

Teacher as a Professional

Contents

Introduction

Issues relating to teaching as a profession

 Social function

 Knowledge

 Practitioner autonomy

 Collective autonomy

 Professional values

Conditions necessary for professionalism

What needs to be done?

Summary

1.0 Introduction

In your previous lesson you explored the terms 'profession' and 'professionalism'. As such you have got a basic idea as to what these terms stand for. However, you would have understood that there are many controversies pertaining to these terms and that there is still a very lively non-conclusive debate as to whether to include teaching among the more prestigious occupations. Therefore this lesson is titled 'Teacher as a professional' as we plan to discuss here whether teaching has got all the relevant attributes for it to be grouped along with other universally accepted professions such as medicine and law. In addition we will also focus on what it means to be a professional teacher.

Pre-test

Recall briefly what is meant by the word 'profession'

When teachers talk of being professionals it normally means how teachers feel regarding the way they are seen through other people's eyes- in terms of their standing, status, recognition and levels of professional rewards. Attempts to improve this status and standing of teaching are usually referred to in literature as 'professionalization'. According to Hargreaves (2000:152) professionalism means improving quality and standards of practice while professionalization means improving status and standards. These two are often presented as complementary as improving standards will automatically lead to an improvement in status. On the other hand, it also could be contradictory as professional standards relating to high-status, scientific and technical areas as standards of knowledge and skill can downgrade, neglect or crowd out the equally important emotional dimensions of teachers' work, in terms of being passionate about teaching and caring for students' learning and lives (Hargreaves and Goodson, 1996). According to Hargreaves and Goodson, in teaching stronger professionalization does not always mean greater professionalism.

These two concepts are always contested. As stated by Etzioni (1969) this is because outside education, professions have been represented theoretically in the image of those who belong to them, and who advance their interests as having a strong technical culture with a specialized knowledge base and shared standards of practice, a service

ethic where there is a commitment to client's needs, a firm monopoly over service, long periods of training and high degrees of autonomy.

Let us look specifically at this term 'autonomy'. Larson (1977) has stated that the criterion of autonomy is crucial as it helps to distinguish professional from proletarian work. Friedson (1994) argues that common sense discourses of professionalism and behaving like a professional have been captured by managerialism as a way to control white-collar workers. Meanwhile Schon (1987) has re-cast professional action as comprising distinctive reflective, practical judgment rather than esoteric knowledge (Refer essential reading 1). Along with these wider debates about the professions teacher professionalism in particular has taken a different meaning especially during the last century (Murray, 1992). In many parts of the world the evolution of the idea of professionalism has passed through many stages with each phase carrying significant residues and traces from the past. According to Hargreaves (2000: 152) 'images and ideas about teacher professionalism, and even about the nature of teaching itself linger from other agendas and other times remaining as real forces to be reckoned with in the imaginations and assumptions of policy makers, the public and many parts of the teaching itself'

The above discussion would make it clear to you that teaching is not what it was and that teacher professionalism is a concept which is difficult to define. According to what we discussed so far it is apparent that the term 'profession' refers to something of positive value but what is professional to one person may not be the same to another. Furthermore, present day discussions often associate 'profession' with another word 'power'. The word is often associated with the freedom or the power the professional practitioners have to practice their own trade. But power is also an ambiguous word with many meanings. Eric Friedson (1986) has traced the historic semantics of 'profession' showing how its various meanings have developed and how it relates to power. He has stated that it contains conflicting connotations and denotations. It is important for us to consider his views as well in relation to our topic.

In his analysis Friedson has stated that the term 'profession' refers to occupations which needs a specialized education, with a distinct public identity, and are considered more prestigious than most other occupations. There is a general consensus that doctors, lawyers and dentists are professionals but somewhat less consensus about school

teachers and others. However, we are generally aware that everyday usage, embraces more occupations as professions and teaching eventually falls into this category.

Quoting the National Labour Relations Act of U.S.A., Friedson has stated further that –

‘the term professional employee means (a) any employee engaged in work i) predominantly intellectual and varied in character as opposed to routine, mental, manual, mechanical or physical work; ii) involving the consistent exercise of discretion and judgment in its performance; iii) of such a character that the output produced or the result accomplished cannot be standardized in relation to a given period of time iv) requiring knowledge of an advanced type in a field of science or learning customarily acquired by a prolonged course of specialized intellectual instruction or study in an institution in the performance of routine, mental, manual or physical processes or learning or in a hospital as distinguished from a general academic education or from an apprenticeship or from training or any employee who i) has completed the course of specialized intellectual instruction and study described in clause iv ‘

(Friedson, 1987: 2).

