

Yes, We Are!:

An Examination of Teachers’
Understanding of their Work as Part of a
Profession

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

The sociological literature on professions often portrays medicine and law as ideal-type professions. This is asserted largely on the basis of a list of criteria that tends to commonly include: extended education, specialized knowledge, prestige and autonomy. Other occupations, such as teaching, are seen to not measure up. This study questions the legitimacy of this claim and the relevance of literature, which does not seem to recognize the current reality of teacher's work.

Based on data collected through interviews with high school teachers, it becomes clear that they see themselves in a very different light. The issues that are of particular interest are the way the education system's structure actually increases teacher autonomy and the importance of self-perception to professionalism. The need to reassess the literature is argued in light of these missing elements.

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Dedication

To Gran:

Still going for the gold. I hope you're proud.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

“A friend of mine is a doctor,” Ms. Davis said as she began to recall a conversation she had had with him about professions. He told her that her profession, teaching, was very important. She insisted that his was more important and he responded, “No. I work with the body. You work with the mind. We do exactly the same thing; we heal.” Ms. Davis said she had never thought of herself like that.

(Interview October 9, 2009)

Drawing on 20 interviews with high school teachers in Ontario, this study examines these perceptions against the current literatures on the professions and sociology of teaching. Having completed the certification process for teaching in Ontario, I questioned how much the literature aligned with the actual experience and perceptions of teachers. The sociology of professions is often associated with the trait approach, which is a way of separating professions from semi-professions, despite the subjectivity of these labels. Key traits include lengthy training, specialized formal knowledge, high status and autonomy. While the literature examines these criteria, it does not actually fully speak to the way that teachers prepare for and do their jobs. My primary goal throughout the research process was to gain an understanding of how teachers think about and describe the way they do their work and whether the literature reflects these understandings. The study was focused on two broad research questions:

1. How do teachers understand their occupational status?
2. Is there a discrepancy between how teachers feel about their work and what has been written in the sociology of professions, and if so, how can this discrepancy be explained?

In fact, there are many occupations that now vie for the label of profession and are trying to achieve this standing through various methods including the establishment of associations, enforced licensing and certification. Dental hygienists, architects and forensic pathologists are among the many examples of this sort of professionalization (Adams, 2004; Brain, 1991, Timmermans, 2008). Unfortunately, the current literature argues that this process merely results in a “semi professional” status and these efforts are not seen to place these occupations at the rank of true professions. Teaching also falls into this category of semi-profession. When compared to the “classic professions”, such as doctors and lawyers, teachers are said to have only met some of the criteria. Thus, teaching is seen as “professionalized” by exhibiting “the structural or sociological attributes, characteristics, and criteria identified with the professional model” (Ballantine and Spade, 2003: p. 103), such as requiring certification to teach yet lacking some of the key traits of full professions.

How do teachers understand their occupational status? The teachers that I interviewed see themselves as professionals. The Ontario education system has gone through a multitude of changes since the years prior to World War One. There was a time when education was a privilege reserved only for the elite. However, the industrial revolution and subsequent laws

banning child labour, brought the need to address the problem of a large portion of the population which was now idle – the youth. The solution was mass education. Not only did this type of schooling change the role of the students, it has also affected the role of the teachers (Davies and Guppy, 2006).

As time has progressed and public schooling has become mandatory, there have been a number of requirements and expectations developed which make pursuing a career as a teacher more like other professions. Unlike the days of the one room school house, teachers are expected to complete a large amount of education and training, including at least two university degrees - a Bachelor's degree in any field and a specialized Bachelor of Education, although there are many teachers who have gone on to complete graduate level degrees as well. Furthermore, teachers, like other professionals, are expected to complete professional development in order to keep abreast of the most current strategies and techniques for increased competence in their field. This may be achieved by Professional Development days that are ordained by boards and ministries to address current concerns and trends in the field; however, teachers may also seek out additional training in the area of their own interest. As school enrollment has become larger, the number of services these institutions provide has increased as well. It is not uncommon for a secondary school to include nurses, police officers, childcare workers and psychologists amongst their staff. Thus, teachers are now interacting with many government agencies and other professions on a regular basis.

The focus of the literature has not kept pace with the dramatic and mutually reinforcing interplay between these changes and teachers' perceptions of their occupation. When asked about their own occupation, the teachers I interviewed unanimously declared themselves part of a profession. Beyond the examples listed above, teachers attested to having large degree of autonomy, a key trait of full profession, when dealing with students. In the literature, this trait has been at the heart of teachers' semi-professional status. Ingersoll, a former teacher himself, acknowledges teacher's having the ability to "exercise their discretion over the curriculum within their classrooms" (2003b: p 95). However, others deemphasize this point and instead focus is placed on the "clear difference between teachers' control within classrooms and teachers' control over schoolwide policies" (Ingersoll, 2003b: p. 95). They are said to have little control over the processes, rules and regulations that shape their work. The hierarchies found in the education system, as well as in individual schools, are said to strip teachers of their autonomy. Their way of work is said to be defined for them, by administrative teams, local school boards and the ministry. Thus, when considering policy implementation and how it may influence teachers' perceptions of their occupational status, one would expect teachers to report a lesser degree of control in their dealings with students.

According to the 20 participants involved in this study, however, this was not the case. When asked about various policies, such as those for handling student misconduct, teachers claimed to use their own discretion when assessing situations and at times even when doling out consequences. Surprisingly, directives from administration, boards and the ministry have little to no effect on how teachers perform their daily work. They do not feel that they are

limited by the decisions of those “higher” in the system, and in actuality report a large degree of autonomy, despite what some of the literature seems to portray. Moreover, participants described staff involvement on committees that gave them input regarding ineffective policies (presumably developed by those same, “higher ups”) and developing new strategies. To my knowledge this type of activity is not acknowledged to any degree, with regards to high school teachers, in the sociology of professions. Instead the emphasis is placed on matters such as non-collegial hiring, the centralization of power in ministries and boards and the large bureaucratic hierarchy in which teaching is embedded, which are all said to contribute to their semi-professional status.

Thus, it is clear that, in regards to my second major research question, there is a discrepancy between what is written in the literature of professions about teaching and how teachers understand their own careers. As it stands the literature currently does not speak fully to how teaching is conducted on the ground. There have been many changes, which have been passed in recent years, which affect the field of teaching and its professionalization. These include, but are certainly not limited to, a professional association, advanced training, as well as an induction program with a mentoring component.

Another thing that appears to be disregarded in some of the literature is an awareness of the context in which teaching takes place and how that informs how teachers understand the nature of their work. When one takes into account the organizational structure of schools it becomes clear that although outwardly there is a hierarchy which appears to place teachers at

the bottom of the ranks, the configuration actually serves to allow teachers the freedom to make decisions about their work. This relates to the concept of “loose coupling” as it is discussed in Institutional Theory, where official rules and regulations are a matter of ceremony and do not necessarily align with the practical functioning of an organization.

