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# Improving the professional status of teaching: perspectives of future teachers, current teachers, and education professors

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## Abstract

A US national sample of 2947 future teachers, 457 current teachers, and 1219 education faculty members was asked to rate the importance of various suggestions for improving the professional status of teaching. The results indicated that future teachers differed from current teachers and education professors. The results also suggested that all these groups rated increasing extrinsic and intrinsic rewards for teaching the most important. They felt raising the standards of teacher education program and teacher certification was also important. However, they felt that eliminating undergraduate education majors/courses was much less important. Implications for the theory and practice of improving the professional status of teaching are discussed in light of the findings. © 1999 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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The low professional status of teaching has been a focus of discussion recently. For example, Goldberg and Renton (1993) indicated the symptoms of teaching's low status remain prevalent – from inadequate student motivation and complacency to parent dissatisfaction with mediocre performance and society's low regard for teachers. Darling-Hammond (1994), Goodlad (1990, 1994), Ornstein (1988), and Pratte and Rury (1991) also analyzed and lamented the low professional status of teaching. Associated with the discussion of the

low professional status of teaching are proposals to improve the professional status of teaching. The following is a review of this body of literature.

## 1. Literature review

In the literature there were basically two lines of proposals for improving the professional status of teaching. The first focused on the teacher education program and teacher certification, including suggestions such as increasing the length of teacher training, improving teacher education program quality, and raising teacher certification standards. The other line emphasized the rewards for teaching,

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including increasing teachers' leadership and extrinsic rewards such as salary. These major ideas for improving the professional status of teaching became the rubrics for organizing the literature review.

### *1.1. To improve teacher education programs and certification*

#### *1.1.1. To increase the length of training*

Many researchers proposed to increase the length of training for teachers (e.g., Holmes Group, 1986; Miller & Silvernail, 1994). The idea usually includes the following elements: an undergraduate major in arts and sciences with an accompanying minor in educational studies, intensive postgraduate year(s) of professional preparation, and finally a clinical master's degree available to interns once they become practicing teachers. It was argued that states should abolish the undergraduate degree in education and make professional teacher education a graduate level enterprise (e.g., Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986; Holmes Group, 1986).

#### *1.1.2. To raise program standards*

Requirements for entry into teacher education programs were raised and imposed in a number of states (American Council on Education, 1985). These requirements were intended to upgrade the academic quality of teacher education students (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1988). The Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy (1986) suggested that to assure teachers receive adequate preparation in their field of study, college faculties and disciplinary societies should undertake a thorough reexamination of undergraduate programs in the arts and sciences to ensure their appropriateness for the preparation of professional teachers. Some researchers and organizations proposed to establish professional development schools that aim to provide new models of teacher education and development by serving as exemplars of practice, builders of knowledge, and vehicles for communicating professional understandings among teacher educators, novices, and veteran teachers (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 1994; Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1988; Goodlad, 1994; Goodlad &

Sirotnik, 1988; Holmes Group, 1986; Levine, 1992; Osguthorpe, 1995).

#### *1.1.3. To raise the exit-level standards*

The teaching profession began to engage in serious standard setting that reflects a growing knowledge base about teaching and a growing consensus about what teachers should be able to do to help all students learn to high levels. The National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers were among the organizations that enhance reciprocity and make uniform certifying standards among the states. The Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy (1986) suggested that the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards should be created to establish standards for high levels of competence in the teaching profession, to assess the qualifications of those seeking board certification, and to grant certificates to those who meet the standards. Several national organizations tried to raise the exit-level standards (Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium, 1991; National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 1991; National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 1993). Some states, such as Texas, used testing of practicing teachers as a method to improve the quality of the teaching force and, therefore, to raise the status of teaching (Shepard, 1987).

### *1.2. To improve the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards for teaching*

#### *1.2.1. To increase teachers' leadership and build a career ladder into teaching*

Effective teaching research of the late 1960s through the 1970s influenced policy makers and educators to focus almost exclusively on basic skill instruction and specific teaching functions (Rosenshine, 1983). As a consequence, educators failed to extend their thinking about significant teaching goals and, therefore, limited their involvement in key decision making activities that affected students, schools, and their own professional growth. For this reason the recent restructuring efforts had to convince teachers of their efficacy and responsibility for decision making (Sykes, 1990).

Generally speaking, the argument to increase teachers' leadership is associated with the notion that true professionals are entitled to decision making and leadership. Therefore, the literature on site-based decision making, teacher empowerment, shared leadership, and distributed leadership was consistent with this proposal (e.g., Austin & Reynolds, 1990; Grace, 1995; Lipham, 1991; Sergiovanni, 1991; Vandenberghe, 1995). For example, Whitaker and Moses (1995) suggested that schools must create a more thoughtful workplace where teachers are empowered to make decisions affecting their work. They suggested further that principals should create the following conditions to empower teachers: (a) letting the teachers make decisions; (b) learning to relinquish control; (c) organizing into teacher teams; (d) coming to grips with empowerment; and (e) getting rid of the hierarchical organizational structure.

