with no link to subject matter.

Schulman refers to the absence of focus on the content dimensions of teaching as the 'missing paradigm' (: 6) and argues that it poses serious problems for practice, policy and research. His attempt to build a systematic theoretical framework that both retrieves the 'missing paradigm' and heals the cleavages between different forms of teacher knowledge is probably the closest that a conception of a knowledge base for teaching comes to Abbott's argument about the abstract knowledge base of professional jurisdiction. In conceptual terms Schulman's framework consists of a classification of:



**Figure 2: Schulman's classificatory framework for teacher knowledge**

Taking content knowledge in teaching as one domain<sup>3</sup>, he describes it in terms of the categories of *subject matter content knowledge*, *pedagogical content knowledge* and *curricular knowledge*, thereby positioning subject matter knowledge as the central axle around which all other forms of teacher knowledge revolve.

While *pedagogic content knowledge*, which refers to ways of formulating and representing the subject to make it comprehensible to others, is often emphasised in an attempt to rectify deficit views of teachers' content knowledge<sup>4</sup>, it is important to bear in mind that in Schulman's original formulation it provides a way of distinguishing, as he put it 'between a biology major and a biology teacher' (: 10). He further distinguishes between *lateral curricular knowledge*, which involves being familiar with the curriculum materials being studied by students in other subjects they are studying at the same time and *vertical curricular knowledge*, which refers to familiarity with the curricular materials taught in the same subject in preceding and later years in school (*ibid.*) (This is often referred to as 'progression').

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<sup>3</sup> Other domains mentioned are: individual differences among students; generic methods of classroom organisation and management; history and philosophy of education; school finance and administration (1986: 10).

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Sanni and Brodie (2008).

Theoretical understanding, he argues, develops when principled knowledge and well-studied cases (as theorised instances of a more general class) are brought together to lead to the formation of strategic pedagogical knowledge. Such strategic understanding provides the basis for professional judgement and decision-making when a teacher is confronted with particular theoretical, practical or moral situations for which there are no single solutions, or which are not predictable or regular. It is professional judgement which is the hallmark of a learned profession and distinguishes it from mere craft.

'The professional holds knowledge not only of how - the capacity for skilled performance - but of what and why. The teacher is not only master of procedure but also of content and rationale, and capable of explaining why something is done' (13).

Schulman's is a thoroughly theoretical interpretation of teacher knowledge and offers a strong argument against seeing teaching only as skill gained through experience. But, as we see in the next section, this approach is highly prevalent in discussions about teacher knowledge.

### **The knowledge base of teaching as practical knowledge**

There are various theoretical trajectories that provide a rationale for the argument that the knowledge base of teaching is mainly practical. We consider the philosophical and/or political underpinnings of four main strands.

#### *Teaching as craft*

We have seen how the distinction between profession and craft runs through the course of history. So far we have considered school teaching's professionalising moves. But, there is also a counter-argument that teaching is not a profession in the conventional use of the term but rather a craft. The claim rests on reference to the experiential component of teacher knowledge.

'We would define teaching, rather as a craft-profession. Unlike the traditional professions, a craft-profession does not rest on a highly formal or codified body of knowledge. Instead, competence for craft-professionals is defined in terms of various skills and practices, reflecting a different sort of knowledge base ... much of their knowledge is embodied, something that they learn by doing and that is experientially learned, rather than acquired in a systematic, highly formal manner. This is not to say that such knowledge is necessarily less substantial, or of a lower order, than more abstract forms of knowledge. It is just different' (Pratte & Rury, 1991: 61-62).

We return later to the epistemological contradiction which occurs when teaching is labelled as both craft and profession. At this point it is important to note how, in the above argument this truncation is achieved through reference to Donald Schön's (1983) concept of 'reflection-in-action', which Schön developed by drawing on practices such as architecture, town planning,

music and science to conceptualise a reflective relation between practitioner and client that gives clients some control over their own situation. Kerchner and Kaufman argue that such a relation is typical of the relationship between teacher and students.

‘Although all professions have elements of craft knowledge, teaching’s reliance on highly indeterminate, experiential knowledge rather than codified information identifies it as a craft profession rather than an expert profession ... It is precisely the critical reflection that raises teaching from craft to profession. Reflection transforms the craft culture of teaching into a professional culture – an understanding based on verbalising the principles implicit into a tradition of criticism. This is the professional judgement – that is, a judgement based on the tacit knowledge that comes from experience and from acknowledgement of a distinctive relationship between teacher and learner within a particular social tradition’ (1995: 109-110).

### *Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge production*

Another way in which the knowledge base of teaching is conceptualised as being mostly practical is through reference to Gibbons *et al’s* (1994) argument about a paradigm shift from traditional, or what they call Mode 1 knowledge production characteristic of disciplinary research and institutionalised largely in universities, to trans-disciplinary Mode 2 knowledge production which has problem-solving as its main objective and is flexible in terms of different contexts of application. Hegarty argues, for instance, that:

‘... many facets of Mode 2 knowledge production seems highly pertinent to education – the focus on the context of application and problem solving for particular purposes, transdisciplinarity, the broad range of user involvement and the importance of social accountability. Thus, a model of research which is concerned with knowledge produced and valued in a practical classroom context as opposed to theoretical knowledge concerned with child development or psychology is more likely to commend itself to educators. Likewise, defining and pursuing inquiries in a transdisciplinary way, where the key driver is the underlying problem and disciplinary inputs have a place only to the extent that they illuminate the problem, stand a better chance of producing knowledge that can be used by the classroom teacher than university-based discipline-bound knowledge’ (2000: 455-456).

