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# Quintessential Acts of Inquiry in Educational Practice

## Delineating Inquiry and Interpretation in the Pursuit of Teacher Professionalization

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Sociological research on the professions points to specific modes of inquiry and interpretation, guided by typically complex classification systems that have been confirmed through various forms of evidence and guided by theory, as the trademarks that uphold the status of certain occupational groups (Freidson, 2001).

Acknowledging that over many decades the occupation of teaching has had imposed upon it various forms of inquiry and interpretation that serve to shape the work of teaching and the identity of teachers, this essay seeks to delineate practitioner inquiry in a way that will build the political status of teachers. I argue that commonly discussed forms of inquiry in education, such as data-driven decision making (modeled upon business outcomes analysis), progressive forms of practitioner research (modeled upon academic procedures and norms), "scientifically-based" research (modeled upon medical and pharmaceutical treatment research), and other forms of inquiry or research that are hallmarks of *other* professions, will not necessarily aid the professionalization movement for teaching. Instead, for the purposes of the professionalization of teaching, a unique form of "practitioner research" must be delineated as the *sole province of teachers*. Thus, the central aim

*I argue that commonly discussed forms of inquiry in education, such as data-driven decision-making (modeled upon business outcomes analysis), progressive forms of practitioner research (modeled upon academic procedures and norms), "scientifically-based" research (modeled upon medical and pharmaceutical treatment research), and other forms of inquiry or research that are hallmarks of other professions, will not necessarily aid the professionalization movement for teaching.*

of this essay is to determine what that unique form is and why having a distinct form of practitioner research is critical to teacher professionalization.<sup>1</sup>

This argument is rooted in the Marxian sociological and political literature of professions and occupational status as it seeks to uncover the ways in which capital is held by one group for the subservience of another (Braverman, 1975). In the pursuit of teacher professionalization, in accordance with other Marxian literature in knowledge work (e.g., Larson, 1980), capital is assumed to be the intellectual tools (typically developed through graduate education and endorsed by the state) by which an occupation maintains authority over one's occupation. Considering that one of those tools is a special form of inquiry that an occupational group utilizes to conduct its practice--and considering that competing groups offer competing inquiry tools--this essay is an attempt at continuing the dialogue on the specific steps that should be taken in the pursuit of teacher professionalism.

I begin the essay with a review of the sociological and political literature on professions, showing how the occupation of teaching has yet to achieve full professional status. I then show that all established professions have a quintessential form of inquiry used to interpret problems over which the profession has societal priority. I then look at various forms of inquiry commonly discussed as vehicles for instructional improvement to show how they, while causing no necessary harm, cannot be utilized as the quintessential forms of inquiry on which the profession of teaching can be based. The essay ends with commentary on how already conceptualized elements of good teaching can be re-interpreted as forms of inquiry that can assist teachers as they seek jurisdictional control over the field of PK-12 education.

### **Jurisdictional Struggle**

Teachers in the United States believe themselves to be under greater attack now than at any other time in the past century (e.g., see Staul, 2010). National policies, such as Race to the Top, and local efforts, such as the *Los Angeles Times* effort to publicize test scores for all teachers in the Los Angeles Unified School District, are considered by teachers and their unions to be direct threats on the value of the teaching occupation. Yet, interestingly, research increasingly demonstrates how necessary instructional expertise is to effective teaching practice (e.g., Nye et al., 2004). Indeed, even staunch supporters of market reforms in education are beginning to see that dramatic educational change cannot occur without better trained teachers.<sup>2</sup> It is a strange

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<sup>1</sup> Sociologists are very clear about the point that teaching has yet to reach, even marginally, professional status (see Ingersoll, 2003, for a very thorough explanation). Professional status is typically determined by lengthy graduate training, culturally-respected practice autonomy, politically-guaranteed domination over a social problem, and consistency of mental models. The most foundational work on the professions is Abbott's (1988) *The System of Professions*.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, many charter networks that reached their political apex by exhibiting their market-based elements are now investing large amounts of money to enhance teacher effectiveness. Teach for America, which for a long time argued that teacher training was irrelevant to student learning, is now investing in significant teacher mentorship. These efforts have been deemed necessary by these groups, as their initial market-entry innovations have proven only marginally effective at raising student achievement on tests. See Purinton (in press) for a more detailed discussion of this phenomenon.

time when reformers are both recognizing the power of effective teaching *and* simultaneously attempting to dismantle the structural and political supports that would otherwise help to build an effective teaching workforce.

