Professionalization 2.0: The Case for Plural Professionalization in Education

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The Case for Plural Professionalization in Education

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Educational professionalization has long been a powerful, if highly contested, idea. Since the field's modern founding at the beginning of the twentieth century, advocates have argued for greater professionalism. If only education could establish a real knowledge base to guide practice, develop training in that knowledge, and establish stringent licensure requirements which would ensure that credentialed teachers possessed that knowledge, these reformers have argued, we could eliminate educational quackery in the way that the Flexner report eliminated medical quackery. This idea is as old as the Progressive Era and as recent as American Federation of Teachers president Randi Weingarten's 2012 call for a "bar exam" for teaching. Proponents have repeatedly hoped that such a professionalizing process would not only improve the consistency of practice but also win the field the kind of status, respect, and pay that characterize more established professions like law and medicine.

At the same time, the notion of education professionalization has had its skeptics. These critics have long questioned whether education can ever be a profession on a par with law and medicine, given the sheer number of teachers in the field, its comparatively low pay, and the lack of unity about values and the weakness of its knowledge base. They also point to past efforts to professionalize as a cautionary tale: despite a century of efforts to develop knowledge, reform training, and increase licensing requirements, there is no sign that the field has either improved the consistency of its practice or achieved the status of more powerful professions.

In more recent years, a group of reformers has argued that professionalization is not only unworkable but also undesirable. From this point of view, the kind of faux professionalization that prevails in education is the worst of both worlds—it gives monopoly control to a group that has

no track record of success and no knowledge base on which to claim its authority. These critics argue that professionalization limits educational diversity, prevents innovation, forces a unity of values on a field that is deeply pluralistic, and restricts entry for potentially good teaching candidates and school providers who do not meet the requirements of the would-be profession.

Both sides in this argument have a point, yet both sides are also missing the point. Proponents are right that the relatively underdeveloped professional structures in teaching are a key obstacle to durable improvement in the quality of instruction; it is hard to imagine improvement in practice at scale without a more professionalized system. But critics are right that medicine may not be the best model for a public field with modest pay, an uncertain knowledge base, and widely divergent ends. They are also right that educational professionalization needs to embrace change. In a period of skepticism about expert control and of lackluster educational results, the field needs a way to embrace new ideas, school models, and approaches to school improvement.

We enter this debate as a proponent (Mehta) and a skeptic (Teles) of professionalization. In this paper, we suggest that there is a way to marry its virtues with the best ideas of its critics. To make major improvements in teaching, we need to understand that professions come in many forms and that they need not possess the monopoly structure of law and medicine to effectively shape practice and generate cumulative, productive knowledge. The peculiarities of education lead us to suggest the idea of *plural professionalism*—professionalism without monopoly.

Plural professionalism is not pie in the sky. There are other professions, such as architecture, psychology and psychiatry, the arts, and the academic disciplines, that combine a high level of expert knowledge, specialized and internally controlled training, and insulation from extraprofessional control with, at least in part, a pluralistic rather than a monopolistic structure.

And there are already elements of plural professionalism bubbling up in the educational field, experiments that, if taken to scale, could create a new teaching profession, one simultaneously more professional and more diverse than the one we have today. While we do not claim that plural professionalization would magically enhance the status of teachers to be on par with other leading fields, we do think that it has the potential to develop the kind of knowledge, training, and consistency of quality practice that education desperately needs. We hope that, over time, such improved practice might gradually win its practitioners the autonomy, respect, status, and pay that they have long sought.

Defining Professionalism

Professions have traditionally been defined as fields that possess the following traits:

- A well-developed knowledge base that practitioners are required to possess

- Control by the profession of licensing providers of training and certifying practitioners to ensure that entering members meet its standard of quality

- Common norms and standards of practice which ensure that practitioners continue to meet the standards of the field (for example, hospital rounds in medicine or peer review in higher education)

- A moral code that expresses the field's commitment to the common good.</BL>

The traditional justification for the state's granting professions the right to exclusively license practitioners (such as letting the American Medical Association or the American Bar Association license doctors or lawyers) is that the potential costs to clients of an unregulated market are high, and thus professional licensing to enforce standards is an efficient way to ensure competent practice in a field.[1]

From this perspective, teaching, like other feminized fields, such as nursing and social work, is an aspiring or "semi" profession. Training is relatively short, compared to that in more established professions, and is reported by many teachers to be of limited use in guiding actual practice. In part due to skepticism about the efficacy of traditional preparation programs, alternative certification programs, which put people into school with almost no training, have grown significantly in recent years. Emergency credentials allow teachers to teach before receiving a full teaching license. And teacher licensing exams, compared to their counterparts in law, medicine, and engineering, cover much less knowledge and reflect a much lower standard. Teaching has some of the accoutrements of professionalization, but it is not a fully professionalized field.[2]