### *Phronesis as practical wisdom*

Recovery of the Aristotelian notion of *phronesis*, one of the five intellectual virtues discussed in book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, has gained significant ground in recent years in different areas of social science (e.g. Dunne 1993; Noel, 1999a, 1999b; Flyvberg, 2001; Eisner, 2002; Carr 2004, Breier & Ralphs 2009). For Aristotle the intellectual virtues of *episteme* (theoretical, scientific knowledge) and *techne* (productive knowledge or technique) were disconnected from experience and anchored in universals, including reference to the particular only as abstractly represented in general rules and formulae. *Phronesis*, on the other hand, remained experiential, open, concerned with concrete action. Breier and Ralphs (2009: 479) ascribe the

gain in popularity of the concept of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, in literature on education as an attempt to define the other-than theoretical knowledge that characterises good teaching. Dunne argues, for instance that:

‘Practical knowledge has been shown as a fruit which can grow only in the soil of a person’s experience and character; apart from the cultivation of this soil there is no artifice for making it available in a way that would count. In exposing oneself to the kind of experience and acquiring the kind of character that will yield the requisite knowledge, one is not the kind of epistemic subject that has been canonized by the modern tradition of philosophy. One is at the same time a feeling, expressing acting person and one’s knowledge is inseparable from one as such’ (1993: 358).

Although Oakshott (1962) does not directly reference Aristotle, Winch (2006) argues that Oakshott’s distinction between *technical knowledge* and *practical knowledge* is based on a reading of Aristotle that denudes *phronesis* of its moral dimension and, that it is this lineage that provides the philosophical basis for social practice theories of learning. In the social practice tradition the influential theorists Lave and Wenger (1991) take the ‘here and now’ of legitimate peripheral participation in the lived-in-world as key unit of analysis. And place distinctions between abstract and concrete forms of knowledge and concepts such as a hierarchy of knowledge forms within what they call a ‘folk epistemology of dichotomies’ (: 104). Abstraction is thus not a feature of knowledge itself but rather constitutive of the disconnectedness of a particular social practice. Such disconnectedness, they argue, occurs through lack of the access and transparency that results from ‘sequestering’. This is their term for referring to what they see as the prevention of legitimate peripheral participation in a social practice (: 104).

#### *A ‘common sense’ approach to knowledge – a political strategy*

Beck (2008) investigates the political nature of moves to represent the knowledge base of teaching in practical terms. He discusses deprofessionalising strategies advocated by the New Right in England in the 1980s to wrests control of teacher training from university education departments by positioning the knowledge base of teaching as practical common sense, with ‘immersion in practice in a ‘good school’” as the favoured model of teacher training (: 125). In Beck (2009) he employs Bernstein’s (1996) concepts of ‘official and pedagogic recontextualising fields’ to analyse current moves to reconstruct the official knowledge base of England’s ‘modernised’ teaching profession (2009). He further recruits Jones and Moore’s (1995) analysis of the narrowly behaviouristic and atomistic notion of competency developed in the vocational sector in Britain in the 1980s (albeit under the guise of being rooted in everyday work experience and in the ‘common sense’ of the ‘real world’), to point to the role that generic pedagogic modes are playing in shifting the knowledge base of teaching in a practical direction. What is being represented as common-sense reform of ‘professional standards for teachers’, he argues, is in fact a mode of competency training that has its theoretical underpinning in elements of post-fordist management theory and a loose forms of behaviourist psychology.

## Section 2: Teaching as a professional practice

We now move to a second body of literature to investigate the notions of accountability collective autonomy as other two reciprocal elements of professionalism identified earlier, having concentrated, in the previous section, mainly on arguments about the nature of the knowledge base of professions in general and of teaching in particular. We have already found that teachers do not control their knowledge base and therefore accountability and collective autonomy cannot be linked to norms held by the profession to explore these concepts we need to define professionalism from the vantage point of practice. In this tradition Sockett (1993: 9) defines professionalism broadly as referring to '*quality of practice* ... within an occupation, how members integrate their obligations with their knowledge and skill in a context of collegiality and of contractual and ethical relations with clients'. Given that schools are accountable for systematic and reliable instructional practice, we locate the idea of professional accountability and collective autonomy in the institution of the school and specifically in relation to instructional practice. This is where the literature on school effectiveness and school improvement is helpful.

Literature on *school effectiveness* focuses mainly on identifying the features of a successful school. Academic attainment is taken as primary measure of success and then processes that appear to be related to positive outcomes are 'back mapped' (Reynolds, cited in De Jong, 1999: 44) or 'infer[red]retrospectively' (Raudenbush 2009: 172) to identify common elements of successful schools. Schools thus attain successful outcomes and are then studied as models of success.

Literature on *school improvement* tends to focus on the change strategies a school employs to become successful. Particular emphasis is placed on the internal dynamic of the school, on processes of change and the management of change through organisational development (OD) interventions that support institutional self-evaluation and renewal, as well as through in-service training for both teachers and school managers.

De Jong (1999) argues that a successful school is likely to include both 'product/outcome' and 'process' characteristics that transcend the boundaries between the two traditions. It is at the intersection between these two bodies of literature that useful discussions occur about the internal and external dimensions of school accountability.

