

## Fostering a Culture of Professionalism in Teacher Preparation Programs

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### Abstract

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Professionalism and how it is to be acquired should be a focus of every teacher education program. Despite the significant role professionalism plays, a lack of a universally accepted method of assessing professionalism has been challenging to teacher education programs. This paper examines professionalism and presents characteristics specific to the teaching profession based on Hart and Marshall's (1992) fundamental characteristics of a profession and the work of Vollmer. Each of these fundamental aspects is addressed as well as the relevancy to fostering a professional culture in teacher education programs.

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**Keywords:** professionalism; dispositions; teacher preparation

### 1. Introduction

How does a teacher candidate learn to be a professional? Most teacher education programs expect their students to graduate from their programs with the dispositions of a professional. The question that teacher education programs must consider when seeking to instill professionalism is: How and when does this transformation of a teacher candidate to a professional occur? The professional development of teacher candidates may be well planned or it may be erratic depending on the individual teacher education program. For example, if the program believes that promptness is important professional behavior but not all faculty members hold students accountable (e.g., deduct points for students being tardy to class), then the message sent to students about the importance of promptness is ambiguous. "This raises the possibility that while trying to solve the problem, faculty members might be inadvertently exacerbating it, due to differing perceptions about the nature of professionalism" (Brown & Ferrill, 2009, 2). Perhaps it is assumed and taken for granted that pre-service teachers will simply become professionals as a result of completing the teacher education program. Perhaps teacher educators believe that professional dispositions will be automatically acquired through field experiences. Whatever the belief or assumption, the fact is that professionalism and the acquisition of professional dispositions is believed to be important is shared by 22 different Specialized Professional Associations (SPAs); almost all of which have at least one standard addressing "professionalism". Across the various disciplines of teacher education it is clear that "educators are expected to develop the characteristics of a professional and model professionalism every day" (Kramer, 2003, p. 22).

### 2. What is "Professionalism"

When asked to define "professionalism," the definition would probably include examples of what is commonly considered professional-like behaviors. To define the term "professionalism" is elusive and organizations have crafted definitions to meet the specific needs of their profession. In the teacher education literature, most definitions agree that a professional demonstrates behaviors which portray the knowledge and skills of the profession. Thus, professionalism is defined as "an ideal to which individuals and occupational groups aspire, in order to distinguish themselves from other workers" (Pratte & Rury, 1991, p 60). Grady, Helbling and Lubeck (2008) added that a professional also "exercises discretion in making decisions within the scope of their expertise, and they assume some authority for their own professional development" (p. 603).

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Regardless of the lack of a universally accepted professionalism definition, what is consistent in the relevant literature is that professionals are expected to have specific knowledge which they utilize to make sound judgments, specialized training, characteristics that are unique to their field, and standards to which they are accountable. Professionalism is multifaceted and therefore difficult to define (Brehm et al., 2006). Brehm argues that professionalism is divided into the three categories; 1) professional parameters, 2) professional behaviors, and 3) professional responsibilities. *Professional parameters* focuses on the legal and ethical issues to which a professional must adhere such as the local, state, and federal laws pertaining to educational and instructional issues (i.e., American with Disabilities Act, No Child Left Behind, Child Maltreatment, etc.) or Code of Professional Conduct delineated by state boards of education or SPAs.

*Professional behaviors* are observable actions that demonstrate the individual's appropriate behaviors such as: maintaining appropriate relationships with students, parents, and colleagues; modeling of the appearance and attitudes of a professional; and promptness.

*Professional responsibilities* for a teacher would include demonstrating responsibility to the profession, students, the school district, the community. Examples of professional responsibility would include becoming an active member of one's professional association, volunteering for school or community functions and attending school events.

When defining professionalism, Brown and Ferrill (2009) emphasized the importance of identifying the unique characteristics of one's profession and how it differs from others.

