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EDITORIAL

WHAT IS HAPPENING TO THE TEACHING PROFESSION TODAY?

The teaching profession is undergoing changes in its character and social status. The development has specific features that reflect the historical, cultural, and economic contexts of different countries. However, the underlying trends of this transformation are similar. This is evidenced by several OECD international surveys, including PISA, Education at a Glance, CERI, and by the upcoming Teachers, Teaching, and Multi-dimensional Professionalism project that is to be launched in 2021.

Of course, no concept of professionalism is ever completely fixed, since the content of the skills required to enter and to practice the profession can evolve over time and be transformed. The teaching profession is changing particularly as a consequence of societal changes. New curricular areas, competencies, and literacies are arising (social-emotional, financial, environmental, global citizenship, etc.). Moreover, teachers face changes in student populations. Owing to the democratization and massification of education in OECD countries, the social background of students is changing, and new educational needs are emerging. Another accelerator of current development in teaching is the new education technologies, which are shaping new instructional methods as well.

Rapid societal changes mean that what counted as adequate teaching a generation ago is currently viewed by policymakers and the public as inadequate and a target of necessary reform. Therefore, public trust in teachers and in traditional teacher education programs has eroded (Goepel, 2012) and new interpretations of what it means to be a good teacher are emerging. Changes in the approach to teacher professionalism are not completely consensual. While some see the development as an opportunity to adapt to the changing needs of society, others see “resistance to change” as a positive phenomenon, perceiving the contemporary development as being directed to de-professionalization and threatening the quality of education. In any case,

both sides agree that teaching is currently accompanied by many contradictory pressures, leading to tensions and uncertainties, reducing job satisfaction and teacher well-being, and increasing the danger of teacher burnout or dropout.

The teaching profession is naturally influenced by the style of public administration governance. Over the past three decades, the dominant paradigm of New Public Management (NPM) has transformed government in many essential regards: the stress is put on professional management, and on explicit standards and measurements of performance, with greater emphasis on output controls. There is a shift to competition in the public sector, accompanied by the adoption of private sector management styles, and by an emphasis on discipline and parsimony in the use of financial resources with the goal of lower costs for better outcomes (Hood, 1991). These guidelines are also applied to education (see Gunter & Fitzgerald, 2013; Gunter et al., 2016). They have triggered a transformation in the interpretation of teacher professionalism. New criteria of teacher quality have been established, such as student academic performance (measured by tests) and the smooth labor market integration of graduates.

Globalization gave power to supranational institutions such as the OECD, UNESCO, the European Commission, and the World Bank. Currently, these institutions represent the dominant discourse on education, harmonizing with the NPM paradigm. They express their views through expert analyses, whose (real or reputed) scientific objectivity implicitly arouses trust in their neutrality. The impact of mere recommendations issued by these institutions comes from what Hammersley (2001) designates as a kind of rhetorical violence, the effect of which “is to discredit opposition”. How can anyone oppose or even criticize affirmative words such as reform, transparency, effectiveness, and best practice?

The national reception of international recommendations such as benchmarks, best practices, and effective standards of the profession often remains purely rhetorical. In teaching practice, such recommendations can collide with resistance from the professional teaching culture, which is used to relying on autonomous deliberation about its mission in service to community. The criteria of teacher quality established by NPM and recommended by supranational institutions thus can induce discontinuity with traditional standards and values associated with the profession. It is then a challenge to find common ground on which to restore trust in teachers and their professional quality, and more broadly, in the concept and objectives of school socialization and education.

Against the background of this dynamic situation, the aim of this issue is to discuss what is happening to the teaching profession and why. The contributions collected here are aimed at exploring current developments in the teaching field in different countries.

The first thematic part of the issue consists of three papers dedicated to the factors shaping the teaching profession. These factors are official discourse, policy measures, and opinions expressed by experts on education. The issue opens with the paper *Discourses on Governance of the Teaching Profession* by Moos, dealing with the history of discourses on education. It presents the development of four types of discourse (certainly not only in Denmark): from the traditional Bildung discourse dominant under the welfare state through effectiveness and accountability discourse under the neoliberal, competitive state to eduBusiness and data-driven digital discourse. Two more general findings can be emphasized in the analysis. The first is the loss of a culture of consensus typical of the welfare state period, and the second points to hidden centers of power combining weak direct governance by the state with urgent pressure on the internalized “mandatory” choice of recommended practices.

In the next paper, *Teacher Status and the Role of Teacher Unions in the Context of New Professionalism*, Symeonidis and Stromquist explore teacher status based on two surveys by Education International conducted in the last five years. They show that teachers’ unions see changes in teacher status under the influence of NPM, emphasizing increased external control of teachers and expansion of privatization policies. The authors warn about the lack of self-defense tools of teachers, such as active participation in trade unions to make the voices of teachers more resonant.

The research study *Eroding Trust in Teacher Professionalism: An Ethnomethodological Analysis of Radio Interviews with Czech Experts on Education* by Tůma, Pířová, and Černá depicts self-appointed “experts on education” as non-traditional actors capable of expressing their opinions and influencing the concept of professionalism in teaching. In the public space, heavily colonized by media, these experts have overshadowed educational researchers in their impact on public opinion, and sometimes even on education policy. Although they do not support their claims with reliable evidence, their opinions can erode trust in schools, in education, and in teachers.