Finally, a large piece that seems to be missing from the current literature on professions, is the importance of self-perception. It is clear that the participants of this study have internalized elements of what it means to be a “professional”. They discussed the importance of demeanour, appearance and the attitudes with which one approaches and engages in their work. They believed that they must meet certain standards and held themselves accountable, not to the administration, school boards or the ministry, but rather, to their students. Most teachers, it seems, appear to be working within a culture of professionalism and they question and condemn those colleagues who did not embody the same values.

Thus, I have found that teachers proclaim themselves as professionals, not only because they do in fact meet many of the criteria set out by the sociology of professions, but they have also embraced the tenets of what it means to be a professional. Thus, it is important to revisit the literature in this area and ensure that it accurately reflects the nature of teaching, and other semi-professions, as well as the perceptions that individuals hold of their own work.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

What is a profession? This is a question that has brought much contention to the field of sociology for a long time. Some believe that the degree to which an occupation may be considered a profession can be objectified; that demonstrating noted key traits can validate the use of such a label (Ingersoll, 2003; Freidson, 2001). Others contend that becoming a profession is a process that not only requires the acquisition of certain milestones, but also involves a systematic process by which these milestones are obtained (Wilensky, 1964). One thing that sociologists tend to agree on is that the fields of medicine and law seem to exemplify the term, and have become the prototype of professional employment.

However, many contend that these definitions are too narrow and do not reflect the changing nature of work (Frendreis and Vertz, 1988; Adams, 2010; Randle, 1996). There is a reluctance to acknowledge other jobs as equivalent to the classic professions, nursing and teaching being among the most often discussed. Instead these occupations are labeled as “semi-professional” (Ingersoll, 2003: p. 112; Davies and Guppy, 2006: p. 174). Yet, it is becoming more common for individuals to describe themselves as professionals. How can this be? As the conditions and terms of employment for these “semi-professions” change, the meaning of the labels and how they relate to the working environment needs to be revised.

There are many facets of society that contribute to our understanding and outlook, these can be reflected in the laws, culture and values upheld by a people. Tracey Adams has published work that examines how professions have been distinguished through the use of legislation in

Canada, and how the designations may have changed with time (2010). She argues that, “with the expansion of the ‘knowledge economy,’ a growing services sector, and credential inflation, there are many occupations in the labor market that require education and expertise, and provide service to the public” (2010: p. 50). The days in which the training of doctors and lawyers surpassed other occupations due to the nature of their work and the preparation required to perform it have now come and gone.

It has become far more common for individuals to complete post-secondary education, not necessarily in the pursuit of a particular prestigious career, but rather, to increase their chances of getting any job at all. Due to the expansion of educational attainment, “the social distinctiveness of the bachelor’s degree and its value on the marketplace have declined – [this] in turn, [increases] the demand for still higher levels of education” (Collins, 2002). Credentialist theorists have aptly coined this process “credential inflation”. Thus, merely having a bachelor degree no longer sets one apart to a potential employer, and a bachelor degree has become an assumed and necessary next step for many young people, who may or may not have already decided their desired career path. They can afford to do this, because as Hurn summarizes the, “central importance of university... goes beyond the particular knowledge that it generates or transmits, to the role of instilling a commitment to rationality as a way of solving problems” (1993: p. 77). This argument is further supported by those who are proponents of the idea that, “schools seldom teach specific job skills... [and] on-the-job training works better for learning specific skills” (Brown, 2001: p. 25). These changes in perception require moving past rigid definitions of what it means to be a certified in a

“profession”. This re-conceptualization allows for a more fluid meaning that reflects the setting and how it interacts with such a concept.

There have been many lenses used to define a profession within a sociological perspective. Three approaches have dominated the professions literature: the characteristic or trait approach, the process approach, and symbolic approaches (for a review see Frensdreis and Vertz, 1988). Though they are not an exhaustive list of that which exists in the sociology of professions; by outlining each of these approaches, one can come to a better understanding of how professions have been defined in the past, and why a certain occupation, in particular teaching, has been denied the label. Below I review some of the existing literature in this area, and where applicable discuss its relation to the work of teachers.

2.1 Trait Approach

The basis of this approach is that there are predetermined traits that are necessary for an occupation to be considered a profession. It should be noted that lawyers and doctors generally have the traits discussed and an individual’s job is measured to this list in order to establish their validity as a professional.

What is most problematic about this approach is that the set of characteristics by which a profession is defined are contested in the literature. However, there are some broad concepts that tend to reoccur. These include, but are not limited to: Extensive training and education, Specialized knowledge and expertise, Autonomy, and Status and Prestige (Ingersoll, 2003; Freidson, 2001).

2.1.1 Training and Education

A reasonable place to begin this discussion is training and education, which in some way or another are requirements for many types of employment. However, those who aspire to become professionals are said to need a different kind of training for their occupation. First, completion of studies at a post-secondary level has become not only commonplace, but also mandatory. Once this requirement is met, candidates apply for post-graduate training at universities, such as law, or medicine (Freidson, 2001). This is but one difference between the training of professionals versus that of technicians and trades people. Perhaps the most recognizable difference is the amount of time committed to education and training before entering the field. Professionals can spend close to a decade or more preparing to enter their chosen occupation.

This extensive education in a university setting is seen as a necessity because book learning and the familiarization with theory and abstract concepts are, “claimed to be a necessary intellectual foundation for the capacity to learn and perform the complexities of professional work” (Freidson, 2001: p. 96). In contrast other work is judged as less complex, thus those employees will not need the insight to make integral decisions about their work and therefore higher and more specialized education is deemed unwarranted.

Friedson (2001) identifies another important distinction; specifically the amount of training that takes place in schools, as opposed to on the job. He has found that a high proportion of professional training occurs in a university context, with instructors who are full time teachers. In contrast, craftspeople, for example, are often involved in apprenticeships, where

their training occurs primarily on the job site and their instructors are working members of their field.

Decades ago it was noted that the entrance requirements for a teaching position were not set high enough, the time commitment required was considered far too short and criticized for the focus on theory at the sacrifice of exposure to practical strategies, pedagogical approaches and hands-on experience (Gosden, 1972; The Canadian Education Association, 1948). The value of the training has continued to be up for debate more recently, because the “instructional component of teacher-training is seen to be weak in comparison with the ‘imprint’ of the practicum and later institutional practices” (Lockhart, 1991: p. 56).