Teaching has long been characterized as careerless and flat (e.g., Goodlad, 1984; Lortie, 1975; Shen, 1997; Whitaker & Moses, 1995). Therefore, to build a career ladder in teaching becomes an argument for improving the professional status of teaching. For example, The Holmes Group (1986) proposed a career ladder from instructors, to professional teachers, and to career professionals. The Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy (1986) and Goodlad (1984) argued for the need to develop a small cadre of teachers who are experienced, effective, and educated at a much higher level.

### *1.2.2. To increase extrinsic rewards*

Teachers' low pay has been characterized as a culprit of the low professional status of teaching. The Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy (1986) and the Holmes Group (1986) suggested states and school boards, working closely with teachers, should establish incentive systems that link teachers' compensation to student performance. Several different types of performance-based compensation systems, such as merit and incentive pay, were advanced during the 1980s reform movement (Barber & Klein, 1983; Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1988; Rosenholtz & Smylie, 1984; Shulman, 1987). Associated with the salary was the argument that working conditions for

teachers also needed improvement (Lieberman & Miller, 1986; Sykes, 1987; Whitaker & Moses, 1995).

### *1.2.3. Professionalism issues outside the US*

Improving the status of the teaching profession is also an issue in other Western countries. For example, Judge (1988) studied public perceptions of the role and status of teachers in the United Kingdom, among other nations. Robinson (1995) examined the status of the teaching profession in England and Wales and proposed an agenda for improving teacher education and the professional status of teaching. In Australia, Whalley (1986) warned that educational malpractice development in the US may affect legal accountability of Australian teachers. He suggested that teachers should embrace their widening legal responsibility in order to advance professionalism and teaching status. Sachs and Logan (1990) argued that Australian inservice education policies have unintentionally controlled and deskilled teachers. The authors claimed that teachers' managerial skills are emphasized over curricular and instructional skills, and that teachers' professional development and status suffer consequently.

## **2. Research purposes and questions**

The purpose of this study was two fold. First, although we used a set of rubrics to organize the literature review in the foregoing, we did not have any studies which empirically inquire into what are the major dimensions of the agenda to improve the professional status of teaching. Therefore, this study inquired into the dimensionality of the agenda for improving teaching by conducting factor analysis. Second, most of the literature on this topic is produced by education professors, and no studies compare future teachers', current teachers', and education professors' ideas on improving the teaching profession. It is very important for us to be aware of the congruence and/or incongruence among these three groups because the knowledge not only contributes to the literature but also has implications for implementing an agenda to improve the professional status of

teaching. As the literature on educational change indicates, an agenda inconsistent with stakeholders' perceptions will encounter resistance in the implementation process (e.g., Cohen, 1990; Fullan, 1993).

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Sample

The data for this study were gathered during the study of the education of educators (SEE), which used a purposive, representative sample of 29 institutions across the US. These 29 institutions were representative in terms of institutional type, geographic and demographic diversity, religious/nonreligious affiliation, and the public/private dimension.

The SEE Faculty Survey was mailed to 2042 faculty members in the 29 institutions; 1219 returned the survey, yielding a return rate of 59.6%. The Future Teacher Survey was sent to 4644 students at or near the end of their teacher education programs in the 29 institutions; 2947 completed the questionnaire, resulting in a return rate of 63.5%. The Current Teacher Survey was administered to 994 students in educational administration programs in the 29 institutions; 457 returned the survey, leading to a return rate of 46%. Given the rule of thumb that a response rate of 50% is adequate for analysis and reporting, a response rate of 60% is good, and a response rate of 70% is very good (Babbie, 1989, p. 242), the data of this study are satisfactory for analysis. For a detailed discussion of the methodology of SEE, please refer to Goodlad (1990) and Sirotnik (1989).

#### 3.2. Instrument

The future teacher, current teacher, and faculty surveys were designed to collect data regarding their biographic and career information, and their perceptions of ways to improve the teaching profession, among others. These surveys asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a list of 20 suggestions for enhancing the status of teaching as a profession. The participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale, with "1"

meaning "not at all important" and "7" "extremely important."

#### 3.3. Data analysis

Corresponding to the two purposes of the study, there were two major steps in data analysis. First, a factor analysis was conducted to collapse the items into factors which depict the major dimensions of the agenda for improving the professional status of teaching. After averaging across the items within each factor, ANOVA was then conducted to inquire into whether the three groups were different in the mean of each factor. If the ANOVA indicated that there were statistically significant differences among the three groups, multiple comparisons were employed to inquire into which groups differed from one another.