As a variety of organizational, political, and socioeconomic theories demonstrate, the governance, incentive, labor supply, professional development, financing, and organizational structures that drive the educational system are out of sync with the demands of developing and maintaining a teaching workforce characterized by peer-mediated expertise (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ravitch, 2010). Policy has preferred that teachers remain part of a bureaucratic chain below school boards (Ehrensals & First, 2008), while reform has preferred that teachers be exposed to market or quasimarket forces (Ferlie & Geraghty, 2005). Neither approach, as a general organizational model for work, is sensitive to complex knowledge development, transfer, and application (Scott, 1982; Tsui et al., 1997).

The literature on the professions suggests that occupational groups obtain status by asserting their unique classification systems (i.e., forms of interpretation) over various societal problems; jurisdictional battles between occupations fester, as occupations seek to provide competing solutions (Abbott, 1988). Established professions, such as law, academia, and medicine, maintain their jurisdictional controls over their domains with the assistance of policy, institutional networks, professional associations, political alliances, and science (Krause, 1996). Yet, in public consciousness, established professions maintain status by virtue of the "mystique" of their knowledge: If medicine, for instance, is too easy for the average person to learn, there would be little need for professional dominance of an occupational group over issues of health (Freidson, 2006). When too many professionals within an established profession are seen to deviate from the accepted professional norms, the public (and the political system) begins to look to other occupational groups for competing solutions (Abbott, 1988).

In the field of education, both the political system and entrepreneur-minded reformers, including those who work in think tanks, consulting agencies, research organizations, text publishers, and other not-for-profits, have claimed (or attempted to claim) jurisdictional control over the methods of input and outcome (Burch, 2009). This ensures that managers and entrepreneurs control the terms of the work, thus reducing the costs of the field (Leicht & Fennell, 2001). Glazer (2008) argues,

The greatest threat to education's jurisdictional control is not from other professions but from nonprofessional forces such as the use of uncertified teachers, charter and private schools (both of which use a disproportionate number of uncertified teachers), home schooling, and programs like Teach for America that circumvent both teacher education and traditional certification (p. 173).

For example, it was not an educational group that instituted one of the largest and most important reading instruction policies in the history of the nation, *Reading First* (a somewhat direct result of the report produced by the National Reading Panel), but rather a medical research agency; the National Institutes of Health sought to devise its own solutions on the literacy gap among children, and the result was billions of dollars spent on reading policy that many teachers and education researchers argued was somewhat disconnected from classroom realities (e.g., Yatvin, 2002). And, most obviously, business has sought to incorporate its solutions into P-12 education (e.g., Apple, 2006); its influence has had likely the most striking consequence on teachers' political power (e.g., Shipps, 2006). Though much more maligned in the political landscape of public education, colleges of education, too, attempt to influence public schools, but they have had much less success (Labaree, 2004).

### **Autonomy of Inquiry and Interpretation in Professions**

A sociological conception of professional work can provide insight into tasks common to all professions: in this case, I focus attention on the tasks of inquiry and interpretation. Most sociologists of professions frame a professional's status in terms of either autonomy, research-based practice, or lengthy graduate training (Freidson, 2006). In either case, the market value of a professional's services is contingent upon a combination of these three features, which are all interdependent. Autonomy in practice (i.e., neither the market nor politics dictate the essentials of practice) is a result of public/market acceptance that a professional has command over a specialized knowledge, which itself is based upon research, that is too complex for the lay person and cannot be whittled down to simple procedures, thus demanding extensive graduate training so as to inculcate the candidate into a particular way of thinking (Freidson, 1975). One

The public buys not just one professional when it seeks out professional services; rather, it buys the entire profession...

significant mark of a profession, thus, is the public or market value of the application of its specialized knowledge.

In defense of a profession, peer-mediation serves as quality control *by* people who similarly understand, via rigorous professional training, the aspects of practice.