Professionalization can also be seen as an expression of cultural power over a domain. As Andrew Abbott has argued, professions are characterized by their ability to take jurisdictional control over their arena—to convince other actors that they, and only they, can be responsible for doing the work in their area.[3] The strongest professions, like medicine and law, have been able to convince the public that their work is grounded in an extensive knowledge base that they exclusively possess, a claim which has helped shape their treatment by the state and make them attractive to prospective entrants. Education has always been a troubled field with respect to claiming this kind of professional power. As a public field from its inception, it has always been under the thumb of the state, which has limited its ability to develop the professional control that characterizes law and medicine. It does not have an extensive knowledge base that guides practice or a technical vocabulary that organizes its work. It suffers from the fact that everyone has been to school, and thus everyone thinks he knows what good education looks like and how it should be produced. It is also a highly feminized field, with relatively low status and pay. For all of these

reasons, education has been frequently subject to the whims of the state, and has not achieved the kind of professional power and autonomy that we see in other fields.

The Case for Professionalization

The case for greater professionalization of teaching is powerful and long-standing. It rests on problems in the quality of classroom instruction and the relatively haphazard quality of teaching training, professional development, and feedback from practice to knowledge creation. Proponents argue that to achieve significant improvement, teaching must become competitive with other occupations, not just by increasing salaries but also by altering the social prestige and control of the workplace that attract talented people.

The most powerful argument for greater professionalization of teaching is the wide inconsistency of practice in the field. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation reports that in their largest ever video study of American classroom practice, more than 60 percent of classrooms were competently managed, but only one in five featured ambitious instruction that asked students to reason and to answer open-ended questions.[4] These patterns in how teachers teach are, of course, reflected in what students can do. Results on the National Assessment of Educational Progress regularly show that two-thirds or more of American students of all ages have mastered basic skills like reading and recalling information, but that only one-third can do work that involves application or analysis.

The inconsistency of teacher practice is not surprising, given the nonsystem through which teachers enter the profession. The United States lacks a professional system for producing quality teaching. Teacher training is conducted by more than 1,300 institutions of widely varying quality; there are fierce debates over what sort of knowledge is relevant for teaching but little codified

knowledge of the kind that supports work in other fields. Particularly in high-poverty schools, many teachers are teaching in areas outside their area of substantive knowledge. There are many skilled teachers in the United States, but most of these have "picked it up" on their own—through watching good teachers when they were themselves in school, through trial and error, and through the advice of fellow teachers.

Compare this nonsystem to the way in which more mature professions work. Professions assure quality control by developing knowledge to guide the work in their fields, training people in that knowledge, licensing them only when they have demonstrated competence in that knowledge base, and then developing ongoing standards that guide the work in the field. We hire dentists to examine teeth, lawyers to draw up probate contracts, and pilots to fly planes because there are established ways to successfully do these things that are enforced by members of the field. If serious reform requires establishing quality practice across fifty states, 15,000 districts, and 100,000 schools, the cross-cutting power of professionalization is a very attractive lever.

There is also some preliminary evidence that countries at the top of the PISA rankings use a more professional approach. A McKinsey & Company study from 2007 found that top-scoring countries generally draw their teachers from the top third of the prospective teacher pool, in contrast to the bottom 60 percent in the United States.[5] Training is also much more extensive and more frequently paid for by the state. This emphasis on selection and training on the front end lessens the need for the extensive testing on the back end, which is what we see in the United States. Teaching in such a context is also a much more desirable job (the most preferred career option for fifteen-year-olds in Finland, for example), which creates the strong pool of potential applicants that the professional approach requires.[6]

Finally, the professional approach is right to suggest that giving the field power over the core processes of knowledge development, training, professional development, and management of schools is critical both for developing skilled practice and for generating enough autonomy from the state to make teaching a desirable career. Professions are regulated by the state to ensure that they serve the public interest, but states are generally not good (in any field) at developing the kind of complex processes needed to generate quality practice. And a system in which teachers themselves had more say in the development of knowledge and standards of practice could better link research with day-to-day work in the classroom, while also engendering less resistance by teachers to efforts to make their behavior more uniform. Thus, professionalization has many virtues which should be capitalized on in a system that seeks to produce consistent quality practice at scale.