### Internal and external accountability

Against the background of increasing demands on schools in the United States for external performance-based accountability, Elmore (2004) defines the nature of such accountability as 'systems that hold learners, schools or districts responsible for academic performance' (:90). However, Elmore (2008) argues, it is not educational policy that produces performance; it is

rather that accountability policy affects the way in which schools, as organisations, respond to external signals about their performance. A key determinant of that response is the capacity of schools to produce high levels of instructional practice reliably. This, in turn, is a function of the knowledge and skill of teachers and administrators as well as of internal accountability or coherence around norms, expectations and routines for getting the work done.

‘A school in which decisions around content and pedagogy are delegated to the classroom level, in which teachers have no relationships with each other around instructional practice, in which there are no discussions among teachers or administrators about evidence of student learning, is a school with extremely low internal accountability. Such schools are relatively immune to external influences of any kind because they have no receptors for new knowledge and skill and no way of using it when it is present. Moving a school like this through an improvement process requires a focus on creating occasions for discussion and analysis of instructional practice, creating demand for new knowledge and skill, managing time and money in a way that promotes occasions for learning, and opening up classroom practice to outside influences on curriculum and pedagogy.

A school with a well-developed approach to curriculum and pedagogy, routine grade-level and content-focused discussions of instructional practice and structured occasions to discuss student performance is a school with relatively high internal accountability. Moving a school like this requires skill in using the existing infrastructure to develop and sustain focus and motivate teachers to tackle progressively more difficult problems of practice. The problem with such schools is that they often lose focus, or become complacent, not that they lack wherewithal for improvement’ (Elmore, 2008: 46).

Internal accountability thus precedes external accountability. In this view improvement is the process by which schools move from being ‘relatively atomised and ineffective organisations’ with low internal accountability to being ‘relatively coherent and effective organisations’ with high internal accountability that increase their performance and quality over time (: 64).

Elmore’s distinction between *performance* as a matter of external measurement and *quality* as a matter of professional judgement (: 53), is important to our enquiry about professionalism. If school leaders and teachers cannot interpret and act on the evidence of the effects of their practice (e.g. examination results or diagnostic tests results) there is a disconnection between quality and performance. Like Coleman in the 1960s (Coleman *et al*, 1966), he notes that many high performing schools produce a large part of their performance with social capital from outside the school and not through instruction. A direct correlation between high performance and high-quality instruction thus cannot be assumed without taking into account the important role that family and community play, independently (or in compensation) of what the school does (: 54). Where such social capital is absent, children can rely only on the instructional practice of the school. If instructional practice is poor, they have little chance of success and

carry along the inequality imposed by social factors such as poverty, low educational level of parents, community attitudes towards formal learning.

### ***How does instructional practice improve?***

For Elmore (2008: 60), practice is not a personal attribute or characteristic of any one individual and knowledge and skill are collective rather than private goods. For accountability to be about systemic improvement knowledge and skill has to belong to the system as a whole – not to individual schools or to the individuals who work in them.

‘In order for an accountability system to produce performance as a public good it has to be accompanied by a system of social relationships that take knowledge out of the private domain to make it public – within classroom in schools, among schools, and among a system of schools within a larger polity’ (: 60).

This means any practice needs to be defined as what Elmore calls a ‘collection of patterned actions, based on a body of knowledge, skill and habits of mind that can be objectively defined taught and learned’ (: 44). Such an objectified view of practice moves it away from being identified in an essentialist way with people who have the “right attributes”. He argues that schools as organisations need to be treated ‘agnostically and instrumentally’ (:50) so that ‘practice becomes something that can be changed through learning and further practice’ (:50). In this approach discussions of instructional practice are based on systematic observation of practice, using protocols derived from established bodies of knowledge in particular curriculum areas. This ‘depersonalises practice’, by focussing ‘as much as possible on the visible evidence in the classroom, not on the personal attributes of the teacher and not on the observer’s normative stance towards what is being observed’ (: 50).

‘Teachers are thought to be either “good” or “bad” depending on deeply seated personal attributes. Teachers think of themselves as more or less coterminous with their practice; they **are** what they teach. To challenge the practice is to challenge the person. This view of teaching is, among other thing, profoundly unprofessional, no anti-professional ... It is also deeply **anti**-intellectual – good practice in the essentialist view depends on who you are, not what you know and can do. But the main problem with the essentialist view is that it effectively precludes any possibility of improvement of instruction at scale. There are never enough people with the “right attributes” to go round. It makes what is essentially a learning process into a selection process, and in doing so makes it impossible to treat human skill and knowledge as the main instrument of improvement’ (:50; original emphasis).

Raudenbush (2009) takes the same position when he distinguishes between two forms of instructional practice, namely *privatised idiosyncratic practice* that is rarely open to public inspection and *shared systematic practice*, with shared aims shared assessment tools, shared instructional strategies, active collaboration, routine public inspection of practice and accountability to peers (: 172).

‘I will argue that the most powerful reforms are conceptualised from the bottom up: One begins with a vision of a community of practitioners dedicated to the success of their students and determined to relentlessly appraise and reappraise their practice to ensure that every student stays on track for success’ (: 172).