Currently, teachers must complete a recognized degree program in Education in order to become certified with the governing professional body, the Ontario College of Teachers. Though, many faculties of Education will request at least a three year general degree, due to the competition in the field, it is rare that individuals with less than a four year degree are awarded a spot in the Bachelor of Education programs, as these candidates are preferred. For example, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, affiliated with the University of Toronto, lists among their basic academic requirements; “Applicants are advised to hold, or be in the final year of a four-year degree. (Applicants with a completed three-year degree can be considered, but are at a significant competitive disadvantage)” (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 2011). This is a common assertion from the various Faculty of Educations found across the province.

It should also be noted that teachers do have continued access to training, as there are mandatory ongoing professional development programs throughout the year. In one study, a third of the teachers involved stated that they have been involved in “over 30 hours of training in the last two years” (Grant & Murray, 2003). Unfortunately, the amount of commitment teachers make to professional development beyond certification requirements can vary significantly. What is encouraging, however, is that when these programs are implemented in an intensive manner, they have been shown to influence teachers’ strategies and classroom practices (Borko, 2004).

2.1.2 Specialized Knowledge and Expertise

Specialized knowledge is a very important part of obtaining all of this profession specific training. This entails the mastering and understanding of concepts and processes that are not part of everyday life; thus, “the formal knowledge of particular disciplines [must be] taught to those aspiring to enter specialized occupations with professional standing” (Freidson, 2001).

The term specialized knowledge refers to that which is well above the common knowledge of the general population and focused on a particular area of expertise (such as family medicine, chemical engineering or corporate law). In order to acquire this advanced comprehension and competence in a specific field one must dedicate themselves as well as much of their time and resources to the goal. This concept tends to be positively correlated with training; when the required knowledge of an area is more specialized, the amount of education needed to

obtain a reasonable understanding is increased. Thus, the training for professions such as medicine and law is lengthy because of the very particular expertise that requires demonstration in order to be licensed.

There are a number of areas with which teachers need to be well versed in order to perform their jobs, such as dealing with parents, curriculum development, strategies for teaching and navigating the classroom environment (Goodson, 2003). However, there seems to be a lot of focus in the literature regarding class content knowledge. Teachers are only required to demonstrate specified subject expertise when teaching older grades and even then they may be assigned to “out-of-field” teaching positions (posts that are not in their trained teachable subject areas). This is a problem not with the training and certification process, but rather a “lack of fit” between teachers’ expertise and the subjects they teach (Ingersoll, 2003). If there is a need in another department, the principal can fill any available teacher in that spot. This practice of “having to teach courses for which they have little formal preparation can also have a negative impact on teachers’ sense of efficacy” (Ingersoll, 2003b: p. 129).

Additionally, it is not as if out-of-field teaching is rare. When teachers are allocated to teach more than one subject area, it is reported that 41% of these teachers are not certified in at least one of the subjects they have been assigned to teach (Grant & Murray, 2003). Ingersoll notes that “about one-fourth of [America’s] secondary teachers in any given semester are assigned to teach classes – usually one to three – in other fields or departments” (2003b).

Out-of-field teaching is said to happen because principals face major budget restrictions thus,

it is cheapest and easiest to give the classes to a teacher who already works for the school, than to hire another teacher whose specialty is that particular subject.

Out-of-field teaching is cited as one of the main roadblocks to teacher professionalism (Grant & Murray, 2003). Members of traditional professions would never be seen as interchangeable in this way. In fact, a person practicing one of the classic professions without proper training and certification can be accused of “malpractice” and seen as engaging in illegal activity.

Ingersoll is of the opinion that, unfortunately, this phenomenon demonstrates, “teachers [being] treated as [if] they are semi-skill or low skill workers, whose work does not require much expertise” (2003a: p. 3).

2.1.3 Autonomy

While teachers lack some qualities of traditional professionals, they are still thought to have a great deal of autonomy within their own classrooms. This is another of the important signifiers of professionalism (Engel, 1970). Those who obtain designations as professionals tend to have a large amount of control over their daily work behaviour, activities and conditions, without third party involvement or extensive supervision, indicating a high degree of autonomy (Ingersoll, 2003; Leicht & Fennell, 2001; Lockhart, 1991; Baldrige et. al., 1977). Engel (1970) outlines two kinds of autonomy; one being “work-related” autonomy which gives an individual the freedom to work in a way that is in agreement with their training, the other is “personal autonomy” with which one’s own discretion dictates how they will work.

These elements are found within the teaching profession, since educators have the freedom to conduct themselves as they see fit once the bell has rung and the classroom door is closed. In terms of personal autonomy, “even courses at the same level are frequently taught by different teachers with considerable freedom to shape their classes as they choose” (Powell, 1985: p. 23) Due to the fact that there is little to no direct supervision, teachers are often thought to have the freedom to define situations themselves and determine what procedures will best fit the circumstances, without interference from others. It has been reported that, “30 to 40% of all teachers [perceive] themselves as having a great deal of influence over decisions about how they teach; while 54% claim they are ‘told in detail what to teach at given times and what material must be covered’” (Grant & Murray, 2003: p. 97).

Independence of this nature is very important and thus changes that may endanger this condition are often resisted, even if they are deemed to be to the benefit of educational progress (Powell, 1985). Perhaps retaining classroom autonomy is so important because educators in the public school systems are said to not have much influence over decisions in the larger context regarding their workplace as a whole, such as those involving policies development, teacher hiring and financial distribution (Ingersoll, 2003; Grant & Murray, 2003). Therefore, in comparison to the teachers of one room school houses in the nineteenth-century, today’s teachers have less “personal power” and instead are subject to the regulations disseminated by their administration (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). This somewhat ambiguous position can potentially result in conflict between the desire for professional autonomy and the requirements and expectations of the administration and government

(Meiksins, 1989). These circumstances also leave teachers with seemingly, “less autonomy than other professionals” (Lockhart, 1991).

2.1.4 Status and Prestige

Professionals tend to be rewarded with elevated societal status and prestige. In North America, doctors and lawyers are held in high regard. These individuals are often thought of as relentless workers, whose labour benefits the community as a whole. These positions are coveted by many, not only for the esteem that they bring, but also for more tangible gains; “professionals typically are well compensated and are provided with relatively high salary and benefit levels throughout their careers span” (Ingersoll, 2003).

In the past, there were a large number of teachers reporting that they believed that their salaries were too low (The Canadian Education Association, 1948). However in recent decades, the compensation for teachers in Canada has risen dramatically. While they do make less than some professions, they tend to be better off than most other occupations. Although, “their educational and income attainments, [puts] the status location of Canadian teachers... well within the professional occupational range... In terms of public status recognition, teachers find themselves barely at the semi-professional status level” (Lockhart, 1991: p. 82-83). In fact, they have often been reported as feeling underappreciated by students, parents and by the society as a whole (Acker, 1999). This could be in part because parents have more access to teachers than they do to other professionals, thus, the differential between laypeople and educators does not seem as great. An alternative, or perhaps

complementary, explanation is that the barrage of educational reforms results in, “teachers who feel that their experience and opinions have not been taken seriously and a public [that through it’s politicians] has expressed its lack of faith and trust in their professional judgment” (Acker, 1999).