However, a further review of literature on professions indicate that certain attributes have to be met if any occupation is to be classified as a ‘profession’. Hoyle (1980) using the functionalist theory of the professions has stated that professions are those occupations whose members bring a high degree of knowledge and skill to those social functions which were most central to the well being of society. Summarizing this theory Hoyle has listed the criteria that would lead to the recognition of an occupation as a profession. These are listed below.

- It should perform a crucial social function,
- Skill is required to fulfill this function,
- This skill is exercised in situations in which new problems have to be handled and are not wholly routine,

- The recipe type knowledge is insufficient to meet the professional demands. Therefore the practitioner must draw from systematic knowledge,
- To acquire these attributes require a lengthy period of higher education,
- During the period of education and training proper socialization and professional values too should be acquired,
- These values tend to center on the pre-eminence of clients, interests and to some degree they are made explicit by a Code of Ethics,
- Freedom to make their own judgments with regard to appropriate practice,
- A large degree of control over the exercise of professional responsibilities and a high degree of autonomy in relation to the State,
- Lengthy training, responsibility and client centeredness are necessarily rewarded by high prestige and high remuneration.

An analysis of the above criteria indicates very clearly that teaching does not meet all of the above requirements. However, some theorists (e.g. Sykes, 1987) feel that these requirements have only a limited relevance to reality.

In Sri Lanka and in many other countries the holders of many occupations that are not included in the permissive usage of every day life or in official categories publicly claim themselves as 'professionals'. Some critics however look at this as an organized attempt to get recognition for the trade they practice. There has been an attempt recently to altogether abandon the attempt to define professionalism due to frustrations it has caused and to concentrate more on what professionals do while at the same time focusing on the criteria that should be maintained to bring respectability and professionalism to the occupations which are essential for the development and the well being of the society.

An analysis of what we have read so far indicates to us that analytical scholars use the term 'profession' for those occupations whose competence is based on theoretical or abstract knowledge usually obtained by means of a higher education; uses that knowledge for the benefit of the clients who come to them seeking expert guidance, put service to clients as more important than material gains and have gained some protection from ordinary market forces through licensing, certification or similar devices. Though teaching is often referred to as a profession yet many, even the ordinary people would hesitate to put the teachers in the same class as doctors, lawyers or even

professors. This may be in part due to the predominance of women in the occupation as women are granted less respect in most societies. In addition it could be because of the nature of the teacher's task, which is to teach children what every ordinary adult is supposed to know. Yet others believe that the competence of the teachers is not based on a truly esoteric and difficult body of knowledge supported by well-researched theory.

Activity 1

List the important attributes of a profession. Why do you think that these attributes are important when practicing a profession?

In our next section we will look at those issues relating to teaching as a profession.

2.0 Issues relating to teaching as a profession

Hoyle (1980) has organized some issues relating to teaching as a profession around five key criteria – social function, knowledge, practitioner autonomy, collective autonomy and professional values.

We will now discuss each of these attributes and later examine how these requirements could be met. In the previous lesson we looked at the attitudes and skills required by a teacher to be a competent professional. In this lesson we can see whether the competencies acquired by the teacher along with the relevant attitude could fulfill the requirements listed by Hoyle (1980).

2.1 Social function

Here we are looking at the contribution made by a teacher to the well being of the society as a whole and that of the individual. Martin Bueber addressing a gathering of teachers as far back as 1939 stated that "Education worthy of the name is essentially education of character" (Buber, 1939, 104). By this what he meant was that the very profession of teaching calls on the teacher to try to produce not merely good learners but good people. Education of character in Buber's sense asks of teachers something more than the mere elimination of behaviour problems in the classroom. Thus the importance of education and hence teaching to the well being of society as a whole is self-evident. The benefits of education accumulate over a long period and are not the result of the work of one individual. Furthermore it is not one-to-one instruction as the

children are taught in groups of age or ability cohorts. This fact militates against the identification of one single teacher with individual achievement. Moreover, teaching at its heart needs to be based upon a holistic understanding of the taught both collectively and individually, if the expected social function is to be fulfilled. Consequently, teachers are expected to be responsible for meeting the spiritual, cultural, moral, mental and physical development needs of the students and to prepare them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.

The significance of education increases as it is often linked to the occupation. But questions are raised as to whether educational qualifications alone decide on one's occupation. There are many other variables at play especially in countries like Sri Lanka when a person is selected for an occupation. It is also pertinent to raise the issue as to why so many graduates remain unemployed if education is the main deciding factor when an occupation is decided.