Challenges to Professionalization

The argument for making teaching more like other prestigious professions is powerful, but not unassailable. The great waves of professionalization in fields like medicine and law crested in an era in which faith in experts was exceptionally high, an era that today seems like another world. The power that those fields have over their own practice continues to be exceptionally strong, but it is hard to imagine that a field in which only 19 percent of Americans say they have a high or very high degree of trust would obtain the control over practice that lawyers have if they had to build it from scratch today. While high-profile scandals and the growing reach of the market have certainly put a dent in many professions, they have also been damaged by the increasing currency of broader critiques of the professional ideal. Conservatives in particular have argued that while professions claim that their power is necessary in order to protect the consumer, in practice the

power of experts is simply a back door for the profession and the state to collude in promoting their own interests and in shrinking the scope of the market and civil society.[7] And both those on the Left and Right have attacked professions as self-interested devices to drive up prices and reduce consumer options by limiting market entry.

Another set of concerns emerges from what critics take to be the peculiar character of teaching as a field, rather than the nature of professionalism. The argument for professional control is strongest where the costs of substandard care are acute, immediate, and irreversible. Bad doctors can lead their patients to die on the operating table, and poor lawyers can cause their clients to go to jail or face financial ruin. While the long-term costs of poor teaching are certainly significant, they are not of the sort that critics believe can justify the risks associated with provider control of market entry.

Just as significant, education displays fundamental differences of opinion about what the goal of expert treatment ought to be—that is, what constitutes an educated person. Contrast this with medicine, where maximum longevity is a widely accepted goal. In a developed, pluralistic, liberal democratic state, education needs to accept a diversity of educational ends. Less normatively, but with roughly the same effect, the United States has sufficient diversity that it may be impossible to get political agreement to impose all but the most anodyne of educational ends. Thus, allowing different communities to define those ends is the only way to prevent watered-down, lowest-common-denominator schooling. The lack of social consensus on ends, therefore, means that there is insufficient grounding for a professional claim to advance broadly accepted goals.

Critics also point to the absence of the knowledge base that exists in other fields. With a couple of signal exceptions (such as early reading), the field has not developed a knowledge base

that would legitimate the establishment of a canon of accepted practices, training teachers in them, and clearing out those who fail to conform to them. Of course, many fields in the past, the medical profession above all, established professional control in advance of having a comprehensive set of demonstrably efficacious techniques.[8] But at least the medical profession had a widely legitimate basis on which it could promise the discovery of more effective techniques and, over time, has created a progressively accumulating knowledge base that has delivered on that promise. Given that a century's worth of educational research has not, in most cases, led to a consensus on effective educational practices, either we need a different model of research or there is no consensus to be had. And with millions of teachers out in the field, the challenge of corralling them all to consent to a collective understanding of the job is much harder than with occupations like law and medicine.

These are serious criticisms, and even those—like us—who think the case for some form of professionalization is strong need to develop an approach to improving teaching that takes these critiques into account rather than dismissing them. Professionalization faces significant headwinds, and the peculiarities of teaching show the limits of overreliance on the medical model of professionalism. Thankfully, there is not a single model of what a profession is or should be. And in that diversity of models of professionalization we believe there is hope for finding a way forward that may achieve much of what advocates of making teaching a profession want while avoiding the problems and pathologies identified by their critics.

A Synthetic Alternative: Plural Professionalization

Professionalizing education is a huge project. It would require changes in status, pay, training, and the way in which the field is treated by external actors. A full treatment of those issues is beyond the scope of this essay.[9] But critical to a profession is generating mechanisms to develop knowledge, training people in that knowledge, certifying them, and getting that knowledge into use. A would-be profession today also needs to accommodate the dynamism of technological change and innovation. We believe it is possible for education to become more professionalized, in the sense of being characterized by consistent skilled practice, while adapting itself both to the special challenges of American pluralism and to education's idiosyncratic features.

The answer might be in plural professionalization. The primary virtue of professionalization—assuring core competency grounded in accumulating knowledge—does not need to be tied to the idea that there is one standard knowledge base or accrediting body through which everything flows. Rather, we take our cue from fields like psychology, architecture, higher education, and the arts, in which individual practitioners work within traditions or schools that govern and shape practice but also in which, across a given field, there is a pluralism of different approaches.

Consider the field of psychology. Psychology has many similarities to education—heterogeneous human clients whose cooperation is essential for successful outcomes; frequent disagreement over how successful outcomes should be defined; and the need for licensed practitioners to competently deliver critical services despite these challenges. Within psychology, a range of different approaches has developed over time, including cognitive-behavioral therapy, psychoanalysis, and many others. The differences in approach do not impede the field, within its various traditions, from developing knowledge and technique over time. Within each of its strands

there is an evolved sense of what good practice should look like, which then lays the foundation for training in that particular subset of the field.