Reviewing an extensive body of educational research done in the United States, which suggests that increases in the amount and quality of schooling can reduce social and racial inequality, Raudenbush concludes that the three kinds of conventional resources which increase school quality the most are: small class sizes, teacher experience and teacher knowledge. But, he argues, none of these measures should be considered on a stand-alone basis. Instruction must be built around school-wide formative assessment systems that monitor and record the progress of every pupil, so that instruction is not left to chance or to the judgement of individual teachers. When classroom practices are opened up, the results of every student in every classroom are known to staff. Variations in teacher expertise then become public knowledge and teachers become more motivated to be knowledgeable and to have their most expert colleagues as mentors (: 177).

Raudenbush also identifies a second source with potential to improve school quality, namely formal research studies on instructional practice. Only when schools are organised in ways that capitalise on what is available both inside and outside the classroom can they ensure that ‘each child will have access to ambitious instruction capable of supporting ambitious intellectual work’ (: 176).

When Mona Mourshed, one of the authors of the influential OCED-sponsored report on *How the world’s best-performing school systems come out on top* (2007), (commonly known as the McKinsey Report), spoke at a local conference on ‘*What works in school development?*’ in 2008, she similarly identified opening up the classroom through peer observation of demonstration lessons in actual classes, as well as through collaborative development of model lessons, as practices frequently used in the classrooms of highly effective school systems.

The three major findings of the McKinsey Report were:

1. “The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers”
2. “The only way to improve outcomes is to improve instruction”
3. “High performance requires every child to succeed” (McKinsey, 2007:4)

A recent South African pilot study by Christie, Butler and Potterton (2007) reviewed a sample of schools that succeeded in achieving good Senior Certificate results, while others in similar circumstances could not do so. The eighteen schools in the sample represented a continuum of schools: seven rural schools, six schools in regional centres, four schools in city townships and one city suburban school.

The internal dynamics that enabled these schools to succeed were found to be that all these schools:

- were focussed on their central tasks of teaching and learning with a sense of responsibility, purpose and commitment.
- carried out their tasks with competence and confidence.
- had organisational cultures that supported a work ethic, expected achievement and acknowledged success.
- had strong internal accountability systems in place that enabled them to meet the demands of external accountability, evidenced most particularly in terms of Senior Certificate achievement (Christie *et al*, 2007: 5).

At a conceptual level, Taylor, Muller and Vinjevoid (2003) review a range of qualitative and qualitative large- and small-scale South African research studies that inform systemic school reform and then construct a theoretical model of the factors that influence learning (as represented on the following page). The model is based on four key constructs, namely:

- **Social organisation** of the school in terms of social values; style of social relations between officials, principals, parents, teachers and pupils; and, the internal organisation of the school in terms of task, time and resources.
- **Language**, both in terms of proficiency in the language of instruction and the promotion of reading and writing.
- **Curriculum and pedagogy**, in terms of planning coverage, sequencing and pacing, as well as the relation between school knowledge and everyday knowledge.
- **Evaluation**, or the extent to which assessment policies are in place, monitored and quality assured, as well as the extent to which teachers make the evaluation criteria explicit so that they are available to pupils.

Taking a systemic approach, their theory of schooling shows how these constructs function at all levels of the schooling system: national, provincial, district, school and classroom. What the diagram, reproduced on the next page, shows is that in this view teacher professionalism is based on **systemic coherence**. The conclusion that can be drawn is that teacher professionalism as *quality of practice* depends on synchronicity between all parts of an education system.

**Table 1: Diagrammatic representation of a social theory of schooling (Taylor, Muller & Vinjevoid, 2003)**

EDUCATIONAL FACTORS EXPECTED TO AFFECT LEARNING				
THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT	SUB-CONSTRUCT	INDICATOR CATEGORIES		
		District and	School	Classroom

		higher		
<b>SOCIAL ORGANISATION</b>	<b>Social values</b>	Values incorporated into curriculum statements	Values incorporated into school culture	Values incorporated into lessons
	<b>Social relations</b>	Style of relations between officials, principals, parents, teachers and pupils		
	<b>Task</b>	The classification of tasks		
	<b>Time</b>	The organisation of teaching and learning time		
	<b>Resources</b>	The management of resources		
<b>LANGUAGE</b>	<b>Proficiency in language of instruction</b>	Language policy set and monitored	Proficiency in language of instruction promoted	
	<b>Promotion of reading and writing</b>	Policy set	Reading and writing supported and monitored	Reading and writing at appropriate levels promoted
		Books and stationary produced and distributed	Books and stationary managed	
<b>CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY</b>	<b>Planning, coverage, sequencing and pacing</b>	Design: vertical knowledge competences and progression criteria specified. Distribution supplied, monitored and supported	Curriculum planning, coverage and progression quality assured, supported and monitored	Macro: entire curriculum covered over the year. Micro: pacing adjusted to cater for pupil characteristics
	<b>Inter-discursive relations</b>	Design: inter-discursive relations specified		Level of cognitive demand appropriate to curriculum statements
				Structuring of relations between school and everyday knowledges
<b>EVALUATION</b>	<b>Explication of evaluation criteria</b>	Assessment policy set, supported and monitored	Assessment quality assured, supported and monitored	Explication of evaluation criteria

### Collective autonomy

The interpretation of *autonomy* that emerges out of the above review of the school development literature discards the traditional view of *individual* teacher autonomy in the

classroom in favour of *collective* teacher autonomy. But this view is different from the notion of collective autonomy as we find it in the 'true' albeit bureaucratized professions. We need to return to both these issues to understand the basis of the argument.