Teaching also differs from other professions in terms of the consequences of the services provided. Most people would argue that this service is not vital like in the case of a doctor or a lawyer as the judgments of lawyers and doctors would have profound consequences for the clients. Teachers face such moments very rarely. However, the *Bicentennial Commission Report on Education (1976)* states a different view. According to them-

Every moment in the lives of teachers and pupils bring crucial decisions of motivation, reinforcement, reward, ego enhancement and goal direction. Proper professional decisions enhance learning and life; improper decisions send the learner towards incremental death in openness to experience and in ability to learn and contribute. Doctors and lawyers probably have neither more or less to do with life, death and freedom than do teachers..... teaching is definitely a matter of life and death It should be entrusted only to the most thoroughly prepared professionals

(Howsam, et al. 1976:15)

The above statement demonstrates the significance of learning and the vital obligation that the teachers have to the society. However, the last statement at the same time illustrates how important it is for the teacher to become a true professional in the real sense of the word. This therefore leads us to focus on the aspect of knowledge that a teacher requires to be a professional.

2.2 Knowledge

Every occupation that is normally referred to as 'professions' must have a command over a very definite field of knowledge, much of which should be specific to that particular profession. However, the knowledge base of the teaching profession remains a highly contentious issue. There seem to be some skepticism about the knowledge base which is often referred to as educational theory (Jackson, 1987). Lack of theory would deprive the teachers of one of the traditional characteristics of a profession and teaching would then be nothing more than an experience based skill with a limited set of precepts just as any other craft like plumbing or motor mechanism.

The problem about the professional knowledge of the teachers has become a complex issue as very little effort is made to distinguish between pedagogical, curricular and socio-educational theory even though each of these areas has definite functions. Moreover, during the last few decades the knowledge base of the teachers have expanded so much that it has become impossible for the teachers even in developed countries who have all the facilities to be updated with the new knowledge.

With a fast diminishing employment market employers are seeking employees with a solid academic foundation but they want the applied versions of the three 'R's. Applied reading, writing and mathematics which the employees need at their job are substantially different from the versions taught in schools. In addition employers want a set of behavioural skills such as problem solving, communication skills, inter-personal skills and leadership that are not taught at all in the traditional academic curricula. There has been a communication revolution during the last few decades and this has provided the students with more opportunities to learn through CD roms and other methods of distant learning. Interactive technologies will enable people from different parts of the world to talk to each other simultaneously, to surf on the Internet and seek knowledge by various other means without the aid of a teacher. Under these conditions, it is claimed that the mass-media and advertising have shown that they can teach better

than the teachers. The claim to the mystique of teaching has been undermined and whether the teacher is an essential element in the teaching-learning situation is being questioned.

The Sullivan Commission in the 'Year 2000 'Framework for Learning' has stated that the society is changing and that the structure of the economy is shifting from being primarily resource based to becoming a mixed economy. It has declared that-

'In view of the new social and economic realities, all students regardless of their immediate plans following school will need to develop a flexibility and versatility undreamed of by previous generations. Increasingly they will need to be able to employ critical thinking skills to solve problems and make decisions to be technologically literate as well as literate in the traditional sense and to be good communicators. Equally they will need to have well developed interpersonal skills and be able to work cooperatively with others. Finally they will need to be life long learners

(Ministry of Education Sullivan Commission:
Year 2000 Framework for Learning 1991:2).

From the above it is clear that the knowledge the teachers require is immense and consistently high if the quality of teachers is to be raised and high standards are to be maintained in teaching. In the new century the establishment of a culture of learning has to be given priority and the teachers should have the knowledge base to undertake such responsibilities.

Some educational authorities have developed criteria for teacher development to ensure that essential professional standards are maintained in the teaching profession. We are giving here the standards used by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, USA, which states that 'To receive a license to teach in Wisconsin, an applicant shall complete

an approved program and demonstrate proficient performance in the knowledge, skills and dispositions under all of the following standards:

1. Teachers know the subjects they are teaching.

The teacher understands the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the disciplines she or he teaches and can create learning experiences that make these aspects of subject matter meaningful for pupils.

2. Teachers know how children grow.

The teacher understands how children with broad ranges of ability learn and provides instruction that supports their intellectual, social, and personal development.

3. Teachers understand that children learn differently.

The teacher understands how pupils differ in their approaches to learning and the barriers that impede learning and can adapt instruction to meet the diverse needs of pupils, including those with disabilities and exceptionalities.