The arts provide another good example. In visual art, dance, theater, and classical music there are highly divergent visions of what it means to do "good work." But that doesn't mean anything goes. To the contrary, there are exacting standards for how to play Bach or perform a turnout in ballet. Again, the organizing unit is the school or tradition. For example, some classical musicians insist on the use of period instruments and a commitment to performance traditions in place when was the music was composed, while others are attracted to what they see as the greater range and power of modern instruments and the performance possibilities they open up. These decisions imply choices about technique and about antecedents, which serve as the departure points for new work. And, of course, styles are not sequestered from one another. Artists bridge traditions and develop new ones. The arts are not a profession in the sense of requiring formal licensing from the state, but they show how very high levels of practice can accumulate across a diversity of traditions and schools.

The academic disciplines are another good analogue. Here, the core organizing units are the disciplines, which in a broad sense maintain similar standards in the awarding of the PhD but are highly heterogeneous in their judgments of what counts as good work. This pluralism allows disciplines and subfields of scholarship to develop in very different ways without having to resolve underlying disagreements about values, methods, epistemology, and other issues. Again, as in other fields, sometimes subfields that had considered themselves distinct come together in unpredictable ways to create new disciplines or fields (biochemistry). Developing knowledge within distinct traditions does not eliminate the possibility of cross-pollination; in fact, it can

enhance it by creating separate but related strands that then can both critique and reinforce one another.

There are also hybrid examples, which combine common knowledge that everyone in the field has to know with particular knowledge that develops in schools or traditions. Architecture is a good example. All architects have to pass licensing exams which ensure that they share the scientific knowledge that underlies the engineering of structurally sound buildings. But as they design, individuals choose among the variety of architectural traditions and styles that culture and history have made available to them. Psychiatry, because of its ties to medicine, is also a hybrid example: all psychiatrists have to attend medical school and pass common boards in both general medicine and psychiatry, but some then pursue additional training in one or other of the many various approaches.

Why Education Is a Good Candidate for Plural Professionalization

There are four key reasons why these pluralized fields provide the right analogue for the teaching profession. First, education is inherently a highly pluralistic field in terms of both means and ends. Second, enabling this kind of pluralism would link science and craft, as well as training and practice, within traditions in ways that are more likely to be effective than a one-size-fits-all approach. Third, the most successful models that exist in American education already take this form. Fourth, attempts to establish uniform professionalism have not worked well because they have tried to paper over the pluralism of the field in lowest-common-denominator compromises that are the antipathy of good educational practice.

Our starting point is that education is a highly pluralistic field in its means and ends. The purposes of education are highly contested. Schools are intended to fulfill economic, civic, social,

moral, and other functions, and Americans disagree on their relative importance. Some see schooling as inherently conservative, a way of transmitting the wisdom and values of previous generations to the next; others see it as a fundamentally progressive force, one that should empower the next generation to reshape the world according to ideals of justice and progress. Some think that students should learn through individual academic disciplines; others think that they should be taught to work across them or to understand the epistemology that underpins them. And, of course, there are major disagreements over whether students should be taught the Western canon or be exposed to a multicultural curriculum. None of these questions has a right answer, nor are any of them likely to be resolved. Across more than 300 million people in a highly diverse nation, citizens can and will continue to disagree about such fundamentals.

Education is also pluralistic in its modes. Teaching and learning can be accomplished through lectures, projects, labs, Socratic seminars, Harkness tables, and case studies, among many other approaches. Disciplines and fields also have methods that have been found to be well-suited to their aims. Business schools use case studies, anthropologists invite students along on digs, physicists and biologists work in labs, and architects work in design studios. Often these means are linked to presumed ends: small seminars are critical for a liberal arts education; projects are favored for those who want students to discover as opposed to only receive knowledge; business school cases help professional students think through practical dilemmas they are likely to confront.

Such diversity in terms of both means and ends is not a problem to be overcome but a predictable outgrowth of the diversity of human experience. Education is not one thing; it is many things. Embracing this pluralism allows education to travel down its many tributaries, assuming the forms that are most natural for its ends.

A system organized around a pluralism of approaches would be more likely to produce consistently good practice because it would embrace rather than avoid the necessary intersection of values and techniques that comprise good education. However, our current system, when it has sought coherence, started from the least objectionable set of ends (basic literacy and numeracy) and then used the methods of science to arrive at the means most likely to achieve those ends. This kind of technical rationality has a number of problems: (1) the ends are limited when it comes to good education; (2) given the complexities of classroom teaching, it is very difficult to develop an intervention and expect it to be robust enough to guide teachers across the many contingencies she may face; and (3) in practice, teachers frequently ignore research, especially research that is philosophically incompatible with their views of how to teach.[10] This is especially the case when teachers believe that what is demanded of them one year will shift—perhaps radically—the next.[11]

In contrast, decades of research on effective traditional public schools, parochial schools, and now successful charter schools have repeatedly identified the importance of developing a clear mission and pedagogical approach based on a set of values about what good education looks like, as well as what kind of people the school is trying to produce.[12] This mission grounds the work of these schools—engendering commitment from faculty, students, and parents—and provides a standard to guide educational decision making. These are schools in which the people who run them possess *conviction*—a clear view of what is worth learning and why and what pedagogical activities might achieve these ends. Of course, they differ widely in those convictions, from the strict traditionalism of most Catholic schools to the optimistic progressivism of Deborah Meier, but they each have a clear sense of what they are about. Just as important, a clearly stated educational philosophy operates as a compact between teachers and education leaders, making

clear to teachers that if they invest in mastering a set of practices, their supervisors will not scrap these practices just a few years later.