For others to judge the quality of practice, itself, would be considered amateur; furthermore, professionals have a stake in the practice of other professionals, as they represent the profession and are accorded their autonomy because of the profession. Thus, even though considerable quality variation exists among physicians, professors, and lawyers, the professional title is in a sense a brand, a marker of some level of expertise. Public encounter with too many bad physicians may reduce one's trust in the whole medical profession. A profession, as a brand, must therefore monitor itself so that its reputation continues to allow it to charge high prices (in the case of lawyers and physicians) or command enormous work flexibility (in the case of professors). The public buys not just one professional when it seeks out professional services; rather, it buys the entire profession--what it stands for,

the research that guides it, the collective ways of thinking that shape diagnosis and practice, and the results it has demonstrated in the past (diLuzio, 2006).

Occupations that do not have professional status, though perhaps requiring some graduate training, are at various levels dependent upon politics or the market to dictate how work gets done (Ouchi, 1980). From an organizational perspective, managers take the wishes of the market or bureaucrats take the decrees of the political system and translate those wishes and decrees into tasks, outcomes, and procedures (Olsen, 2005). Though some autonomy is provided to nonprofessional workers, at widely varying levels, research is considered just one source of information among many sources to nonprofessional occupations--and training is not expected to necessarily shape conformity of analyses, a hallmark of professional expertise (Collins & Evans, 2007).

Again, the rationale for professional autonomy is the complexity of knowledge needed to perform various tasks that cannot be acquired quickly by a manager or a bureaucrat. Just as the insurance company or the hospital director should have limited rights to decisions about health care, the university president should have limited rights about how a course is taught or how research is conducted. The work of the physician and the work of the professor are respected enough by the public, as well as the marketplace, to encourage high salaries for physicians and extreme latitude in work terms for professors. Where support for the value of the work wanes, bureaucrats and managers (promoted by the market and/or politics) increase their control and direction of the work of professors and physicians (Adler, 2007). Physicians are increasingly told how to perform their work based on procedures mapped out by insurance companies (Schlesinger, 2002). The marketplace for professor positions is dwindling as for-profit universities remove the rights of professionals over higher education curricula (Tierney & Hentschke, 2007); and nonuniversity research agencies increasingly win research contracts so that principals can have more control over the agents (Collins, 1994). Increasingly, expertise is devalued for market incentives and efficiency (Gardner & Shulman, 2005).

Assuming that the complex knowledge and skill possessed by professionals is indeed valuable for certain domains of society--particularly should professional fields stage a comeback in the decades ahead--their knowledge and skill can be roughly displayed in two categories: inquiry/interpretation and decision-making (e.g., Freidson, 2001; Groopman, 2008). Physicians make diagnoses through classification systems that funnel patient displays of illness into root causes (Abbott, 1988). Once root causes are determined, decisions of prescription, surgery, or other action can be made. Professors conduct inquiry and interpretation by way of their research through classification systems that funnel problems (social, physical, artistic) into analyses that serve explanatory or applied functions. Their classification systems are specific to their disciplines in that their disciplines emphasize certain methodologies, theories, and assumptions instead of others; thus, their analyses can be arrived at similarly by their peers who have the same analytic lenses and utilize similar methodologies. For instance, problems of marriage can

be similarly conceived within certain disciplines (even though arguments indeed exist within disciplines)--such as psychology, sociology, economics, biology, literature--and those similar conceptions are arrived at because the discipline itself is a function of expert classification systems. A good example of this comes from the debates between economists and sociologists about personal relationships, such as marriage. A sociologist's classification system predisposes this professional to see relationships as functions of human society; to the sociologist, cultural norms and individual sentiments drive the development and sustenance of such relationships. An economist's classification system predisposes this professional to see relationships as functions of trade; to the economist, one person's good looks might be "traded in" for another person's financial worth. The extent to which either of these professionals has political clout or a market is contingent upon society's belief that there is value in someone who has the skills and knowledge to be able to recognize problems of relationships in varied ways and to interpret and analyze data with the lenses of that discipline. Indeed, considering sociology is still a fashionable college major, and sociology books occasionally obtain bestseller status, the profession of sociology has continued value. More so for the economist, who is hired to help make policy decisions at all levels of government and in the private sector. The important point is that a professional does her or his work by first utilizing the profession's system of classifications to interpret findings through inquiry; then, the professional utilizes the tools of the profession to make decisions (in the case of professors, the "action" component of decision-making is embodied in the main forms of dissemination: teaching and publishing). And if there is value in the profession's brand of inquiry and decision-making, the trappings of a profession--lengthy pre-service training, practice autonomy, etc.--will be permitted to exist in the marketplace or the political sphere.