### 4. Results

#### 4.1. Results of factor analysis

The results of the factor analysis are displayed in Table 1. Principal components extraction, eigenvalue greater than 1.0, and varimax rotation were employed to collapse the 20 items into factors. During the first preliminary analysis, a six-factor solution emerged, with the item "clear conceptual and practical argument for why teaching is a profession" being cross-loaded. Therefore, this item was deleted and the analysis was conducted again. The second run resulted in the same factorial structure as the first one. The factors, reported in Table 1, explained 60% of the variance.

The factor analysis showed that there were six dimensions for the agenda of improving the teaching profession. The following three factors seemed to focus on the program and certification: higher national entry, exit, and certification standards; eliminating undergraduate education majors/courses; and lengthening the training. Two factors appeared to emphasize the intrinsic and extrinsic reward for teaching, respectively. Improving teacher leadership and career opportunity pointed to the intrinsic reward, and higher salary and improved working condition to the extrinsic reward.

Table 1  
Results of factor analysis

Item	Loading	Factor
National teacher certification board	0.84	Factor 1 Higher national entry, exit, and certification standards
National program exit-level teacher examination	0.82	
Require national accreditation with high program standards for all teacher preparing institutions	0.73	
Higher program entry-level standards	0.58	
Model teacher education programs after other professional training programs in medicine, law, and so forth	0.47	
Develop leadership roles as an integral part of teaching Responsibilities	0.82	Factor 2 Improving teacher leadership and career opportunity
Develop participatory management roles as an integral part of teaching responsibilities	0.81	
Develop differentiated staffing/career opportunities based upon education plus experience	0.75	
Develop a clear, conceptual and practical argument for teaching as part art, part science, and part craft	0.62	
Eliminate/phase out undergraduate education majors	0.88	Factor 3 Eliminating undergraduate education majors/courses
Eliminate/phase out undergraduate education courses	0.85	
A master's degree in addition to the teaching credential	0.81	Factor 4 Lengthening the training
A doctoral degree in addition to the teaching credential	0.70	
Five years of university/college preparation	0.69	
Develop a small cadre (say 20% of current teacher force) of "professional teachers" with the remaining force at lower level of preparation	0.70	Factor 5 Strengthening the professional base
Eliminate "emergency certification" options	0.62	
Demonstrable, scientific basis of teaching	0.44	
High teacher salaries	0.80	Factor 6 Higher salary and improved working condition
Significantly altered working conditions for teachers in schools	0.68	

There was also a factor – strengthening the professional base – focusing on the foundation and organization of the teaching profession.

#### 4.2. Results of the ANOVA and multiple comparison

The mean and rank for each factor, and the results of ANOVA and multiple comparisons are displayed in Table 2. The ANOVA on each factor was statistically significant at 0.001 level; then Scheffé's multiple range test was conducted and the statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level are indicated in the table. There were several patterns as displayed in the mean, rank, and the multiple comparison results.

First, there were statistically significant differences among the groups in each of the factors. The multiple comparison tests indicated that generally speaking future teachers differed from current teachers and education professors.

Second, when we examined the rank order of the means within each group, the rank ordering was very similar. The Spearman's rank order correlation between future teachers and current teachers was perfect, and those between the professor group and the other two groups were both 0.94 ( $p < 0.01$ ). The two factors rated highest by all three groups were higher salary and improved working condition, and improving teacher leadership and career opportunity. They were followed by strengthening the professional base, and higher standards for

Table 2  
Results of ANOVA and multiple comparison

Factor	Future teacher (FT)		Current teacher (CT)		Professor (P)		<i>p</i>	Multiple comparison
	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank		
Higher salary and working condition	5.81	1	5.96	1	6.06	1	<0.001	FT < CT, P
Improving teacher leadership and career opportunity	4.90	2	5.45	2	5.36	2	<0.001	FT < CT, P
Higher national entry, exit, and certification standards	4.56	3	4.62	3	4.33	4	<0.001	FT, CT > P
Strengthening the professional base	3.72	4	4.03	4	4.45	3	<0.001	FT, CT < P; FT < CT, P
Lengthening the training	3.30	5	3.72	5	3.88	5	<0.001	FT < CT, P
Eliminating undergraduate education majors/courses	2.24	6	2.68	6	2.58	6	<0.001	FT < CT, P

entry, exit, and certification. The two factors rated lowest were lengthening the training, and eliminating undergraduate education majors/courses. All three groups seemed to suggest that in order to improve the professional status of teaching, it is most important to improve the extrinsic and intrinsic rewards of teaching, and also to raise the standards for entry, exit, and certification. All three groups gave very low ratings to eliminating undergraduate education majors/courses, with the means of the groups ranging from 2.24 to 2.68 on a 7-point Likert scale.