The challenge to date, however, has been that these "effective" schools have tended to rise and fall with their leaders. The question is how they might operate more consistently over time and at much greater scale. Our hope is that plural professionalism might provide the means by which we could move from individual schools with distinctive missions to a field that is more organized around distinct traditions.

What would it mean to organize around schools or traditions? Consider five examples—Montessori, International Baccalaureate (IB), no excuses, classical education, and "blended learning." Freed of the need to achieve consensus, each of these approaches takes a strong stance on the nature of a good education, on how to balance breadth and depth, and on how students will demonstrate their learning. Teachers, students, and parents choose approaches that are consistent with their values, removing the problem of philosophical incompatibility. Within each of these approaches is not a single intervention but, rather, a dense body of *stuff*—teacher training, norms, materials, assessments, and a thriving community of people who have taught within this tradition—which, taken together, creates greater consistency across different classrooms.[13] The paradigm here is a mix of science and craft, as those working within a tradition are expected to share certain assumptions, work with certain materials, and use certain techniques, which mark them as professional members of the clan.

The strength of this approach is the creation of vertically integrated systems that would link the various levers which guide practice into coherent streams. Each of these networks would train practitioners, organize schools, generate curricula, develop assessments, and create mechanisms of accountability aligned and anchored in a strong vision of good instruction. We can

see this in the IB program: teachers are trained and certified by IB; IB assessments serve as the anchor for lesson planning and the development of a curricular scope and sequence; and externally administered exams provide accountability for students and schools alike. Individual teachers have considerable flexibility in developing specific lessons and teaching particular classes, but they do so within a framework that provides a clear conception of what a good education is and how it can be realized.

The result for individual practitioners would be a much more coherent process of developing skill and expertise. One becomes "expert" from 10,000 hours of practice, yes, but research suggests that all practice is not created equal. Practice works only when it is situated within clear expectations that are embraced by the practitioner and that are accompanied by targeted feedback measured against those expectations. In a system organized around multiple traditions of good education, the result is that new practitioners know what they are aiming for and can get better as they move closer to a shared standard.

At the level of the field, this kind of pluralism could accelerate the accumulation of knowledge by enabling technical sophistication about how to make each of these traditions work. The pattern in American education has been to lurch wildly between antithetical extremes—one decade is about "back to basics," the next about "higher-order thinking," and then back again. These kinds of fights, while providing fodder for op-ed pages, do nothing to advance the specific, technical types of knowledge that help teachers improve their practice. Since educational traditions take a stand about what is taught and how, they enable professional discussion among relatively like-minded people. Freed of the need to debate first principles, these smaller, more compatible communities can more tightly focus on what scaffolds are needed to help students undertake a historical investigation or how best to help students master "core knowledge."

Research suggests that teachers already do this on an individual basis. Rather than looking to a unitary body of science for guidance, they consult philosophically aligned teachers, seeking to scavenge materials, activities, assignments, and other teaching materials that will help them solve practical problems in their classrooms.[14] By moving this process up to the level of the tradition, we can enable individual teachers to learn what like-minded colleagues are doing and, as a field, allow knowledge to accumulate within each of these approaches. There are better and worse ways to run a project, organize small groups, or deliver a lecture; to be an expert in a tradition would mean knowing the best approaches. What we need are mechanisms that enable these traditions to develop, capture, and share knowledge and make that knowledge part of the training of new practitioners.

Plural professionalism also has the advantage of more closely tying practice to knowledge production. Currently we have institutions, like schools of education and other research institutes, that are fairly distant from practice and are not focused on the needs of the field. Instead of a horizontal model—with a layer of research/theory/training separated from a layer of practice—we would have a vertically integrated model in which different traditions developed practices and trained their practitioners in those modes. We are beginning to see this already. As Billie Gastic describes in chapter 4, "no-excuses" schools like KIPP, Achievement First, and Uncommon Schools have partnered with Hunter College to create the Relay Graduate School of Education, which trains its practitioners in the management skills one needs in no-excuses schools. Conversely, High Tech High, a project-based network of schools in San Diego, has created a graduate school of education to train teachers in interdisciplinary, project-based methods. Both of these models are heavily driven by the needs of practice and, in fact, were started out of the realization that education schools were not producing teachers with the particular types of skills

needed in their classrooms. The outcome of these new models, from the perspective of the potential teacher, is a coherent experience. From her beginning days of teacher training through to becoming an expert teacher, she is working within one conception of what good education looks like, a coherence that enables her to accumulate knowledge, skill, and technique within that tradition.