### **Delineating Common Forms of Inquiry for the Teaching Profession**

Toward the goal of strengthening a profession of teaching, the form and content of the inquiry that professional teachers engage in must be clearly defined as a collectively-understood process by which expert teachers deliver publicly-expected results. Such forms of inquiry, in particular, must be considered in a separate domain from (1) academic research, (2) the recently popularized data-based decision making, as well as "scientifically-based" research, and (3) progressive reflective practice. The purpose of this separation is to ensure that the skill of delivering instruction is fundamentally intertwined with the skills of inquiry. For the teaching profession to enact a form of inquiry that is central to another profession is to see the teaching profession further dominated by other professions (or, in a way, occupational interests). Each of the next three sections, beginning with this one, will elaborate how the distinctions can be drawn.

First, despite the thriving subfield of teacher practitioner research which encourages teacher-led inquiry based on academic models (e.g., Pine, 2009), a collaboratively agreed-upon form of inquiry to the teaching profession that is central to peer-mediated conceptions of practice should utilize distinct norms and practices. Though academic procedures (e.g., structuring work for

dissemination with attention to samples, literature reviews, and so forth) will cause no harm to the development of a profession of teaching, they will not help such efforts, as they encourage teachers to pursue another profession's quintessential act of inquiry.<sup>3</sup>

The professor's job is to produce knowledge; the work, therefore, of the professor is academic research and dissemination. The physician's job is to produce health; the work, therefore, of the physician is diagnosis and prescription, and sometimes surgery. The teacher's is to produce learning; the work, therefore, of the teacher is assessment and instruction (and by assessment, I refer to all forms of interpreting how students, individually and in groups, make sense of lessons in progress and at culmination). The physician and the professor are good examples, as their forms of inquiry contrast nicely. The physician does not aim to produce new knowledge; that is not what the physician is paid to do. Rather, the physician conducts inquiry as her or his form of practice in order to produce health: asking questions, performing physical examinations, interpreting technically-produced data, and so forth. The professor is paid to create and disseminate knowledge; academic scholarship has the aim of building and/or circulating knowledge for a variety of societal purposes. That it gets published is only a function of the role of the professor. That a physician does not publish details of individual cases is only a function of the role of the physician. In other words, academic scholarship aims to disseminate; medical diagnosis aims to prompt individual health. Of course, some physicians do publish academic scholarship, but it is work that fits in a separate domain from practice; typically, such physicians work in organizations that encourage or require it, such as at teaching hospitals or research laboratories.

I draw the distinction between the professor and the physician to demonstrate that, contrary to educators' conceptions of practitioner research aiming for the mark of academic scholarship, teachers are *not* employed to produce it. When they produce (or attempt to produce) academic knowledge through action research, for instance, the knowledge is either intended for outsider consumption or personal work modification (e.g., reducing the use of an ineffective strategy or increasing the use of an effective one). Inquiry is essential--not some optional "extra"--to the professional status of teachers *primarily* if it is utilized for *personal work guidance*. Attempts to clean it up and disseminate it will not necessarily provide credence to the activity as a part of a teacher's duties, though dissemination can certainly provide models to the field, and there is no reason why such work should be discouraged. Additionally, "work guidance"--adjusting activities, making changes to units or lesson plans, answering questions in particular ways, and so forth--should not *only* have an action orientation; such inquiry should also aid in interpretation. In other words, practitioner research should guide not only lesson development, for example, something that involves preplanning; it should also guide moment-to-moment

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<sup>3</sup> In making this argument, I am consistent with the sociological and economic literature on professions that views professors/academic researchers in a separate profession from practitioners in a given field. For instance, the professors who conduct research and teach in medical schools are considered to be in a *different* profession from physicians who graduated from medical schools and often utilize the research conducted by their former professors. In the same way, such literature would portray teachers and education professors in a different profession (see Krause, 1996).



understandings of how students are processing and constructing new knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Thus, any changes in teaching action as a result of such inquiry can be demonstrated almost immediately, often imperceptible to the untrained eye.