### **3. The Profession of Teaching**

Hart and Marshall (1992) reviewed the literature on what makes a profession in the United States. They identified five fundamental aspects or categories that represent the "characteristics, variables, and criteria" of any profession in general and teaching in particular. The common elements are: 1) the presence of a specific body of knowledge, 2) the ideal of service, 3) ethical codes, 4) autonomy, and 5) distinctive culture. These elements will be described and the relevance of each to the development of a culture of professionalism in teaching will be discussed. In addition, this paper will discuss the obedience to societal demands as a sixth component to the teaching profession.

#### *Body of Knowledge*

Each profession requires their members to receive specialized training. This training will assist in providing skill sets that are individual to that profession (Hart & Marshall, 1992). Hart and Marshall (1992, p 3) state the following: "it is the possession of such knowledge that separates professionals from laypeople". Thus, the field of education is no different. Persons that are in possession of teaching licensures/certifications have acquired a distinctive body of knowledge and received specialized training. Schulman (1987) outlines seven different categories that compose the body of knowledge. These categories are 1) content knowledge, 2) general pedagogical knowledge, 3) curriculum knowledge, 4) pedagogical content knowledge, 5) knowledge of learners and their characteristics, 6) knowledge of educational contexts, and 7) knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values.

The distinctive knowledge base of education is accrued not only through formal education, but experiential learning. Specifically, "teaching is acknowledged to be a complex, multi-dimensional act which calls on many different types of knowledge, actions, behaviors, and decision making abilities" (Hart & Marshall, 1992, p. 8). Pratte and Rury (1991) recognize, as did Hart and Marshall, that teaching is a "multi-dimensional act" and differentiate educators further than simply the knowledge that is possessed by those in this profession. Pratte and Rury have determined that educators are "craft professionals". They identify that craft can be defined as "an art or skill in a field or calling" (p. 64). For one to be a professional educator, one must acquire and develop a sense of craft (Pratte&Rury).

A member of a craft profession, such as an educator, differentiates from other professions in that other professions have their specific body of knowledge, but the profession may not require a specific art or skill. Pratte and Rury (1991, pp 64-65) identify that "becoming a skillful teacher, or craft-professional, is not simply becoming able to skillfully teach. It is also becoming able to judge one's teaching performance by the standards of good teaching and judgment about what constitutes good teaching, and what might be better, and what is inappropriate or unacceptable, and this ability is best cultivated in concert with other teachers".

The acquisition of the specific body of knowledge must be "extensive and rigorous" to the extent that those in society accept that those in the profession are experts and there is an "air of mystery surrounding the profession that cannot be found in the commonplace individual (Hart & Marshall, 1992, p 3). In the past decade, the National Association for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, has focused on what teachers 'should know and be able to do' (2002 Thus, teacher education programs must address the knowledge and skills of an academic subject as well as the dispositions of an educator (Eltis, 1997; NCATE, 2002; Wise & Leibbrand, 1996). Katz and Rath (1986) define dispositions as the "attributions which summarize a trend of a teacher's actions across similar contexts" (p. 3).

What are the dispositions of a professional? It is important to note that Katz and Rath's definition includes a summary of actions that can be observed or documented through the use of behavioral observations. Many of these dispositions are what Brehm and colleagues (2006) referred to as professional behaviors (e.g., maintaining appropriate relationships, acceptable appearance and attitudes such as a belief that all students can learn). For teacher education programs the question then becomes, "Which of these professional behaviors does the program believe is most relevant to preservice teachers' success in the workplace as a beginning professional? The program must hold the students accountable for these dispositions throughout their entire program of study.

#### *Ideal of Service*

The ideal of service in the profession of education is the notion that educators should be unwaveringly committed to the community where they teach. Hart and Marshall (1992) stated that "this service involves a 'devotion' to the client's interest more than personal or commercial profit" (p. 3). An additional consideration of the ideal of service is to recognize the philanthropic facets of professionalism. The ideal of service encompasses assisting others in one's profession without being compensated monetarily or reaping personal benefits. This could include tutoring sessions or volunteering within the educational community (Hart & Marshall). Within teacher education programs, faculty and pre-service teachers should be actively engaging in volunteer activities within schools, participating in school projects, mentoring colleagues, engaging in advocacy efforts, and serving in professional organizations.