Of course, there may be some knowledge about teaching and learning that is more universal or broadly shared. If there is a growing knowledge base about early literacy, the importance of noncognitive skills, or how people learn, students in all of these traditions should learn it. But, even here, the traditions are important as each, in its own way, incorporates new knowledge into its distinct community and value system.

Plural Professionalization in Practice: The Teacher's Eye View

What would plural professionalism look like in practice? Compare the experience of a hypothetical teacher, Pam, in today's system to what her experience would be in a pluralistic system of the future.

In today's model, Pam graduates from college in the spring of 2014 with a major in biology and a desire to help children, so she decides to become a teacher. She applies to education schools chosen primarily by geographic proximity, is accepted to one, and picks the one with the lowest tuition. She attends school there for a year and learns a hodgepodge of material, including Vygotsky, Dewey, adolescent development, the achievement gap, and the importance of helping students become active thinkers and learners. She does some student teaching in a nearby suburban school, drawing mainly on what she remembers from her own tenth grade biology class, but receives little feedback from her university supervisor, who himself has not taught in many years.

The next year she starts her full-time teaching in an urban school nearby. She finds she is radically underprepared for what confronts her. The students won't pay attention to her directions, and some of them are years behind grade level. Her first year is miserable. Over the summer before the second year she asks a couple of veteran teachers for advice, and they suggest a set of behavior-management routines to achieve order in her classroom. She tries these, and, over the second and the third years, she is able to achieve a level of stability in her classroom. Her kids are mostly doing worksheets in biology (so much for Dewey!), but at least they are doing some work.

Now imagine instead Pam's experience in a plural professionalism system. On graduating from college, she looks at the local options for teacher preparation and identifies five broad approaches available to her: classical education, IB, project-based, no-excuses, and a new network of blended learning schools. Excited by her work in a lab in college, she elects the project-based option. There she learns the ways in which a project-based approach fits into the broader landscape of educational choices, and she recognizes that as a method it values depth over breadth. She then begins an extensive apprenticeship in project-based teaching. She watches many videos of expert teachers running projects and develops a series of project-based lessons as part of her unit on lesson planning. She learns how to incorporate mini-lectures and other more traditional teaching techniques into units that feature projects but are not exclusively organized around them. Her student teaching takes place at a local school that is project based and that is also run by her teacher training institution, creating continuity between her classwork and her initial entry into the profession.

When she begins teaching full time the following year, she looks for another project-based school that is part of the same network. There things look familiar from her student teaching—the same conceptions of what good work looks like, the same teaching philosophy, and the same

expectations about how to scaffold projects. The school also provides explicit guidance on how to solve the most common problems associated with project-based teaching. She works with other teachers on how to implement projects while also providing her students with the background and contextual information they need in order to develop their understanding of biology. Parents and students explicitly choose the school because they are attracted to its philosophy and tradition. Pam has a highly successful first two years that grow coherently out of her teacher training program.

In her third year, Pam's school is visited by an accreditation team that is steeped in project-based methodology. Accountability through this kind of accreditation frees the school from the need to do the broad but not deep testing that has bedeviled project-based schools in the past. The accreditation team offers detailed feedback on what the school is and is not doing well in a way that is consistent with the school's goals; in particular, it draws on the work of leading schools in the network to suggest ways to integrate technology and to deepen instruction. The school comes out of the accreditation visit energized and with a number of new ideas about how to extend its already ambitious practice.

Plural Professionalization in Policy

The vision of a pluralized teaching profession that would give Pam this kind of experience is an attractive one. It holds the potential to attract a good number of motivated, idealistic young people who are turned off by the thinner and more uniform face of the teaching profession today. And, in many ways, it represents the "hidden potential" in changes already afoot in the sector. But it is far from obvious how policy can help us get to that more attractive world. Since the prevailing winds are, to a degree, behind plural professionalism, the key for policy reform is treading

carefully, focusing on removing the obstacles, and providing resources and encouragement to those willing to push plural professional experiments. While we imagine that, in the long run, there may be ways in which all of education could become more pluralized, in the short run we focus on concrete policy steps that might enable those actors already inclined to move in this direction to broaden their reach.