While action research is often utilized in practice to "test" a strategy (e.g., a teacher may ask, "Does my use of Document-based Questions alter my students' analytic aptitude within U.S. History?"; e.g., Coghlan & Brannick, 2004), I construe work guidance as a process of constant analysis of how students are understanding or misinterpreting the content of various lessons. Deborah Loewenberg Ball and colleagues (2005), for instance, portray expert teaching of mathematics as the ability to not only understand the mathematic content, but also how children acquire new mathematic knowledge. This is ongoing activity that is critical to strong instruction (see also Phelps & Schilling, 2004, for an illustration of pedagogical content knowledge in the teaching of reading). Currently, the skills and knowledge needed to make such deep analyses in classrooms function as a result of carefully-crafted experience; and it exists in isolated pockets. Such is the outcome of bureaucratic and market-based structures to guide the work of teaching: genuine expertise is not vital in such organizational structures. For expertise to exist in uniformity throughout national school systems, institutions such as professional schools and associations must see it as their goal to produce only highly competent individuals who are trained to see problems, even miniscule ones, in similar ways.

Academics, at the culmination of their graduate training, prove their ability to inquire through the defense and publication of a dissertation. Physicians, at the culmination of their graduate training, prove their ability to inquire via medical rounds within a lengthy residency. Lawyers, at the culmination of their graduate training, prove their ability to inquire via exams that test the ability to culminate, analyze, and apply previous cases. No such inquiry is uniformly expected of all newly certified teachers: There are no common standards for what teachers, in various grade levels and subjects, should inquire about; and there are no common standards for how teachers, in various grade levels, subjects, conditions, and contexts, should respond to the data they garner from their inquiries.

### **Inquiry as an Act of Ownership Over the Profession**

The second delineation of inquiry that must be made for the development of a profession of teaching is with the popularized conception of data-driven decision making. This sort of inquiry tends toward classroom superficiality (i.e., it touches upon categories often too broad for teachers) and is typically designed by and for nonteachers (e.g., school and district administrators, policy makers, voters, taxpayers, parents). It assumes that with just enough knowledge of outcomes, proper input or action decisions can be made. Underlying that initial assumption is also the belief that the difference between current outcomes and goals is either the motivation and general intelligence of the teacher or the specific structures, texts, and programs used to guide instruction.

In either case, much decision making is left to those outside the classroom; and when decision making is prolific among teachers, the system is considered to be loosely coupled, which is supposedly a bad thing (Fusarelli, 2002). A loosely-coupled system is one in which the agents do not explicitly carry out what the principals expect (Weick, 1976).<sup>4</sup> In school systems, this means that teachers do not necessarily do what administrators tell them they should do. This is evidenced through considerable research over the past decade: While many researchers believe that accountability mechanisms have encouraged teachers to attend explicitly to state standards and district curricula (e.g., Coburn, 2004; Spillane, 2004), other researchers point out that the gap is still quite wide and that teachers either continue to safely hide behind their classroom doors or simply do not understand how to carry out the work expected of them (Spillane et al., 2006).

A Marxian interpretation of the political desire to close the loosely-coupled gap suggests that teachers are incapable or inappropriate decision makers (Purinton, in press). The means to produce a given product (in this case, learning through formal education) are not possessed by the workers (teachers). Because entities and individuals outside the classroom determine curriculum, create tests, evaluate success, and determine failure, teachers are left with few tools but the directives that they, because of a high "span of control" endemic to the organizational structure of schools, can occasionally choose to ignore. A high span of control means that supervisors have many direct reports (a typical middle manager in a private firm may have just a few direct reports, while a school principal will have many more), resulting in minimal direct oversight (Meier & Bohte, 2003). Thus, test scores have become the efficient method by which teachers are or will be judged (Kohl, 2009). They are (and increasingly will be) presented with expectations--and when lucky, resources, such as texts--while administrators, board members, mayors, voters, and reformers will determine if their goals are met. With such a view about the "black box" of educational production, it should be little wonder that inquiry is ignored as an essential skill: The systematic view, thus, is that teachers are paid to "deliver" instruction, not to inquire about anything. Both the goals and the methods are determined on the outside; teachers are simply paid to put those methods into practice in order to meet the goals. Of course, it must be noted that there is a distinct difference in professional systems between expected outcomes and methods of guaranteeing those outcomes. All professions are fundamentally based on the promise that they can deliver specific expected outcomes desired by the public; the difference, however, between professions and nonprofessional occupational groups (including teaching) is that there are market-based or political influences inserted into the methodologies of obtaining those goals, thereby (a) diluting the fullest potential of a true outcomes-based system, whereby teachers would be given complete autonomy to demonstrate their ability to reach specific outcomes, and (b) still blaming them anyway for the outcomes that they could not entirely influence.