Earlier on Kerchner and Kaufman (1995) presented the argument that in professions where professionals increasingly work in large private sector and civil service organisations, the key element of professionalism is no longer the autonomy of individual conduct in practice. It is collective autonomy, which relates to the ability of professional associations to enforce high ethical and technical standards *in the workplace*. This is achieved through the collective establishment of widely recognised rules of good service and standards for admission to practice, which enables professional bodies to exercise discretion over professional conduct in the workplace and to remove professionals from a profession's register for conduct unbecoming to a particular profession. The other side of the rights-obligations coin is that such collective autonomy grants individuals a measure of individual autonomy in the workplace, even if they are not wholly in control of their work.

In teaching professional associations cannot enforce workplace standards as this is the ambit of the state. Autonomy is thus presented as the autonomy of the individual teacher behind the closed door of the classroom. Notions of teacher independence are premised on the belief that, in their classrooms, teachers are able to have their own teaching styles, to develop their own curriculum and to use their creativity and imagination towards the achievement of educational goals. It is as if the closed door of the classroom becomes a 'harbo[u]r from mandated accountability' (Denofrio, 2001: 3).

However both Elmore and Raudenbush argued against this (as cited above). Elmore argued for internal accountability through opening classroom practices to outside influences on curriculum and pedagogy, while Raudenbush argued for a shift from what he called privatised idiosyncratic practices that are seldom open to public inspection to shared systematic practices which are routinely open to public inspection, where teachers share educational aims and collaborate actively around instructional strategies and assessment tools and where they are accountable to their peers. Inherent in these arguments is a drive towards *building collective autonomy in practice, as the basis for individual autonomy*. Importantly, such forms of practice are not just the sharing of experience. For Elmore discussions about instructional practice are based on systematic observation of practice, in accordance with protocols derived from established bodies of knowledge in particular curriculum areas. Raudenbush considers the use of the findings of formal research studies on instructional practice a crucial component of discussions about practice, as this is what makes it systematic. Both are referring to what Shulman considers 'case knowledge'. As Shulman explains it:

'... a case of direct instruction, of teacher expectations, of student misconception is a theoretical construct. Hence there is no case knowledge without theoretical understanding. What passes for atheoretical case knowledge is mere anecdote, a parable without a moral' (1983: 12).

This is an injunction for teachers in schools to theorise their own practices, with reference to established bodies of educational research and to build their formal knowledge base together to enable them to 'control and regulate themselves' (Freidson, 1994: 153), thereby gaining 'membership in the broader academic guild of professional teachers' (Shulman, 1983: 14).

This argument is by no means restricted to teaching. Arguing, in general, that peer review is essential for fully developed professionalism, Freidson notes, for instance:

'If professionalism is to flourish it is essential that practice be infused with a spirit of openness, infused by the conviction that one's decisions must be routinely open to inspection and evaluation ... one's obligation is to provide colleagues with all the data upon which one bases a decision or conclusion and to make public one's results' (1994: 196).

We thus see again that what counts as the knowledge base of teaching, is crucial to any notion of autonomy, be it in the profession as a whole or in the individual school or classroom. For this reason it is important to reconsider what should count as the knowledge base of teaching and the final section of the review is thus normative in this regard.

### **Section 3: The knowledge base of teaching reconsidered**

Thus far we have reviewed the sociological literature to ascertain a set of criteria for the notion of profession and professionalism. Taking into account a continuum of positions of professionalism and disregarding undifferentiated post-modern versions of professionalism, it is fair to say that most professions or semi-professions would display forms of professionalism that lie between 'pure' and bureaucratic professionalism. A reciprocal relation between three criteria emerged as the defining feature of professionalism as related to the notion of a profession. These were:

- level of abstraction of a profession's knowledge base in order to claim professional jurisdiction
- accountability
- collective autonomy

Against these criteria, the verdict by three analytical approaches to professions and professionalism, namely trait theory, professionalisation theory and occupational control theory, were that school teaching is not a profession. It cannot lay claim to a distinctive expertise based on esoteric knowledge does not control its own knowledge base and is, at best, a semi-profession.

#### **Can teaching be a craft?**

An alternative that emerged was to view teaching as a craft profession. We have already noted that this is a contradiction in terms. It is rather an attempt to suture the division between the knowledge base of craft and profession, which has existed since medieval times in our story, but since time immemorial as a mental-manual social division of labour. The solution proposed was to link craft to critical reflection, premised on teachers' capacity to verbalise the tacit principles implicit in their actions as the basis for professional judgement. This is a particular reading of what 'tacit' means and one which is not borne out by theoretical work and empirical studies on craft. In the above depiction 'tacit' is taken to mean that which is implied or inferred but is not openly expressed. The other meaning is that 'tacit' means wordless and refers to meanings which are embodied and cannot be put into words. It is the latter meaning which Basil Bernstein employs when he theorises of the structure of knowledge in different disciplinary fields and describes the knowledge structure and transmission of craft as 'tacit' (1996: 181). Gamble (2001; 2002; 2004) followed this up in an empirical study of a particular craft (cabinet making) and found that craftspeople neither talk nor act with an explicit awareness of knowledge principles. They recognise such principles through being able to *visualise* the relationship between 'parts' and the 'whole' and they realise them work performance. What they cannot do is to explain what they are doing in principled terms. The vignette cited below illustrates the difference between a formal and tacit understanding of knowledge principles rather dramatically (if not in a way that is complimentary to either the mathematicians or the craftspeople involved):