The basic principle here is that the role of the state should move to licensing networks rather than licensing individual teachers. One could begin by keeping all of the existing apparatus of state regulation—rules governing the degrees teachers need to have, state testing of students, choice of curricula, etc.—but allowing waivers for vertically integrated networks of practice if they can demonstrate their own rigorous, internally imposed standards. To a degree, portfolio districts offer a model for accountability since the central authority is held responsible for ensuring that schools meet the standards districts have established for themselves. The same approach could be applied more broadly to networks of practice in a world of plural professionalism, with an accrediting body ceding authority to those that incorporate the full range of professional functions and that meet specified outcome standards. As those networks grow and new ones develop, the one-size-fits-all rules and regulations would not necessarily have to be eliminated, but they would gradually become less important. And the opportunity to opt out of state regulation would provide strong incentives for new networks to develop and for smaller groups of schools to align with others that share their values and pedagogical approach. We think it would be particularly promising if leading traditional providers that have a defined point of view (like Bank Street College of Education, for example) decided to form such networks, along with the new entrants that have become prominent in recent years.

Particularly important in moving toward this world is a shift in the mechanism of

accountability. Today's insistence that all schools be measured by the same standards is a critical impediment to plural professionalism. Holding teachers and schools accountable to one set of tests inevitably focuses attention on those assessments. The result for teachers and schools is to force them to pay attention to multiple masters in ways that inevitably lead to incoherent education (projects one day, test prep the next). Rather, as is already the case with private schools and universities, accountability should be done through accrediting teams that share the basic values of the schools they are assessing. The role of the government should be to certify these vertically aligned networks, which would need to show that they have robust processes of accreditation in place.

In the model we are proposing, the existing network of regulations and standards does not disappear. For example, nothing we are saying here would impede the rollout of the Common Core State Standards or assessments based on them. They would still apply to all parts of the educational system outside of certified professional networks, and they would provide a baseline against which those networks would have to justify their curriculum and assessments to accrediting authorities. But in the world we are describing, students within these networked schools would be trained to quite divergent measures of what constitutes an educated person, and thus tests in one network would be incommensurate with those in others. This is a feature rather than a bug. The more educational terrain covered by these networks, the less "common" assessments based on Common Core would become. But that only suggests the need to move toward universally applicable measures of outcomes based on long-term measures of success rather than universal testing— measures like college admission and completion, future employment, or involvement with the criminal justice system.

To be certified in the way we are recommending, vertically integrated education networks

would need to develop institutions that cover many functions currently filled by different institutions across the sector. They would need to develop their own teacher training institutions (which would not be primarily MEd machines but networks of graduate schools to which teachers would continually return throughout their careers), their own research shops (through which federal research might increasingly flow), their own curriculum and assessment tools, their own teacher accreditation systems and networkwide processes for removal. Within themselves, they would perform most of the functions that other professions do, the only difference being that there would be multiple professional networks, organized regionally or nationally, rather than a single one.

We can imagine two ways in which this policy approach could go awry. The first is that it could develop fairly unsavory insider-outsider dynamics, as the accrediting authorities get captured by existing networks of practice that use their resources and attention to keep out innovative new professional challengers. The second is that the standards for accreditation could become too lax, with networks developing political allies who allow them to opt out of existing state policies without developing the full range of professional infrastructure or without developing sufficiently high standards for student performance. Either of these would defeat the goals of plural professionalism, but we are somewhat encouraged by the fact that there seem to be directly conflicting political incentives in regard to our proposed institutional design that could push against one another. Outsiders will lobby to lower standards, but insiders will probably push back. This could keep the system at equilibrium.

Overall, we think the best way to nudge teaching in the direction of plural professionalism is less weeding (removing bad teachers, closing bad schools) and more watering (nurturing networks that want to vertically integrate, raise their own self-defined standards, and deepen their

own connections between knowledge and practice). Rather than attacking the mass of existing institutions and rules, we should create clearer pathways and incentives for networks to escape them entirely. This will allow for a gradual transition from the existing system and minimize political resistance—or at least reduce the political opportunity for stopping plural professionalism from growing.

In the longer run, we might imagine that what is learned through these networks would penetrate back into the traditional system. Ted Kolderie has described a "split-screen" strategy for educational improvement, in which a minority of schools innovates aggressively and the rest do so incrementally, drawing on the lessons of the innovating minority.[15] The greater capacity for deep testing of ideas in professional networks would allow for that split-screen strategy to roll out in an ambitious way. Even if traditional institutions do not become as single-minded as the networks we describe, we can hope that the knowledge they generate can be incorporated into everyday practice in more traditional institutions. When a department wants to run a project, it will draw on the best of the project-based schools, and when it wants to work across disciplines, it will learn from IB, and so forth.

Conclusion: Pluralism but Not Balkanization

The obvious danger in what we are proposing is fragmentation, or balkanization. Much as legal scholar Cass Sunstein hypothesized that the Internet was leading to different groups reading only the news that was already consistent with their assumptions, there is a potential concern that the kind of pluralism we are proposing here could result in parochialism and insularity within each of these various traditions.[16] We think this is a serious concern but that there are ways to potentially mitigate its effects.