The ideal of service and credibility are intertwined with the society in which we live. Members of society can choose to award the profession a measure of credibility or diminish the profession's credibility. It should also be noted that educators must not take light the fact that the public entrusts educators with their children almost daily. Many times educators have more face time with children than even their parents. The impact that educators can and do have on their students is immeasurable. For this reason, the ideal of service is of particular importance.

#### *Ethical Codes*

Hart and Marshall (1992) describe a profession's ethical codes as serving three distinct purposes. First, ethical codes must serve as a reminder of consequences available for engaging in certain behaviors. Second, during times of conflict or difficulty, they can serve as guidance. Finally, they enhance the public's trust in the profession by showing a commitment to service. Codes of ethics serve not only those in the profession, but those outside of the profession (the clients). Adhering to codes of ethical codes provides to the public a having a sense of trustworthiness because it signifies that those in the profession are truly committed to service. Warnick and Silverman (2011) add that ethical development must focus on the well-being of all and must "generate solutions that are not only correct but correct in educationally sensitive ways" (p. 283).

The National Education Association (NEA) first constructed a code of ethics for the teaching profession that was adopted in 1929 (Hart & Marshall, 1992). This code focused on two principles, commitment to the student, and commitment to the profession.

#### *Autonomy*

Autonomy encompasses the freedom and ability to implement the theoretical knowledge and technical knowledge one has learned during a program of formalized training. When the profession as a whole utilizes its group or collective autonomy, it can control the entrance and conduct of its members. Professionals assume collective responsibility for the enforcement of professional standards of practice (Shon, 2006). This may be demonstrated through peer reviewing one's work or mentoring a colleague. Further examples include choosing teaching methods, curriculum decision making, self-reflection, collaboration with fellow in-service teachers, and participation in professional organizations.

### *Distinctive Culture*

Each individual profession has a culture of its own. This distinctive culture encompasses the beliefs regarding the norms for interactions with students, other faculty members, school staff, and administration as well as understanding and having a sense of collegial togetherness and support.

One of the places that the culture of the teaching can be observed is in the schools. Each individual school has its own culture. As a professional, teachers must be aware of the school in which they teach and adapt to this culture as needed. This is a concept that teacher education programs must emphasize to pre-service teachers, as they will be visiting schools as part of their clinical experiences. Other ways of instilling an appreciation for this distinctive culture is by assisting in or creating faculty/staff development programming, being a part of an advisory group, attending workshops, volunteering as a mentor teacher, and assisting in coordinating programmatic activities such as family night activities, holiday activities, and student field days or cohort competitions.

### *Obedience to Societal Demands*

The last characteristic is the teaching profession's obedience to society's demands. As trends in American society evolve and change, so do the expectations of American schools. Trends as well as the elements that make teaching a profession can be found on Vollmer's (2011) list of responsibilities that have been bestowed upon educators from 1900 to present. The list of responsibilities' includes a variety of academic (e.g., personal financial literacy, media literacy), social (e.g., bully prevention, gun safety, stranger/danger education), and health issues (e.g., organ donor education and awareness programs, sexual abuse prevention education), that are generic to the education system as a whole but over time has increased. A review of the list includes specialized topics within each of the traditional subjects areas, the responsibility of administering standardized testing and test prep activities and the responsibility of the reporting requirements imposed by the federal government, such as four-year adjusted cohort graduation rates, parental notification of optional supplemental services, and reports of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

## **4. Professionalism Development of Teacher Candidates**

If beginning teachers are expected to be more professional, teacher education programs need to clearly communicate to prospective students their expectations. Programs should review their promotional materials as well as mission statements. What message is the program communicating about their professional expectations? For example, does the mission of the program convey the importance of service (e.g., required volunteer hours or participation in community/school activities)?

Another strategy is to recruit only students who have the aptitude for the development of the body of knowledge. Thus, it is important for teacher education programs to consider prospective students' professional dispositions as part of admission into a program. This could be completed by interviewing students regarding the profession of education and their role/responsibilities as an educator.