'At one aircraft company they engaged a team of four mathematicians, all of PhD level, to attempt to define in a programme a method of drawing the afterburner of a large jet engine. This was an extremely complex shape, which they attempted to define by using Coon's Patch Surface Definitions. They spent some two years dealing with this problem and could not find a satisfactory solution. When, however, they went to the experimental workshop of the aircraft factory, they found that a skilled sheet metal worker, together with a draughtsman had actually succeeded in drawing and making one of these. One of the mathematicians observed: 'They may have succeeded in making it, but they didn't understand how they did it' (Cooley, cited in Dowling, 1998: 4)

From this vantage point it is not possible to make the jump from craft to verbalised critical reflection as the basis for professional judgement that purportedly raises teaching from craft to profession<sup>5</sup>. The distinction made earlier between control of technique in craft and control of abstract knowledge in profession therefore stands.

From a social legitimacy viewpoint it is not 'teaching profession as craft' that will persuade the state and the general public to treat teaching as a full profession.

'Expert action without any formalisation is perceived by clients as craft knowledge, lacking the special legitimacy that is supplied by the connection of abstractions with general values' (Abbott, 1988: 103).

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<sup>5</sup> One could point out here that reflection comes *after* judgement not before.

With this avenue closed, the only plausible position is for teaching to continue in its aspiration to be a full profession. And this means working towards the formalisation of an abstract knowledge base. We have already noted the prescriptions in the school development literature of how this should happen at school and classroom level towards collective autonomy but we have also noted the crucial role of universities in the legitimisation of the knowledge bases of full professions in terms of larger social values of rationality, logic and science. It is to this issue that we turn briefly.

### Teacher knowledge as taught in universities

Bell (1981) puts forward a most instructive periodisation of teacher training institutions in Britain from the mid-1950s to the 1980s. Of course one cannot generalise from a particular context-specific trajectory, yet the way in which the teaching profession in Britain moved their knowledge base into the university is pertinent here.

Bell's argument was based on a three-year study of six teacher training institutions in different parts of the country. His findings, which he classified in accordance with Weber's ideal-type typology of educational structures, can be summarised as follows, in tabular form:

**Table 2: Bell's (1981) ideal-type typology of shifts in teacher training in Britain**

Site	(1) Teacher Training College (as found in the 1950s)	(2) College of Education (1960s→)	(3) Institute of Higher Education (mid-1970s →)
Weber's typology	Charismatic education	Education of the 'cultivated man' [person]	Specialised expert training (bureaucratic rationality)
Qualification	Two-year Certificate	Three-year Certificate + an additional B Ed year for some	Diversified, modularised B Ed as a professional degree
Purpose of qualification	'the good teacher' Educational achievement indicated less by skill acquisition than by the internalisation of moral qualities	'the educated teacher' Main concern was to produce a scholar who happened to want to be a teacher	'professional experts capable of effective teaching'
Curriculum	Integrated approach with weak boundaries between: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Main subject</b> (no subject departments and not deemed of great importance)</li> <li>• <b>Education theory</b> (action-orientated with weak internal boundary between theory and practice)</li> </ul>	Strong boundaries between: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Main subject</b> (most important)</li> <li>• <b>Education theory</b> (academic focus, to equip students to talk intelligently about educational issues)</li> <li>• <b>Professional Methods</b> (compulsory but not formally assessed – largely experiential)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Main subject</b> (diminished, disappeared or seriously undermined through modularisation)</li> <li>• <b>Education theory</b> (shifts from a disciplined approach to more applied study)</li> <li>• <b>Professional Methods</b> (formally assessed as an academic version of</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional methods</li> <li>• Teaching practice</li> </ul>		professional methods e.g. Geography in Education , instead of Geography; Early childhood mathematical experiences, instead of Mathematics)
Who taught in teacher training institutions	'Education tutors' were ex-school teachers with extensive practical experience. Tutors taught all subjects and supervised teaching practice for groups of 20 students	Designated specialists (seconded school teachers). Growing links with universities after the establishment of the B Ed degree led to academically better qualified but professionally less experienced staff.	Mainly academically trained staff, also serving as professional tutors' (in Professional Methods).
Social relations	Close personal tutor-student relationship. The 'permanent education tutorial' reminiscent of master-apprentice relation.	Less personal relations. Rational culture, with main subject pre-eminent and competence as subject specialist considered most important.	Notion of professionalism that emphasises affectedly neutral, trained expertise. Instrumental approach to main subject. No clearly distinguishable departmental identity and therefore absence of sense of subject identity among students.

Bell makes no claim that his typology represents an inevitable professionalising trajectory. What he rather wishes to show is (1) a gradual shift from a close connection between the school and the teacher training institution to close identification with university education departments – thus a shift in the basis of authority of teacher training and (2) ongoing curricular tension in the relation between main subject study, academic knowledge about education and the practice of teaching (what one could call the what, why and how of teaching). The ascendance of one component almost inevitably led to the decline of another. The crux of the tension was the theory/practice question, brought about by ongoing and ever-increasing public and hence political pressure towards functional and immediately applicable teacher training, which, as Bell (1981: 17) states resulted in 'the theory contained in the disciplines of education seen as irrelevant to practice, carrying no directives for action'.