The most obvious mechanism of balkanization would be racial or ethnic segregation of schools, especially if networks develop that explicitly or implicitly appeal only to particular groups. On the one hand, there is no way to avoid the fact that networks that have a clear branding will not be proportionally attractive to particular teachers or students. For instance, no-excuses networks will almost certainly have more appeal to relatively disadvantaged families, as do charters in this tradition today. Up to a point, this is a feature rather than a bug; the challenge of teaching such children is, in some respects, different from that of teaching children of wealthier, college-educated parents, and it makes sense to develop a professional culture built around serving their needs. But that does not get professional networks off the hook. While parents or teachers of particular groups may choose at the end of the day not to buy what each network is selling in a proportional way, networks should still face an obligation to try to sell their approach. Accrediting authorities should hold these networks accountable for advertising for students widely across communities and for recruiting teachers from diverse communities.

Another important element of network credentialing would be to require all new entrants to the profession be taught how their respective traditions fit into the landscape of potential approaches, so that they can reflect on the pedagogical choices they are making. We also think that richer traditions will influence one another over time. Our general instinct is that real learning within the teaching profession will come, perhaps paradoxically, when we insist on less uniformity from the start. When members of particular traditions are confident in their ability to develop and implement their own practices, they will be less resistant to learning from others.

What is true of networks of practice is also likely true of individuals. Much as experienced scholars often turn to interdisciplinary work, we think that it is possible that highly skilled teachers might eventually be able to work within multiple pedagogical modes. But it would be best if those

teachers had mastered one tradition first, much as scholars generally need to master a particular discipline before they begin to work across fields.

Conventional efforts to achieve teacher professionalization in the United States have been frequently frustrated by the fact that the United States is too diverse, the needs and preferences of students and parents too varied, and the question of "what works" too indeterminate for teaching to become a unitary profession. Working with such a goal has led only to frustration and resistance, and a convergence—if on anything—to the lowest common denominator. But that does not mean that the professional ideal is a pipe dream. By nurturing a range of professional teaching communities to form, to learn, to innovate, and to build their own institutions, we can create a uniquely American teaching profession. We owe the teachers of the future, their students, and the nation nothing less.

<u>Notes</u>

[1] Eliot Freidson, *Professionalism: The Third Logic* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2001).

[2] For an extended discussion of education as a profession, see Jal Mehta, *The Allure of Order: High Hopes, Dashed Expectations, and the Troubled Quest to Remake American Schooling* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[3] Andrew Abbott, *The System of Professions* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988.

[4] Measures of Effective Teaching Project, "Gathering Feedback for Teaching," Gates Foundation, 2012, http://www.metproject.org/downloads/MET_Gathering_Feedback_Research_Paper.pdf.

[5] Michael Barber and Mona Mourshed, *How the World's Best-Performing School Systems Come Out on Top*, McKinsey & Company, 2007, http://mckinseyonsociety.com/downloads/reports/Education/Worlds_School_Systems_Final.pdf.

[6] Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development, *Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education: Lessons from PISA for the United States,* 2010, http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/32/50/46623978.pdf.

[7] Irving Kristol, *Neoconservatism: The Autobiography of an Idea* (New York: Free Press, 1995).

[8] Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

[9] For more detail, see Mehta, *The Allure of Order*.

[10] Jack Schneider, *From the Ivory Tower to the Schoolhouse: Understanding How Scholarship Becomes Common Knowledge in Education* (Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 2014).

[11] Frederick M. Hess, *Spinning Wheels: The Politics of Urban School Reform* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1998).

[12] On effective schools, see Stewart C. Purkey and Marshall S. Smith, "Effective Schools: A Review," *Elementary School Journal* 83: 4 <<AU: ISSUE NUMBER?>> (1983): 426–452; on Catholic schools, see Anthony S. Bryk, Valerie E. Lee, and Peter Blakeley Holland, *Catholic Schools and the Common Good* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); on high-performing charter schools, see David Whitman, *Sweating the Small Stuff: Inner-City Schools and the New Paternalism* (Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2008).

[13] On the importance of this kind of infrastructure, see David Cohen and Susan Moffitt, *The Ordeal of Equality: Did Federal Regulation Fix the Schools?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

[14] Michael Huberman, "The Model of the Independent Artisan in Teachers' Professional Relations," in *Teachers' Work: Individuals, Colleagues, and Contexts*, ed. Judith Warren Little and Milbrey W. McLaughlin (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993), 11–50.

[15] Ted Kolderie, "Where National Policy Goes Next—To Succeed" (working paper, Education Evolving, Saint Paul, MN, 2012).

[16] Cass Sunstein, *Republic.com,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).