Professional preparation programs must make an effort to integrate professionalism throughout their curriculum. If professionalism is addressed in certain classes (e.g., clinical and/or field experiences) students may perceive it as an "add-on" or an afterthought, and determine it unimportant (Page, 2004). The importance of professionalism can be conveyed both overtly and covertly. Overtly, the program can explain to the students the programmatic expectations upon admission to the program, and how these expectations will be assessed. One example is to "provide students with an early understanding of the end point of their studies and also to provide them with an understanding of why students are learning particular content" (Page, 2007, p 1). It can also be helpful to have guest speakers who reinforce the importance of professionalism.

Another strategy is to include programmatic assessments (e.g., professionalism rubric) to provide students feedback about their level of professionalism and behaviors that need to be addressed. Covertly, each program can integrate their expectations through the hidden curriculum of the program. The hidden curriculum is what is not directly addressed, but what can be identified through actions of faculty, class expectations, and program policies. From a programmatic standpoint, if professionalism is viewed as a process rather than an outcome, then the idea of being a professional should exist throughout both the overt and hidden curriculum (Hart & Marshall, 2003).

If not, the program may be sending mixed messages. This is a problem Archer, Elder, Hustedde, Milam and Joyce (2008) noted in a review regarding the lack of effectiveness in improving medical school graduates' professionalism. They determined that in spite 90% of US medical schools having curricular content that focused explicitly on professionalism, "the hidden curriculum may be conflict with or confounding efforts to teach professionalism" (p.771). The faculty must model the dispositions expected and they should reinforce positive displays of professionalism from students. As stated by Archer et. al (2008), "the biggest threat to professional behavior comes from the modeling of poor attitudes and inappropriate behavior by teachers and other staff, predominately in clinical settings". Thus, professional behaviors must be expected from all involved in the education of the pre-service teachers.

One approach is to offer a course dealing with professionalism or a component of professionalism (e.g., ethical behavior). For example, some disciplines require professional ethics courses in their professional preparation curriculums. Only 9% of teacher education programs offer professional ethics courses as program requirements or electives, compared to 71% of business programs, 60% of nursing programs, and 51% of social work programs (Warnick& Silverman, 2011).

Adherence to professional ethical codes is one of the five fundamental aspects of a profession, the lack of attention that teacher education programs are paying to professional ethics is disturbing. After all, as Warnick and Silverman (2011) state, "Education surely presents ethical dilemmas as difficult as many other professions" (p. 273). Education presents ethical dilemmas, and with dilemmas comes the need for ethical resolutions. The pre-service teachers in our teacher education programs would be better prepared to deal with these dilemmas if they were provided with professional ethics courses throughout our curriculum. Studies of the effects of professional ethics courses provide positive results that ethics education can make a difference, especially in moral reasoning (Warnick& Silverman). The studies also provide evidence that stand alone ethics courses worked best.

A second approach to instilling ethical codes into the pre-service teacher candidates is to include case studies focusing on ethical issues as a course requirement. Students would analyze the issues, discuss and reflect upon their importance to the profession.

Faculty could require service related activities into courses such volunteer activities at a school, participation in school and district projects, mentoring students, and serving the professional community on the local level, and in professional organizations (e.g., required membership in professional associations). Lastly, the utilization of professional journals as readings within a course or encouraging students to attend professional conferences either as a presenter or attendee causes reflection on the dispositions displayed by others. These assist in the growth of knowledge as a teacher candidate becomes informed of new ideas, best practices, and current areas of research.

## **5. Conclusion**

If teacher preparation programs are interested in the development of professionalism, then faculty must outline a systematic approach for the development of professional dispositions throughout the preparatory program. It is very vital for programs to view the development of professionalism as a process which can be transformed over time. When students enter teacher preparation programs with subjective notions as to what comprises the characteristics of a professional, programs are must employ multiple approaches to instilling the professional dispositions in the program curriculum that the faculty values.

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