2.2 Process Approach

The process approach builds on the trait approach. Like, its predecessor, there is a concern for pre-established criteria for an occupation’s recognition as a profession. However, the focus this time, is not so much on the traits themselves, as it is on the order in which these traits are acquired.

Harold Wilensky is often associated with this approach due to his comparative analysis of the history of various occupations, in which he discusses the classic professions of law and medicine, engineering and accounting, which were considered more recent additions, as well as some “borderline” cases, teaching being among them. The study revealed that each of these occupations underwent a similar course of development on the way to being recognized as an established profession (1964).

The sequence that Wilensky (1964) describes is as follows:

1. Work that is to be done “full time”.
2. Training is required, particularly that associated with post secondary institutions.

3. Establish a professional association.
4. Legal regulation, often accompanied by licensing or certification.
5. A formal code of ethics.

This process has come to be known as “professionalization” and when looking at these steps it is clear that modern day high school teachers have achieved every one. As discussed in the previous section on traits, it has become required for teachers to not only complete an undergraduate degree in the area of their choosing, but they must also complete teacher training which is a degree in its own right, the Bachelor of Education, awarded only from accredited post-secondary institutions.

Furthermore, the Ontario College of Teachers was established in 1997 (“About the College- The Ontario College of Teachers”, 2010). It is to act as the professional association of teachers for all divisions (primary through to senior) and it is this governing body that controls who can teach by granting certification to those individuals who have met the preparation requirements to become a teacher. While it does not have grassroots beginnings, and is in fact, viewed with contention by many teachers, it does perform functions akin to other professional associations. For example, each member of the college of teachers is tracked throughout their career and their standing is publicly documented.

The Ontario College of Teachers also reserves the right to rebuke those who do not conduct themselves accordingly. The Education Act outlines the duties of teachers as they are defined

by legislation. If teachers are found to not live up to the standards expected of them, their license can and will be revoked. For example, like a doctor would be admonished for having an intimate relationship with a patient, teachers are reprimanded for similar inexcusable behaviour with their students.

Unfortunately, despite appearing to have followed the proper course of development, high school teachers are still, by and large, considered to be “semi-professionals” in the eyes of much of the sociological literature. It is important to note however, that the process approach has met its own critics and is often dismissed for its rigidity. Some may argue that particular steps are unnecessary or that they may be taken out of sequence (Freundreis and Vertz, 1988). Most importantly, it appears that professionalization does not guarantee full professional status.

2.3 Symbolic Approach

The symbolic approach does not currently have a lot of weight in the literature, however it is a more recent addition than the two that have already been discussed. Freundreis and Vertz assert that this approach was developed in an attempt to address the concerns, particularly regarding rigidity, that seemed to plague both the trait and process approaches (1988).

Using a symbolic approach harkens back the idea of a folk concept, in that it is adaptable in nature and can be fluid with changes in time and place. Despite this, a great concern is that it allows a common, standard, agreed upon definition to continue to be elusive (Freundreis and Vertz, 1988). One proponent of this perspective was Becker, who argued that the term

“profession” denotes that which people think of as profession (1962). Thus, this conceptualization avoids the inflexibility of the previous definitions and came to be a much more subjective entity. However, it remains to be asked, what does being a part of a profession mean to most people and how is this status generally understood?

2.4 Loose Coupling

The concept of “loose coupling” has been applied to educational organizations in the past, and is a pertinent element of this study as well. Typically this term, derived from institutional theory, indicates that, “*structure is disconnected from technical (work) activity, and activity is disconnected from its effects*” (Meyer and Rowan, 1978: p. 79). This is to say that the various elements of an organization are not as tightly interconnected as one might think. It is a common belief that the higher levels of an institution will set policies in accordance with their goals, and that they will be reflected in the practices of those individuals in the lower levels of the institution. However, this may lead to a “logic of confidence [whereby] higher levels of the system organize on the *assumption* that what is going on at lower levels make sense and conforms to rules, but they avoid inspecting it to discover or assume responsibility for inconsistencies and ineffectiveness” (Meyer and Rowan, 1978: p. 80). With no checks or evaluation in place, there is no way to maintain and ensure a tight connection between policy and practice, and the links between the two may become weak, if they are indeed, there at all. Schools seem to exhibit an environment that is particularly conducive to this type of loose coupling, and are often seen as the exemplar for this phenomenon (Hallett, 2010). When

organizations have multiple (and sometimes conflicting) goals, it is difficult to keep all elements tightly aligned. For example, while classrooms are the setting for learning and mastering skills, evaluation and direct competition between students, which may in turn result in a sense of failure; schools are also deemed to be a place for socialization, and the more recent “whole child approach” stresses the importance of things like nutrition, self esteem and overall well-being.

Thus the advantage of loose coupling is that a variety of goals can be observed at once, because it allows for mutations, adjustments and novel solutions in localized portions of the system without interference with other areas of the organization (Weick, 1976). This is accomplished by setting goals that are broad and vague in nature and making changes in structure and procedures that are largely symbolic rather than functional (Coburn, 2004). The result of this loose coupling in schools is that the classroom practices of teachers are decoupled from the mandates of administration, boards and the ministry allowing them discretion in their every day work (Weick, 1976).

Individuals, depending on their experience and understanding of a given situation, can then interpret policies in a number of ways. As Coburn’s work indicates, teachers’ integration of literacy initiatives into their classroom practices varied depending on their own history, perceptions of the approach, as well as when and how they were introduced to the techniques. Her research explored how, “teachers’ connections to the institutional

environment create a powerful framework within which teachers exercise agency” (2004: p. 214).

In the event that recoupling in schools is to occur (an effort to more tightly align policies and practices) it may produce what Hallett refers to as “turmoil” for teachers (2010). This is important to note because teachers who had previously structured their own work routines also created a “loosely-coupled system of autonomy akin to professionalism” (Hallett, 2010: p. 66). Therefore, when a new administrative team attempted to reintegrate policy and practice in a tightly coupled way, it resulted in a diminished feeling of being treated as a professional by teachers.

2.5 Professions, Professionalization and Professionalism

In the sociological literature the meaning behind a “profession” or “professionalization” of an occupation is quite different to that of “professionalism”. As Ingersoll writes, professionalism is the attitudes an individual brings to the job and as such it is to be discussed at the individual level. Professionalization, on the other hand, is a concept used to denote the structural and social attributes of an occupation as a whole and must be explored in terms of the group (Ingersoll in Ballantine and Spade, 2004). However, if one is to take into account how society tends to conceptualize professions, a huge part of that is the attitudes, work ethic and demeanour that individuals are expected to bring to certain types of work. The conduct and bedside manner of a doctor for example, may be just as, if not more important than the amount of autonomy individuals in the occupation have as a whole, in the

public identifying a particular practitioner as a professional. Therefore, the term “professional” and to whom it may apply can vary within a type of job as much as it does between occupational fields.