4. Teachers know how to teach.

The teacher understands and uses a variety of instructional strategies, including the use of technology, to encourage children's development of critical thinking, problem solving, and performance skills.

5. Teachers know how to manage a classroom.

The teacher uses an understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.

6. Teachers communicate well.

The teacher uses effective verbal and nonverbal communication techniques as well as instructional media and technology to foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction in the classroom.

7. Teachers are able to plan different kinds of lessons.

The teacher organizes and plans systematic instruction based upon knowledge of subject matter, pupils, the community, and curriculum goals.

8. Teachers know how to test for student progress.

The teacher understands and uses formal and informal assessment strategies to

evaluate and ensure the continuous intellectual, social, and physical development of the pupil.

9. Teachers are able to evaluate themselves.

The teacher is a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates the effects of his or her choices and actions on pupils, parents, professionals in the learning community and others and who actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally.

10. Teachers are connected with other teachers and the community.

The teacher fosters relationships with school colleagues, parents, and agencies in the larger community to support pupil learning and well-being and acts with integrity, fairness and in an ethical manner.

As you go through this course on 'Teacher Educator as a Professional' you will understand how each of these standards are important for your performance as a professional.

The above discussion shows that the teacher's role has to be redefined and in future the teacher would be a mediator rather than a content expert. Various authors (e.g. McRae et al 2000 ; Craft, 2000) have brought out various models from which the teachers can draw their knowledge and the practices that would lead to a deeper understanding of teaching and learning. It is believed that in future schooling will become more of a partnership and learning contracts between teachers, pupils, and parents would be the norm. Consequently, the teachers' knowledge base would be guided by these . Therefore the teachers need to retain a clear sense of purpose and vision which will help them to become professional teachers.

At the same time it should be heeded that the mastery of such a core of relevant knowledge requires high intelligence and some training. Law and medicine provide clear examples. Both these professions have an internship period. For example the medical graduates have one year of training where he/she is referred to as an intern. In the teaching it is only in some countries that the teachers have the opportunity to work as an apprentice under the guidance of a fully qualified experienced teacher. All these together surmises the fact whether every teacher could master the relevant knowledge to be a professional.

2.3 Practitioner autonomy

Autonomy is extremely essential for every practitioner to practice his/her trade but none of the professions allow their members complete freedom. The limitations to autonomy can function at various levels. For instance, a national education policy or the text books could limit the teacher's autonomy by curbing his style and by not allowing him to teach the way the teacher wants. For instance the bureaucracy in Sri Lanka has imposed many constraints on teachers by laying down the methods of teaching and even ways and means for evaluation and assessment. Sometimes the roles played by the principal and even the Sectional Heads in schools leave much to be desired by an efficient experienced teacher who has mastered and developed his/her own style of teaching. However, since the schools are 'loosely coupled' the competent teacher could exercise his/her own will as teaching is not an activity which is amenable to close control.

The threat to teacher autonomy is inherent in some institutions due to peer interference. In many systems, there is a move towards greater independence and peer collaboration. Writing on this aspect Peacock and Rawson (2001, 80) have stated that 'peer coaching and support in situ is essential to sustain changes in practices'. However, loss of individual autonomy may lead to more dependence on other institutions.

2.4 Collective autonomy

Teaching as a professional has been less successful in achieving self governing status and independence from the State. Teachers as State employees are expected to carry out the educational policies laid down by the central government. Few of the systems have self governing bodies which are responsible for admitting members and disciplining them and handling policy issues. In some countries teacher militancy has been manifest in various ways like strikes. The National Education Association (NEA) of U.S.A. with over a million members has in recent years attempted to strengthen the position of teachers by limiting the authority of school administrators within the organization. In addition, one in five teachers now belongs to the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) which is another very powerful organization which ensures rights of the teachers. Within the space of a few years AFT competition helped revolutionize the attitude of NEA leaders toward bargaining and the use of sanctions. In cities such as New York collective bargaining between teachers and School Boards are often a year long process. Consequently the control of education is very much in the hands of these

teacher organizations. But it is only in a few countries that such powerful bodies exist.]

2.5 Professional values

It is virtually impossible to make generalizations pertaining to the professional values pertaining to any profession. There is an attempt to establish professional values by observing a Code of Ethics. The conditions of this code again varies from profession to profession. But in almost all the professions the 'client centeredness' is given high priority and adequate coverage. However, in the teaching profession client centeredness is difficult to determine as teachers have multiple clientele including pupils, parents, community and even the State.