Third, it is interesting to note that except for the case of higher national entry, exit, and certification standards, the means for the group of future teachers were lower than those of the groups of current teachers and education professors. In other words, future teachers seemed to be less confident that these measures would improve the status of teaching, or they perhaps did not consider professional status to be a critical issue at their early stage of professional development.

## 5. Discussion

The data analysis shows that the suggestions for improving the status of teaching are clustered

around six factors. As to the rank order of the importance of these factors for improving the status of teaching, there is similarity among future teachers, current teachers, and education professors. They all rate increasing the extrinsic and intrinsic rewards of teaching – including increasing salaries, improving working conditions, and improving teachers' leadership and career opportunity – as the most important. They also rate programmatic and certification issues – including raising entry/exit level and national certification – as fairly important. However, they feel that eliminating undergraduate education majors/courses is much less important.

Although the three groups are similar in rank ordering the factors, they are different in the ratings they give to each factor. The multiple comparisons indicate that future teachers differ from current teachers and education professors in their perceptions. The general pattern is that teacher candidates rate the factors lower than do current teachers and education professors. These findings have the following implications for the theory and practice of improving the status of teaching.

All three groups agree that to raise teachers' salaries and improve teachers' working conditions are the most important for improving the status of

teaching. Teaching has been an area where females constitute the majority of the working force. Because of this history, teachers tend to be paid less than those having similar educational experience but working in other professional areas. This raises the issue whether our society is willing to compensate teachers more. Given the large number of teachers, it is a very difficult decision. Some scholars have argued that a small cadre of 20% of the teaching force should be developed and paid salaries commensurate with other professionals, an idea that teachers' unions strongly oppose. As much literature indicates, the teaching profession is dominated by an egalitarian ethos (Goodlad, 1984; Lortie, 1975).

The three groups feel that improving teachers' leadership and career opportunities are also important for improving the status of teaching. This is consistent with the literature which advocates teacher empowerment and criticizes the careerlessness of the teaching profession (Goodlad, 1984; Lortie, 1975; Shen, 1997; Whitaker & Moses, 1995). However, since leadership and career opportunity are related to the intrinsic reward and salary and working condition to the extrinsic reward, all three groups seem to suggest that to improve the extrinsic reward is more important than the intrinsic one. A materialistic approach to improving the teaching profession is evident.

Enhancing the status of teaching through improving the teacher education program and certification is ranked after improving the extrinsic and intrinsic rewards for teaching. All three groups agree that raising entry, exit, and certification standards, and lengthening the training will improve the status of teaching. However, they agree that eliminating the undergraduate education majors/courses is much less important. Raising entry, exit, and certification standards is consistent with the literature. However, the lack of support for eliminating undergraduate education majors/courses is not consistent with, for example, the Holmes Group's proposal, which argues for conducting all teacher education at the graduate level. It appears that the three groups do not support the pure postbaccalaureate model according to which teacher education begins after the baccalaureate degree. Rather, they support the model which

allows undergraduate education majors/courses, on one hand, and lengthens the program, on the other.

In conclusion, the data of the study illustrate that the agenda for improving the professional status of teaching involves many aspects of work. Future teachers, current teachers, and education professors are similar in prioritizing the agenda. They feel that how the work is rewarded, both intrinsically and extrinsically, is more important than how teachers are educated and certified. However, teacher candidates differ from others in that they rate most of these measures to help improve the status of teaching as less important. It is interesting to note that none of the three groups support the Holmes Group's idea of eliminating teacher education at the undergraduate level. When we work on improving the status of teaching, we must take into account future teachers', current teachers', and education professors' perceptions, among others.

The current study raises some interesting questions for further investigations. First, future teachers' means are lower than those of current teachers and education professors. Is this because future teachers do not consider professional status to be a critical issue at their early stage of professional development, or because they do not expect any of these measures to be successful, or possibly because of other reasons? Second, current teachers and education professors give similar ratings to lengthening the training and eliminating undergraduate education majors/courses. However, teachers tend to rate education courses poorly and education professors have a vested interest in maintaining teacher education programs. Therefore, do current teachers and education professors have similar or different reasons for their similar ratings? Finally, all three groups indicate that extrinsic rewards are more important than intrinsic rewards for improving the professional status of teaching. A materialistic approach to improving the professional status of teaching is obvious. However, is this a valid approach to improving the status for teaching and how does the public perceive the approach? In this research area, there are many important questions to be investigated.

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