The next article, *Bias in Primary School Teachers’ Expectations of Students? A Study of General and Specific Bias Towards SES, Ethnicity, and Gender* seems to be a suitable transition to the second thematic part of the issue, which consists of papers dealing mainly with teacher preparation. Sneyers, Vanhoof, and Mahieu study teacher bias – that of underestimating and overestimating students’ learning attributes – at the microlevel of Flemish classrooms. From the 1960s onwards, a number of researchers confirmed the impact of teacher expectations on the school performance of students (the so-called Pygmalion or Golem effect). Teacher expectations resulting in underestimation and overestimation correlate consistently over the years with the gender of students, their SES, and ethnicity. The authors remind the reader that teachers

anchored in middle-class culture use, even if not consciously, attributes typical of middle-class students as the standard of non-cognitive attributes (motivation to learn, ability to plan). This can also shape the expectations of student abilities. These findings indicate an increased necessity to face such biases, and such requirements of the teaching profession represent perhaps a more important task for educational research and teacher training than test-driven teaching or other NPM requirements.

The next four papers focus on teacher education. The first one, *Teachers for Slovakia: Tensions in the Profession* by Pupala, Kaščák, and Rehúš, presents two heated issues concerning teacher professionalism. First, that of teacher qualification through a program introducing uncertified “temporary” teachers into the school system. After completing an alternative model of short preparation in the Teach for Slovakia program, uncertified teachers give the impression that “anyone can teach”. This opening of the profession raises tensions and questions over the academic dimension of a certified teacher’s education and over what is supposed to be its unassailable aspect. The second issue is that of the congruence of individual policy measures, specifically NPM measures such as the introduction of standards, testing, and the comparison of the results of pupils and schools (accountability imperative). This contrasts with the openness of the profession, which weakens the importance of the complex university training of certified teachers. According to the authors, this incongruence creates tensions and leads to defensive behavior from teachers.

As demonstrated by Holloway in *Aligning Teacher Preparation, Professional Development and Evaluation: The Orthodoxy of TAP Teachers and Teaching*, it seems that strictly prescribed norms and standards could hinder teachers’ critical thinking in and about the profession and reduce the necessary complexity of the teaching profession in the eyes of teacher candidates. The critical study of the Teacher Advancement Program applied in two US states warns against aligning instrumentally and technically consistent teacher preparation, professional development, and evaluation. The (dark) side of this method of fostering the profession is in enforcing the program as the “one and only reality of the teaching profession”.

The next paper by Orchard, Kelly, and Winstanley, is entitled ‘*Head*’ and ‘*Heart*’ Work: Re-Appraising the Place of Theory in the ‘*Academic Dimension*’ of Pre-Service Teacher Education in England. It addresses the question of whether early career, pre-service, and newly qualified teachers (novices in the profession) need academic theoretical education as a constitutive part of their professional identity. To engage teachers with theory, to what extent, and how, represents a key ongoing controversy in political debates about the status of the teaching profession. There is no doubt that classroom practice and “doing” teaching can be of significant importance for student teachers. But thinking intensely

about teaching in the abstract and with support of academic theories could be an excellent opportunity to lay the foundations for the future “reflective practitioner” (in Donald Schön’s words, 1983).

The theory–practice controversy echoes the old distinction between teacher preparation as training or as education, between expertise and *Bildung*. Theoretical education can often seem like learning empty verbal envelopes without getting students familiarized with and involved in research activities. Student teachers need to know the genesis of concepts, their functioning, and their limitations, and inquiry-based teacher education fosters a deeper understanding of the profession. In the paper *Initial Teacher Education and the Relationship with Research: Student Teachers’ Perspectives*, Tavares de Sousa, Lopes, and Boyd present Portuguese and English students’ views of the form and role of the research in initial teacher education. They found that according to the students, research was weakly embedded in teaching activities, despite its potential to enhance the professional practice and improve the status of the teaching profession. The nature, purpose, and timing of student involvement in research are crucial to achieving the desired effects.

This special issue also contains an “Emerging Researchers” section, with one paper by Ann-Kathrin Dittrich, who conducted an inquiry into *General Pedagogical Knowledge of Austrian Teachers*. The research project used a reconstructive strategy combining interviews with teachers and observations of their classroom practice. The author claims that processes of rapid change underline the necessity of continuing professional learning for teachers who experience difficulties in gathering the knowledge necessary to adapt to changes in education and to meet new requirements of the profession. The feeling of insufficient support, excessive social pressure, low well-being, and eventually, blurred professional self-concept join the negative effects of inadequate development of general pedagogical knowledge.

The cover of this special issue on the teaching profession references the “walk of fame” associated with famous celebrities. We think teachers deserve star status, since they influence the lives of so many. They open the world of knowledge for their students and help them to grow. The articles in this issue document the fact that teachers do not have easy lives today. This is something typical for all heroes.

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editors of the issue

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