Raymond William's contention that in specific historical moments it is useful to distinguish between dominant movements (which, in themselves contain different movements and tendencies), residual movements (older ideas and institutionalisations that have resisted transformation and persist as active forces in the present) and emergent movements (new movements, forces and ways of thinking (as discussed in Beck, 2008: 120), is a useful approach to any form of historical analysis. If applied to the above typology one would probably find that in most countries notions of the 'good teacher' persists, alongside strong arguments for the 'educated teacher', in a quest for a mix that optimally produces 'professional experts capable of effective teaching'. The very notion of professions inherently has a moral dimension (whether characterised as *phronesis* or not) so it is not an anachronistic ideal in arguments about teacher professionalism. As Bernstein argues:

'Often people in schools and in classrooms make a distinction between what they call transmission of skills and the transmission of values. These are always kept apart as if it were a conspiracy to disguise the fact that there is only one discourse' (2000: 32).

What is important is to decide which curricular combination of teacher preparation is most suited to any country at a particular time. In relation to this question we turn, in the final subsection, to a brief discussion of the current realities of teacher preparedness and teacher effectiveness as it emerges from empirical studies conducted in South Africa in recent years.

### **Current South African teaching realities**

In 2009, the Cape Higher Education Consortium prepared a report for the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) on *Educator supply and demand In the Western Cape*, with the main research question as: 'Does the Western Cape Education Department currently have sufficient qualified educators appropriately deployed in its public schools?' The findings were based on school survey data received from 641 ordinary and special public schools (comprising 144 schools visited by fieldworkers and 497 schools that responded to a bulk email/posted survey. The overall sample covered approximately 42% of the whole population of schools in the Western Cape). Educator questionnaire data on 4 545 teachers at 151 schools was analysed to establish whether or not existing teachers in WCED schools are 'adequately' qualified in terms of *formal accreditation for the teaching of a learning area/subject in a particular phase/grade (i.e. specialization in the subject, learning areas and or phases that they are expected to teach.)*

To indicate the more general nature of the problem the report begins by citing various other South African studies on teacher quality. We mention only two of the more general findings. The first is the conclusion of the President's Education Initiative research project (Taylor and Vinjevoold, 1999) that the most critical challenge for teacher education is the limited conceptual and content knowledge of many teachers. This contributes to low levels of learner achievement. A second general finding concerns the number of teachers who teach subjects in which they have not received training and here the report cites the findings of Van den Berg (2003) that only 50% of Mathematics teachers and 42% of Science teachers have studied these subjects beyond secondary school level.

The WCED report is detailed and wide- ranging so we mention only some of the main findings, namely that:

- 5% of Western Cape teachers are unqualified or under-qualified in terms of current requirements, with a higher proportion of teachers in *rural* districts needing to upgrade their qualifications for future requirements than the proportion of teachers in *urban* districts. However, 10 245 WCED employed teachers (out of 30 640) are un- or under-qualified in terms the *future* requirement of M + 4. This count implies that 33% will be under-qualified.

- Schools struggle to allocate and timetable existing teaching staff with subject specializations, obtained under a different system, into new areas of the school curriculum.
- Reduced capacity in subject expertise is most evident amongst teachers in the Intermediate/Senior Phase or middle school years for 'newer' more integrated learning areas of Economic and Management Sciences and Arts and Culture. Teachers reported having to spend more time preparing for teaching because of having to teach new learning areas and because dimensions of learning areas/subjects are out of their fields of training (e.g. teachers teaching Natural Sciences more commonly have Biology as a subject in their qualifications than Physical Sciences)
- Particularly in the Intermediate Phase learning areas such as Mathematics and Natural Sciences are being taught by teachers who teach at grade levels beyond their levels of subject expertise. Given the cumulative nature of these knowledge domains, this means that under-preparedness of teachers at the middle school level may be contributing to a cumulative deficit in learners' achievement in later grades.

It is thus not surprising that recommendations dealt extensively with the need to up-grade teachers' content knowledge and the need to channel ineffectual teachers out of the system to make way for well-qualified and high calibre new entrants into the workforce. It was also recommended that further investigation should take place to establish the extent to which teachers who are considered to be seriously incompetent or inefficient are being exchanged between schools rather than replaced by more effective teachers.

In a detailed discussion of problems facing South African schools, Taylor (2008) similarly identified teachers' knowledge and teaching practices as in urgent need of improvement. Citing various smaller-scale studies this report came to the highly disturbing conclusion that the majority of South African high school teachers would probably fail the Senior Certificate examinations (: 12). While this is a hypothesis that remains to be tested on larger and more representative samples Taylor argued that it 'confirms the urgent need to improve the knowledge of many teachers in both primary and secondary schools' (: 12).

The findings of a detailed report about what happens in schools, is no less disturbing. In a study of educator workloads, Chisholm et al (2005) found that, officially, schools generally have a five-day, 35-hour week with lesson times ranging between thirty to fifty minutes. In practice, however, there is little correspondence, in the majority of schools, between the formal school timetable and the actual length of the school day and week, as well as the actual length of periods. The school week is shorter than it should be, the school day is shorter than it should be and the length of periods varies during the school day, with little teaching happening on Fridays.

Teachers spend 6 - 56% of timetabled time teaching. In this calculation teaching time refers to the time the teacher is engaged in teaching and learning activities (whole class instruction,

individual tuition, new knowledge, revision). Time spent in the classroom is not necessarily teaching time.