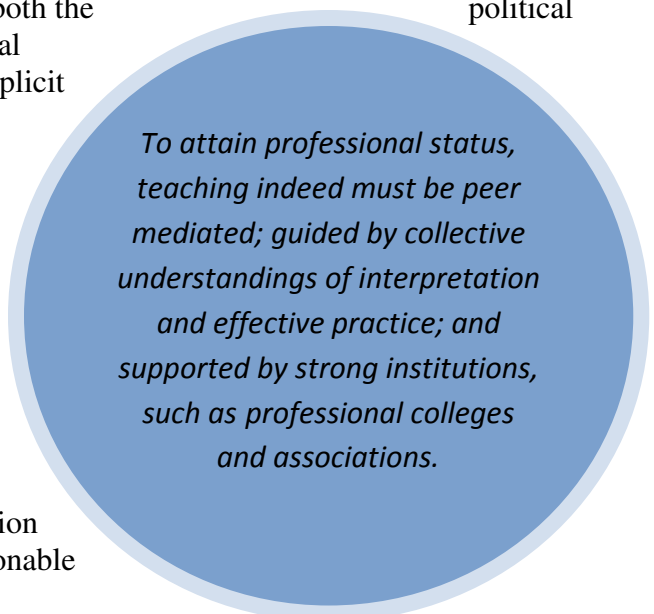
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<sup>4</sup> In a traditional bureaucratic model, the agent carries out the demands of the principal, lest the agent lose his or her job. In a traditional market model, the seller provides what the buyer desires, lest the seller lose his or her job.

Research, thus, is skewed toward the consumption of policy makers, curriculum developers, administrators, and so forth; there is very little research, comparatively, that focuses distinctively on issues of pedagogical content knowledge, for instance, that might directly impact instructional skill (Ball & Forzani, 2007). Indeed, the very trouble with marketing research on pedagogical content knowledge as a foundational element of the theory and evidence that would otherwise bolster a profession is that there is so little of it (Ball et al., 2008). Instead, research is produced by and for populations outside classrooms, as governance has historically prioritized the structures and management of schools over the work of teaching (Purinton, in press). Thus, with few vehicles for respected dissemination, educators are left isolated from the larger world of educational policy and entrepreneurship. This resembles the canonical process of proletarianization, whereby actors with capital distinguish themselves from workers by prohibiting worker access to that capital, forcing the workers to become subservient to and dependent upon them. Indeed, even as school and district budgets shrink, there seems to be little shortage of money in the education "industry"--test developers, consultants, research organizations, reform organizations, think tanks, textbook publishers, and so forth (Burch, 2009).

### **Shared Inquiry, Interpretation, and Decision Making**

Finally, reflective practice cannot be conflated with the forms of practitioner inquiry that can bolster the teaching profession, as reflective practice is philosophical and introspective. Though introspection is essential for the intellectual development as a teacher, as well as any other professional, in the professionalization of teaching, reflective practice must serve a distinct purpose. Indeed, its very nature encourages individual conceptions of practice rather than collective, associational, peer-mediated practice. Local norms of practice inherently undermine professionalization attempts, as local norms reduce both the political salience for associational agreement and the structural investment for research and dissemination for the explicit purpose of professionalization (Mellow, 2005). To attain professional status, teaching indeed must be peer mediated; guided by collective understandings of interpretation and effective practice; and supported by strong institutions, such as professional colleges and associations. A professional interpretation utilizes classification systems shared by all members within the profession; the classification systems organize field knowledge and promote common, research-based responses (Glazer, 2008). Interpretations that are collectively understood by members of a profession cement the profession's ability to sell itself as a reasonable "solution" to a societal need; and those collectively



*To attain professional status, teaching indeed must be peer mediated; guided by collective understandings of interpretation and effective practice; and supported by strong institutions, such as professional colleges and associations.*

understood interpretations are developed through vetted, accepted, and association-sanctioned research disseminated in professional schools; and they are maintained via peer-monitored review.

The fear this last designation will surely inspire in progressive educators is warranted on many levels, two in particular. First, there is every reason to believe that the process of professionalization will be co-opted by powerful interests and narrow-minded conceptions of teaching and public education. Indeed, the development of national standards at present time is left in the hands of corporations, not educators. Second, there is still no unified agreement on the purpose of public education in the United States (Ingersoll, 1993), though *No Child Left Behind* has had some success at narrowing the purpose. Instructional methods are often based on deep philosophical convictions about how children should learn and the content they should master. And the extent to which a teacher adopts certain methods is often a function of local social networks (Deal et al., 2009).