Similarly, while there are cases of teachers who view their work as simply being with kids during the day and getting the job done, there appear to be far more who enter the occupation with the intention and desire of touching the lives of their students in a much more profound way. Therefore, the question can be asked, what does it take to consider a teacher to be a professional? And in what ways do teachers demonstrate a commitment to professionalism? Sociologists have been less interested in this colloquial meaning of “professionalism”, however, I believe that it is a concept worth exploring and will do so within the context of this study.

2.5.1 Teachers as (Semi) Professionals

Despite the many changes that teaching has made in recent decades including adopting many of the traits of established professions and realizing the full process of professionalization, as an occupation teaching is still considered a “semi-profession”. “Semi professions” may be partially recognized for their attempts to emulate the classic professions, however they are not seen to have achieved an equivalent standard. Thus, the emphasis remains, not on the ways in which the occupation is similar to the professional criteria, but rather on the ways in which they continue to fall short. For example, although it may be required that teachers complete multiple levels of post secondary education to enter the field, the focus in the

sociological literature of professions remains on the fact that the required training is still a much shorter time commitment than medical school. As a result, semi-professionals may fall short elsewhere, particularly in the areas of status and prestige.

Yet as my research illustrates, many teachers do see themselves as professionals and have oriented their work practices and approach to teaching based on this belief. Individuals' attitudes towards their work may vary just as much within a given profession as it does between fields. Thus, the internalization of values such as strong work ethic, commitment, confidentiality, punctuality, empathy, responsibility and accountability, may be just as, if not more important, to defining a professional compared to traditional criteria, such as income and length of training. When an individual sees him or herself as part of a profession, they will act accordingly. In contrast, others who have not integrated these elements into their self-concept may not show the same level of commitment and dedication to their work, even if they complete more training, acquire more specialized knowledge and hold a more prestigious position.

Could this be the long omitted piece from the existing interpretations of how a profession should be defined? Based on the data collected during my research I will argue that an integral part of defining a professional is their embodiment of the spirit of professionalism. As of yet, there has been no discussion of how an individual's self-perception affects their status as part of a profession within the literature on the sociology of professions, particularly within the trait approach. Subjective understandings of professionalism are important

because they can dictate how individuals approach their work, as well as the culture of their work environment. If the collective internalizes this professionalism, they may in turn influence other key traits of professions, such as status and prestige. As I argue in this thesis, this examination of self-perception is what is missing from the existing literature and is an integral part of how a profession should be defined.

Chapter 3. Methodology

This project aims to examine teachers' perceptions of their own work, particularly as it pertains to dealing with student misconduct, and their position as (semi) professionals. To investigate these perceptions, I was interested in addressing a number of questions including: What training and professional development have teachers engaged in and how does it affect the way they do their work? How do policies shape their behaviour in their work environment? Do teachers perceive the policy as conforming to, enhancing or infringing on their professional autonomy? To illustrate these perceptions and actions, I asked teachers to provide examples of how they responded to student misconduct. Student misconduct is a suitable example to examine the degree to which policy and practice meet because all schools have codified policies and protocols that teachers technically should follow. Specifically, how do teachers report that they handle student misconduct? What informs their approach to student misconduct?

This research explores how educators perceive their teaching philosophy and techniques in light of policy shifts. Engaging teachers in discussions of school policies and personal classroom practices establishes a concern for subjectivity, while also tapping into their individual experiences as professionals (Bryman and Teevan, 2005: p. 153). While trends can be discerned through quantitative means, such a study would lack the rich information and insights that can be gained through the use of qualitative methods. These forms of data

collection allow for participants to express their own sentiments and concern regarding what they believe is important about the issues.

The research process was a continuously reflective one. Participant input during interviews influenced the tone and direction of their sessions, as well as created an awareness of themes that should be explored more deeply in subsequent interviews (Bryman and Teevan, 2005: p. 184). This process also aided in the categorization of concepts that were implemented in data coding. This “bottom up” approach to theme development is indicative of inductive data analysis, which is typical of a qualitative approach (Creswell, 2009: p. 175).

3.1 Role of the Researcher

Understanding the researcher can be as important to any study as understanding the research itself. It is possible that a researcher’s personal inclinations or values may explicitly bias the proceedings of the study or the findings it derives (Bryman and Teevan, 2005: p. 16-17).

Each individual brings their own interests and biases into their work. For this reason self-reflection is an important part of a qualitative study because it unpacks the ways in which one’s own experiences inform our interpretation of the research. Thus, it is here that I will present some details of my personal background.

Having decided in the third year of my undergraduate career to pursue a career in teaching, I completed my Bachelor of Education in 2008 at the University of Western Ontario. My work is heavily informed by my training as a certified teacher as it has familiarized me with the inner workings of the occupation.

We had classes in areas such as practical teaching techniques for our subject areas, as well as teaching philosophies and child psychology. This time was broken up by three block practicums, lasting approximately a month each. It was in these placements that we shadowed senior teachers in local school boards. Here the importance of classroom management skills were emphasized and honed.

It seemed to me that there was a disconnect between what sociologists said about teaching as a profession (mostly that it was, in fact, not a profession) as outsiders to the occupation and the ways that teachers think about themselves, their work and their contribution to society. I was aware that perhaps my own feelings were influenced by naïve idealism and a touch of misconception, given that I had still not officially worked as a teacher, in a board, with a class of my own. However, I saw this as an opportunity to conduct original research that would compare and contrast teachers' perceptions about the introduction of a new initiative to handle student misconduct with what existed in the current literature. Throughout a teacher's career, he or she will experience numerous policy shifts and initiatives of various sorts, all intended to improve teaching and learning, school safety, or student wellbeing. I wanted to understand how one such initiative may be experienced by teachers and how it shapes their perceptions of their professional status.

Although several of the participants knew that I am a certified teacher, I tried not to make explicit reference to my own experiences in the teacher education program. I am not sure how this may have affected their responses, perhaps, at times it made some individuals feel

as though I was on their side, as one participant warned me prior to starting the interview that it could easily turn into a “bitch fest” about their working environment.

On a positive note, my own training and background made me privy to the jargon of the education system that was often used by respondents. Having personal connections to all participants meant that a rapport was already established between us. This, in turn, made conversation flow freely and provided a level of comfort and trust with me as an interviewer that may not have been present otherwise. The responses from the participants were rich and informative. They were very forthcoming with their feelings and relayed many observations and musings as they reflected upon their work. There was often laughter dispersed throughout the interviews and most of the teachers seemed to be at ease, although there was one or two who were made anxious by the presence of the recording device.