3.0 Conditions necessary for professionalism

The above discussion that would indicate to you that the teaching profession has yet to achieve professional status. Educationists (e.g. Hargreaves, 2000) the world over have over and over again pointed out that certain conditions have to be met if teachers are to be considered as professionals. These are listed in several documents in many different ways. A scrutiny of these documents enable us to focus at least on the important conditions that have to be fulfilled if teaching is to be considered as a profession and teachers as professionals. These are-

- a definite knowledge base,
- control of entry,
- a code of professional conduct,
- freedom to practice the profession,
- membership in the professional organizations,
- conditions of service, and,
- recognition by the public,
- high remuneration

You can now reflect on the extent to which the above conditions are satisfied in the teaching profession in Sri Lanka.

4.0 What needs to be done?

At present the challenge for educators and policy makers is how to build strong professional communities in teaching that are authentic, well supported include fundamental purposes and benefit students and teachers alike. The fate of teacher professionalism in the 21st century is by no means fixed. But there is a chance that a more flexible, democratic and a broader professionalism would emerge through a social movement of committed people, teachers and others who work together for its realization. The forces collecting to realize this possibility are considerable. Discussing this further Hargreaves (2000 :169) has suggested that the teachers-

- Must continue to struggle for substantial and competitive salaries for all teachers that will attract and retain highly qualified people in the profession and not just for a few in positions of responsibility or with advanced skills status
- Must counter the discourses of derision, of blaming and shaming among politicians and the media that have helped create and sustain a loss of public faith in, and regard for teachers and their work.
- Must regulate although not eliminate, the introduction of more unlicensed and un-certificated adults performing educational work in schools
- Must value and defend their entitlement to and their education in a rigorous knowledge base that under-girds their professionalism.

5.0 Summary

What we have discussed so far would indicate to you that becoming a professional teacher is a no mean task and that the teachers have to make a rigorous attempt to remain as professionals. This means that the teachers have to improve the quality of teaching rather than merely delivering and carrying the implementation of government policies.

Objectives

The above discussion would have helped you to achieve the following objectives :

- To define and describe the term 'profession'
- To list the attributes that help maintain the status of a profession
- Critically evaluate the terms standards required by certain occupations to achieve professional status
- Critically evaluate the status of teaching against the above terms and standards

References

- Buber, M. (1939) *Between Man and Man* (trans Ronald Gregor Smith, 1965) New York Macmillan.
- Craft, A. (2000) *Continuing Professional Development*, 2nd Edition. London Routledge Falmer
- Etzioni, A. (1969) *The semi-professions and their Organization* New York, Free Press
- Friedson Eliot (1986) *Professional powers: A Study of the Institutionalization of Formal Knowledge*. Chicago. Chicago University Press.
- Friedson, Eliot (1994) *Professionalism Reborn* Chicago, Chicago University Press.
- Hargreaves, Andy (2000) 'Four ages of professionalism and professional learning, *Teachers and teaching: History and Practice* Vol, 6 No2 pp 151-182
- Hargreaves, A and Goodson, I (1996) 'Teachers professional lives: aspirations and actualities' .In I. Goodson and A. Hargreaves (Eds) *Teachers' Professional Lives*. London . Falmer Press
- Howsam, R. (Ed) Corrigan, D, Denemark, G and Nash R, (1976) *Educating a profession Bicentennial Commission Report on Education for the Profession of Teaching*, Washington, DC American Association of Colleges for teacher Education.
- Hoyle, E (1980) Professionalization and deprofessionalization in education in Hoyle E and Megarry J (Eds) *World Year Book of Education 1980 The professional development of Teachers*. London. Kegan Page.
- Jackson, P (1987) 'Facing our ignorance' *Teachers College Record* 88 pp 384-89
- Larson, M.S. (1977) *The rise of professionalism* Berkeley, CA University of California Press
- Macrae D, Ainsworth G, Groves R, Rowland M and Zbar V. (2000) *A National Mapping Of School Teacher Professional development* National Curriculum Services, Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra.
- Murray, C.E. (1992) 'Teaching as a profession: the Rochester case in historical perspective' *Harvard Educational Review* 62 (4) pp. 494-519
- Peacock, A and Rawson, B (2001) 'Helping teachers to develop competence criteria for evaluating their professional development'. *International Journal of Educational Development*. Vol 21 . PP 79-92.
- Sykes, G. (1987) Reckoning with the spectre. *Education Researcher* 16 :19-21