Teaching time is influenced, *inter alia*, by the following factors:

- class size. Large classes are perceived as more work and there are not always enough classrooms
- the number of different subjects and grade levels taught by teacher is perceived as increasing workload
- lesson transitions. 1 - 14% of total time is spent on transitions between classes and 2.5 hours are lost in 3 days;
- organisation at school level which allows for late starts of the school day or individual teachers arriving late, early departures, little teaching happening on Fridays, teachers and learners frequently being out of classrooms, a general atmosphere of noise and disruption
- organisation at classroom level where teachers are in classrooms but spend their time on marking and portfolio scrutiny, rather than on teaching

Teacher activities that are especially detrimental to teaching time are:

- administration and assessment which refer to curriculum-related assessment and evaluation, record keeping and inputting of marks, as well as preparation of portfolios (0 - 23% of time)
- extra- mural activities e.g. sport and choirs
- fundraising e.g. selling of curry and rice, debutantes balls
- breaks, which include formal time set aside as well as informal times taken by staff (7 – 41% of school day).

Other staff activities that do not take up a lot of time, or that should take up time but do not, are:

- preparation and planning during the school day
- professional development
- guidance and counselling
- pastoral care which includes ground duty, detention, scholar patrol, feeding schemes
- management and supervisory duties which includes attending staff meetings.

The overall conclusion drawn in this report was that time for learning and teaching and the role of teachers *as teachers* need to be safeguarded and prioritised.

Subsequently and after an investigation in 2009 of the challenges experienced in the implementation of the National Curriculum Statement by a task team of curriculum experts, the Minister of Basic Education, Ms Angie Motshekga has announced to all educational role players that from January 2010 her Department will:

- Require only one file for administrative purposes from teachers
- Discontinue the use of learner portfolios in all subjects/learning areas from January 2010
- Reduce the number of projects required by learners
- Emphasise the importance of textbooks in teaching and learning

(As announced and discussed in *Curriculum News* on the website of the Department of Education, [www.edu.gov.za](http://www.edu.gov.za); accessed on 30/01/2010.)

These measures are clearly intended to ensure that teachers do indeed spend most of their time on teaching, but they will not bring about an instant transition in the teaching and learning culture of all schools. As Taylor (2008:12) notes, 'improving the subject knowledge of teachers is a slow process, even when undertaken in relative intensive form ...' The discussion in *Curriculum News* tells teachers 'the textbook can ensure curriculum content and assessment coverage, and it can also offer appropriate pacing and weighting of content and assist teachers with lesson and year planning' but ongoing challenge of building an adequate knowledge base for teachers and teaching is going to require the concerted effort of more than individual teachers using textbooks appropriately. We conclude the review by briefly stating the longer-term challenge.

## CONCLUSION

What this review has conclusively shown is that the notion of teacher professionalism in South Africa has a long way to go before it shifts from ideology to reality. Based on the available evidence one cannot even argue conclusively that current practices merit being recognised as those of a semi-profession. What is equally clear though is that the solution does not lie in turning back the clock, so to speak, to what Durkheim (1893/1984) called the *mechanical solidarity* of cohesive communities in contained geographical areas, which made it possible to achieve social cohesion through bonds of kinship, and shared experience. It is tempting to yearn for the social relations of craft and apprenticeship (as representations of mechanical solidarity), in order to get back to what Bell called 'the good teacher'; yet, South Africa, like other countries, is irrevocably on a modernising road towards the social relations of Durkheim's *organic solidarity*; social relations of an exchange of labour that is based on specialised functions and therefore on the mutual dependence of individuals on one another. School teachers can be no exception in this regard and the quest thus has to be to produce what Bell called 'professional experts capable of effective teaching'. But in seeking to do so, can we skip over the trajectory of what Bell called 'the educated teacher'?

The literature reviewed answers this question with a resounding 'no'. What it asserts is that the notion of teacher professionalism should be viewed, not just as the responsibility of individual teachers (although that is certainly pertinent) but as the responsibility teachers who act together on a collective basis in and between schools and, furthermore as the responsibility of the entire system that supports teachers in

classrooms: of all levels of government and policy making, but also of teacher training institutions in Higher Education who are responsible for the level and quality of knowledge and skill transmitted to teachers, of school leaders, managers and governing bodies who have to ensure that their schools display the internal accountability that necessarily precedes external accountability for excellent results, of professional associations and teacher trade unions that must urge their members to strive for the highest possible levels teaching expertise, while at the same time guarding against exploitation of teachers. Only ambitious systemic intervention at all levels will ensure that 'each student has access to ambitious instruction capable of supporting ambitious intellectual work' (as cited previously).

Freidson viewed the authority of knowledge as central to professionalism, so the pathway that South Africa clearly has to follow in its quest for teacher professionalism is to ensure that all its teachers are capable of exercising their authority on the basis of systematic knowledge about their teaching subjects and their rationale for teaching as well as being able to translate this into effective teaching practice that inspire, motivate and compel young people to strive to achieve their academic best.

We were also reminded by Raymond Williams of the concurrence of dominant, residual and emergent social forces. This tells us that there is no need to discard the notion of teaching as craft or to be overly cynical about the increasing emergence of bureaucratic measures that require teachers to meet their professional mandates. Like in all other professions there will and should be aspects of craft, of rational expertise, of bureaucratic accountability and all the other elements which work together to produce professionalism. It is this complex understanding of professionalism in general and of teacher professionalism in particular that the literature reviewed advises South Africa to embrace.

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