The alternative, however, has appeared to be just as detrimental to minority, impoverished, and low-performing students--and equally detrimental to the professionalization of teaching. Teaching, and the tools (including forms of inquiry) utilized to maneuver the improvement of teaching, suffers from great underdevelopment due to the individualized conceptions (both inside and outside the classroom) of what good teaching should look like. Thus, outsiders, such as members of the political system, business-driven entrepreneurs, large corporations, think tanks, and others are able to exert control over the system and teachers because teachers have no common tools with which to manage their practice. As a result, colleges of education can easily be discredited, as there is no consistent way in which a teacher is evaluated based on practice prior to service. Additionally, as colleges of education are permitted to hold teaching candidates to varying standards, there is very little market for academic research that provides teachers with deep theoretical and empirical knowledge to guide practice. And in our knowledge-focused economy, such knowledge *is* indeed the capital by which outsiders (entrepreneurs, politicians, etc.) possess so that insiders (teachers, teacher educators, etc.) can take control of their occupation.

### **What Quintessential Forms of Inquiry Can Serve to Professionalize the Teaching Workforce?**

Utilizing Deborah Loewenberg Ball and David Cohen's (1999) coherent list of things teachers "...would need to know in order to teach in the ways that researchers and educators imagine they should," I describe how each of these areas are ripe for associational standards of inquiry in the pursuit of a profession of teaching (p. 7). First, understanding content area knowledge from the perspective of students learning new knowledge or acquiring new skills is vastly different from just knowing the content. Putting such knowledge into practice demands inquiry--typically

through classroom assessments, but also through on-the-spot dialogue, such as when a student asks a question in a way that makes visible a misconception.

Second, teachers should understand children and adolescents, not just from theoretical perspectives, but also on very individual levels. Teachers should be able to engage students, individually, in small groups, and within whole classrooms in ways that tease out "...what they are likely to find interesting and to have trouble with, in particular domains. They would need to become insightful in listening to and interpreting children's ideas about academic subjects" (p. 8).

Third, conversely, teachers should be able to understand and interpret the cultural, linguistic, class, and religious identities of their students. This involves, for the teacher, acquisition of knowledge about students within the school and the local community. Furthermore, it involves constant engagement within communities and with students so that as communities change, teachers' understandings of them appropriately evolve.

Fourth, teachers must understand pedagogy. While pedagogy is often (and in many ways, for professionalization purposes, should be) constructed as a combination of theory and science, pedagogical principles unfold in dynamic ways in classrooms. Observing and interpreting how pedagogical approaches impact students is yet another underappreciated form of inquiry that is essential to good teaching. The very activities that teachers construct can easily go awry; nonexpert teachers may attribute such occurrences to other factors, such as general misbehavior of students. An expert teacher, by contrast, is like a cook standing over a sauté, watching the chemical composition of food change as heat and other ingredients are applied. Thus, the expert teacher sees how various elements of classroom instruction impact certain students in certain ways.

*The most crucial form of inquiry that takes place in the work of teaching is inquiry that occurs within the dynamic interaction between teachers and students.*

This is powerful inquiry that needs no data systems, carefully-designed studies, or academic norms. Instead, the most crucial form of inquiry that takes place in the work of teaching is inquiry that occurs within the dynamic interaction between teachers and students. Surely, it can only be enhanced by the rich protocols that guide practice inquiry (among the more relevant approaches comes from Richard Elmore and his colleagues who have developed a system for practice investigation and alignment within professional

learning communities; see City et al., 2009). In summary, the acts of inquiry and interpretation that will help to establish a profession of teaching do not constitute new, ground-breaking concepts; instead, they are the characteristics of effective teaching, upon which expert teachers, scholars, reformers, and school leaders currently seem to agree. They are, as expert teachers (and all those tasked with improving teaching quality) will confirm, extraordinarily complex skills

that involve so much more than lesson planning, implementation, and action-oriented work; instead, they involve extensive watching, listening, sensing, and interpreting. These acts of inquiry are not new to good teaching, but their complexity and essentiality have not been portrayed internally or externally in ways that will underline the quintessential skills and indispensable value of teaching.

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