3.2 Data Collection Procedures

Devising the ways in which data will be collected is an integral part of any research project. This process can have significant influence over the nature of the responses, and in turn will affect the findings. Here I will take the opportunity to outline the data collection procedures that were developed for the purposes of this study.

3.2.1 The Plan

My proposal received ethics clearance from the University of Waterloo in June of 2009.

Originally, this study was to take place in two high schools within the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, one that had recently implemented a restorative justice model and one

that had not. Using teachers from these two settings I wanted to compare their perceptions about each policy and their views about the amount of professional autonomy they can exert when dealing with bullying in their respective schools.

The research was to be attached to a larger project already underway. The “Restorative Justice: Transforming Communities” venture is an initiative that was started over two years ago between the Hamilton Police Services, John Howard Society of Hamilton-Burlington, and the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board. Their underlying concern was to reduce youth conflict in the Hamilton community and examine the implementation of restorative justice models as a method of doing so. This endeavour had already received clearance with the Hamilton school board ethics review.

Unfortunately, after months of dealing with their ethics review committee, in late September 2009, I was told by the Hamilton-Wentworth board that due to high numbers of researchers and in turn, participant burnout, I would not be given authorization to work with their teachers. This was incredibly disappointing, however, a new plan was devised fairly quickly and I was able to forge ahead with research.

3.2.2 The Reality

In the end, semi-structured interviews were generated through a snowball sample of high school teachers, from numerous boards using personal contacts. Nineteen of the interviews were conducted in person, and one interview was conducted by telephone. Conducting interviews is an important method when seeking insight into people’s perceptions and

motivations. These are not issues that can be easily detected through other means, such as participant observation (Bryman and Teevan, 2005; p. 154).

I had previously prepared an interview schedule consisting of questions and specific topics that should be addressed during the session. In the case of this study, it has been important to collect information on themes such as professional autonomy and educational policy reform. The schedule of questions I devised largely concentrated on issues of policies regarding student misconduct, due to the original intention of comparing Restorative Justice and Punitive approaches. I decided not to change the prepared questions given that Restorative Justice is a currently a hot topic in many boards, and thought that these issues could still prove relevant. Asking about particular policies, such as those targeting truancy and bullying, allowed me to understand the ways in which teachers navigate through the expectations and the practical implications of what they do day to day. Still, I did make a point of asking about their preparation, training and skills in general (for sample interview schedule see Appendix A).

Furthermore, when an interview is semi-structured the schedule is merely a guide, the order can be changed or some questions dropped depending on the responses of the participant being interviewed at the time. Flexibility is an important part of qualitative methodology; each interviewee must be able to frame their responses in a way that is personally relevant (Bryman and Teevan, 2005: p 184), thus, the teachers were now asked, for example, if they were familiar with Restorative Justice and if so, how they would describe such methods. This

enabled me to gauge the understanding of these issues from the perspective of the teachers, which I thought could be an indication of their continued professional development.

During the interviews, teachers were also asked questions about their beliefs and attitudes toward student behaviour, such as definitions of bullying, “problem” behaviours that are addressed in the classroom and the process they are expected to follow. I also explored teachers’ feelings about prescribed protocol and how they informed their own routines and approach to handling classroom misconduct. These were asked as “open” questions, which are known to promote discussion because they do not have predefined or restricted responses (Stewart and Cash, Jr., 2006). Both verbal and nonverbal probes were used throughout the interviews as well. For example, silent or “nudging” probes, such as nodding in agreement encouraged the interviewee to continue on. Informational probes are used to illicit more information from the participants. Restatement probes and mirror questions are used as a means of clarification; the former to reiterate the question and the latter to better understand the interviewee’s response (Stewart and Cash, Jr., 2006). All of these techniques elicit rich data from the participants and ensure that the information obtained is clear and relevant.

The sessions included what is known as retrospective interviewing. This means that I inquired about not only the present, but the past as well (Bryman and Teevan, 2005). For example, teachers were asked to describe a time when they have had to deal with a student altercation. Information was also collected about the training they have received regarding how to identify and address these problems. This is intended to provide me with an

understanding of the individual's history and experience and how he/she handled an actual incident.

The interviews took place off of school property outside of school hours and were audio recorded, after having received the consent of all participants (for sample introduction letter and consent form see Appendix B and C). Transcriptions occurred as soon as possible after an interview and the teachers were told a copy would be sent to them within two to three weeks. This was to allow them to read over the interview transcript and inform me of any questions, concerns or clarifications they may have had.

3.2.3 Sampling

The sample consisted solely of individuals who taught in high schools. No elementary school teachers were contacted. While the original plan had been to work with a single board, it soon became evident that the parameters would need to be broadened. In the end the teachers interviewed spanned six boards (five public and one Catholic). Additionally, there was a participant who taught at a private school (for interview and sample breakdown see Appendix D).

Two pre-test interviews were conducted during the summer months, after receiving ethics clearance from the university. When recruitment strategies were changed, these individuals were contacted and asked for their permission to use their audio-recorded interviews for the project and both provided written consent. Eighteen additional semi-structured interviews took place over a three-month period, between October and December 2009. At the end of

each meeting participants were allowed an opportunity for additional remarks regarding the topics discussed and were encouraged to comment on the interview itself. All taped interviews were transcribed and returned to the participants for their review.

3.2.4 Recruitment

In the end it was decided that the best thing to do was to work from personal contacts and use a snowball sample from there. I sent emails and messages through Facebook to family members, friends, my own high school teachers and colleagues from my cohort in the teacher education program. It was important to me not to use board designated email addresses or extensions to get in touch with potential participants, because I did not want any trouble with a board that may result in another hiatus in the research process.

In total, 24 teachers agreed to be interviewed. Of the 24, four individuals agreed to participate and then could not fit the interview into their schedule or did not return follow up messages.¹ The in-person interviews took place in mutually agreed upon locations. I contacted the vast majority of participants directly. At the end of every in person interview, each individual was given three extra introduction letters and three to five of my business cards. The participant interviewed over the phone was emailed a PDF version of the introduction letter that could be forwarded by email. Interviewees were then instructed to

¹ One of these people was on maternity leave and requested that I send the questions to her with the understanding that she would type out the answers and email them back. Her responses were never received.

pass these materials along to other teachers they thought might be interested in sharing their opinions and experiences with me. There is no way of knowing how many people were given these materials by the participants. However, I did have one session with the sister of a previous participant. There was also a case when I pointedly asked one interviewee to give the materials to a specific coworker that I had a relationship with but was not able to contact myself. This individual later contacted me for an interview.

3.3 The Interview Process

Each interview began with allowing the participant time to review the introduction letter and consent form, which included signed permission for recording the interview. Upon completion the details of the interview were discussed verbally, for example, participants were made aware of the structure of the interview including the number of sections. They were also reminded that the session would be audio-recorded and that should they happen to disclose identifying information during the process, such as their name, the name of a coworker, their school or board, these items would be changed to general terms in the transcription process in order to preserve their anonymity. Furthermore, audio recording and transcripts were saved using a six digit identification number, where the first two digits refer to the participants' school board, the third and fourth digits refer to the school in which they teach and the final two digits are given to the particular teacher.

Each participant was told that they would be sent a copy of their transcript that they would have a chance to review. Finally, participants were asked if they had any concerns or

questions before the interview was to commence. The length of the interviews ranged in time from 35 minutes to approximately an hour and ten minutes, with the average time being 45 minutes long.

The first section of the interview was primarily to collect background information about the individual's career in teaching. Following this were sections related to addressing student misconduct, awareness of restorative justice models, attendance policies (which was added half way through the interviews), teaching as a profession and final wrap up. Again, to review the interview schedule please see Appendix A.

Participants were forthcoming with their responses, and there were no questions that were declined. This could be due to the previous relationship that existed between myself and the vast majority of the individuals interviewed.

At the end of the sessions, each individual was debriefed about the purposes of the study, namely to investigate teaching as a profession as this term is defined in the sociological literature. Many of the participants found this to be an interesting topic and at times they seemed shocked and pensive about the fact that not everyone considers their occupation to be a profession. Some individuals also expressed gratitude for the opportunity to think about their work in a way they said they had not done before.

There were also some individuals who provided me with feedback that in turn informed some of the questions asked in later interviews. One gentleman suggested that I ask teachers about

the attendance policy in their schools, as well as how and if they deal with lates and absences in their classroom. As was previously mentioned, I added a section on this topic half way through the interviews. I found that these questions elicited some very interesting, and sometimes surprising, responses.

Before we parted ways, the teachers were reminded that they would receive a transcript of the interview within the following two weeks. Each interview was transcribed as soon as possible after the meeting had taken place, and few took as long as a fortnight to get back to the participant. This was done with the help of a software program called “ExpressScribe” which allowed me to manipulate the speed of the audio while typing out the dialogue directly into a word document. Upon completion, each transcript was sent by email (except for one which was printed and hand delivered, by request) to the respective individuals so that they could review the file. At this time they were encouraged to read over the document and let me know if they had any concerns or clarifications about what had transpired, or if they had thought of additional reflections that they would like me to be aware of since our meeting had taken place. Only one of the participants responded with supplementary points, a handful of others simply thanked me for sending the transcript, while most of the individuals did not respond to this communication in any manner.

3.3.1 In Person Interviews

Nineteen of the twenty interviews were conducted in person. These meetings took place at a previously agreed upon location. While this usually meant a local coffee shop or restaurant,

there were times that they took place in the participant's home. Effort was made to make participation as convenient as possible for the individuals who agreed to meet. In some cases this resulted in my driving out of town for up to two hours to conduct the interview. However, there are many advantages to in person interviews, such as clarity and the ability to take in other forms of communication such as body language.

3.3.2 Phone Interview

Only one of the interviews was performed by phone. The reason for this was due to the distance between the researcher and the participant, as well as conflicting schedules. In the days leading up to the interview, the participant was emailed the information letter and consent form. They were asked to read the documents and reply with a statement that included their consent to the clauses outlined. This phone interview was conducted from the privacy of my own home and was recorded, transcribed and returned to the participant, just as the other 19 interviews were.

3.4 Data Analysis

It is in this phase of research that things start to come together as a whole. Data analysis is a long and arduous, but rewarding process. In this next section I will discuss the ways in which the data were coded and the importance of remaining unbiased during the interpretation phase.

3.4.1 Coding

As Johnny Saldaña, a prominent voice in sociological methodology, has noted, there is no one “‘best’ way to code qualitative data” (2009: p. 47). Due to the fact that qualitative studies are so individualized and can elicit very unique data, it is up to the researcher to understand and determine what analytical approach will be best suited to their study. My research seeks to compare teacher perceptions to what already exists in the sociology of professions; thus, I chose to use a theoretical approach. I began with codes that were informed by concepts devised in the professions literature. Doing this enabled me to organize the data in such a way that would facilitate analysis that is geared towards answering my research questions (Saldaña, 2009: p. 49).

The typed transcripts from the interviews were not the only documents that were part of the coding process. I did keep a notebook on hand during the interviews, often jotting down interesting remarks, points to deliberate and potential codes that seemed to be emerging. Saldaña identifies these notes containing reflections of patterns as “analytic memos”. The notes helped to keep me organized and remind me of connections that I had made between the statements of different participants.

I chose to perform the coding through the use of the qualitative data analysis software package called, NVivo 8. Importing the word documents containing the transcripts was a very simple procedure and it allowed me to begin coding without needing to change the files in any way. Chosen sections of texts could be flagged and associated with a given category, theme or “code”. Using software meant that adjusting these nodes and their relationships to

one another could be done with ease. Additionally, in the later stages of the study I could perform inquiries in order to find certain memorable quotes quickly. Thus, using the software package made the data more accessible which in turn made the coding process less daunting than more traditional methods.

Saldaña advocates for multiple cycles of coding in order to work thoroughly through the data (2009). My first cycle approach was one that readily lends itself to the analysis of interview transcripts, referred to as “structural coding”. Since this approach is associated with studies that engage multiple participants and utilize semi-structured data-gathering protocols, it was very well suited to my research plan. As per this method, and as I previously mentioned, I began by using codes that were derived from the sociological literature of professions, my research questions and the sections that framed my interview schedule. In this particular case, that meant the criteria for a profession, as outlined by the literature, were used as my initial codes, specifically: training and education, specialized knowledge and skills, autonomy and status and prestige. Items that were coded in the same way were later collected and examined for closer detail. This led to new sub codes, for example, text which had previously been labeled as “status and prestige” were now divided into those that mentioned “positive views” (therefore indicating high status and prestige) and those that were with regard to “negative views” (therefore indicating low status and prestige). This meant that the data would be arranged in such a way that allowed me to easily consider the ways in which the teachers’ perceptions did and did not align with the views expressed in the literature.

These initial codes were not the only ones that I found relevant to the data. As I went through the transcripts there were some ideas and patterns that I had not originally expected to find, such as the multiple references to parents and parenthood. Although, these segments did not speak directly to the questions or the themes I was investigating, it was clear that the teachers I interviewed felt that these items were a very important aspect of their work. Thus, it was essential that I label and track these pieces of text as well as “emergent codes” that evolved from the data during the coding process (Saldaña, 2009).

The second cycle of coding for this study can be considered “pattern coding”. During this process bits and pieces of data are pooled under a larger umbrella category for the codes. In my initial coding I had created codes to capture discussion around, “Punitive Methods” and “Restorative Justice” as these were two concepts at the fore of my schedule of questions. During the interviews many teachers discussed the idea of “Zero Tolerance” so that became a code as well. Finally, the teachers also made mention of “school rules” in general and I began asking them about “attendance policies” in specific, thus these two notions also needed their own codes. All of these ideas were then collected under a tree node called, “Policies”. This allowed me to have all of the discussion about the different kinds of regulations under one larger code. This is important because as Saldaña points out, “Coding is not just labeling, it is *linking*.” (2009, p. 8). Using pattern coding brings together information, which makes relationships in the data more evident.

3.4.2 Interpretation

When interpreting data it was of the utmost importance to remain as objective as possible in order to avoid researcher bias. It was important to make note of patterns as they emerged during the coding process but to limit conclusions until all of the pieces were accounted for. It is integral that this report be a truthful representation of how the teachers interviewed perceive their own work.

3.5 Procedures for Ensuring Validity

The term validity has a history in quantitative research. Guba and Lincoln have devised criteria that parallel validity for qualitative methods. Among them are: credibility, transferability and dependability (Bryman and Teevan, 2005: p. 150).

Credibility refers to a good match between the data that has been collected and the situation it is meant to represent. This can be achieved in a number of ways, including asking questions from different perspectives in order to ensure consistency in participant response. This technique was used in crafting the interview schedule and there were times in some of the sessions that the participants said, “Haven’t you asked about something similar before?” Furthermore, a technique called “member checking” has been employed. As noted previously, all interviewees were sent copies of their transcribed sessions and given the option of being sent the final report (only three indicated any interest). This measure allows each individual to assess the accuracy of records and researcher interpretation (Creswell, 2009: p. 191).

Often the ability to generalize findings to other groups or the larger population is not a major goal of qualitative research. However, it is important to provide, “rich, thick description” of settings and other elements of the data (Creswell, 2009: p. 191). Not only does this result in a better understanding for the intended audience, but it also provides others with the information that can be used for “making judgments about the possible transferability of findings to other milieus” (Bryman and Teevan, 2005: p. 150).

Finally, Dependability has been achieved through keeping complete and thorough records throughout the research process. With the permission of the participants, all sessions were recorded to make certain that transcription was accurate and precise.

3.6 Anonymity and Confidentiality

As was indicated previously, all identifiers were removed during the transcription process. This includes deleting references the participants may have made during the interview to themselves, their coworkers, their school or board, as well as implementing a codified identification for all files associated with each participant.

All of the information collected will remain in my possession and no one at the schools will have access to any of the raw data. Any printed materials will be stored in a locked office at the University of Waterloo and will be shredded after two years, while any electronic data, including typed transcripts, field notes and digital recordings will be stored on my personal, password protected computer to be securely deleted when shredding of hard copies occur.

3.7 Limitations of the Study

No study can be perfect. There are always factors that can affect any part of the research process in a less than desirable way. This study is, of course, no exception. Three things in particular that may limit the findings from the collected data are: the recruitment process, the interview process and finally the language used by myself and the participants.

3.7.1 Recruitment

The fact that I had to ultimately use my own personal contacts to recruit participants may mean that the sample consists primarily of a certain type of person and/or teacher. The individuals that I keep in my circle of friends and acquaintances are more likely than others to be people who share common values, beliefs and attitudes with me. Likewise, those former teachers who I have kept in touch with since my own days of high school are the ones that I felt connected to and enjoyed their personalities and teaching style. Thus, it is possible that had my sample been drawn randomly there may have been more variety in the views shared.

3.7.2 The Interview Process

Due to the self-report nature of data collection, it is difficult to know whether or not things that teachers say they do and what they actually do are one and the same. It is possible that individuals tried to influence the researcher's impression of themselves by stating what they thought was the best response. This may be especially true given that the study was discerning if they are following methods and regulations prescribed by their employers.

Furthermore, having previously established connections with participants there is a possibility that some may have tried to present themselves in a certain way in order to manage their image. Ideally, classroom observation or teacher shadowing could confirm that the ways they described themselves in their work were in fact valid; however, due to time constraints this was not a feasible option.

This disadvantage seems trivial in comparison to the advantages involved. Interviews can facilitate better understanding of the issues because the interviewer can probe deeper into particular statements if the need should arise. Furthermore, since a large portion of my interests involve how individuals perceive their work and themselves in the role of teacher, it is important to gain insight into their motivations and understandings, not just their actions.

3.7.3 Language

Another element that had to be taken into consideration is the nature of the language used in the field of education. Despite having some experience with teaching myself, I am not fluent in all of the jargon. Many training programs and anti-bullying initiatives are referred to by acronyms. It was imperative that while interviewing teachers that I clarified their use of terms to ensure that I have an accurate understanding of their responses.

Chapter 4. Findings

4.1 Defending Their Work as a Profession

How do teachers understand their occupational status? When asked if they considered teaching to be a profession, every single participant answered with an emphatic, “Yes!” Not only did they whole-heartedly believe that they were part of a profession, several teachers told me that their co-workers subscribe to this same sentiment. Yet it is clear from the sociological literature on professions that when it comes to the current criteria, especially in comparison to the fields of medicine and law, teaching unfortunately falls short (The Canadian Education Association, 1948; Ingersoll, 2003a; Ingersoll, 2003b; Grant & Murray, 2003).

How do teachers justify calling themselves professionals? How do occupational traits of teaching compare with those of traditional professions? If there are discrepancies, how can they be explained? The sociological literature of professions suggests that there are a number of criteria that need to be met in order for an occupation to achieve the status of a profession. Those that were outlined in the literature review include; education, specialized knowledge, status and prestige and autonomy. The way these matters are discussed in regards to teaching does not appear to align with what actually goes on in schools. Though some of the teachers reported rejecting traditional markers of professionalization, by and large they maintain that they do meet the criteria outlined in the literature, including the ability to exercise a great deal of autonomy.

4.1.1 Training, Education and Challenges from Outside the Profession

Licensing and professional designations are reserved for individuals who have completed specified training, committing time and effort to the program. They are awarded to those who have demonstrated proficiency and expertise in an area of knowledge that eludes the public at large. The authority that professionals possess is a result of obtaining this esoteric knowledge.

For those who choose to become certified to teach at the intermediate/senior level (high school), they must declare two teachable subject areas that they have developed over the course of their undergraduate careers. Teacher training in Ontario typically takes the form of a one year Bachelor of Education. These programs are made up of two components. The first is class based and consists largely of required courses, including classes that are focused on instruction strategies relevant to one's teachable subject areas, among other things. The second are placements in which participants in the program are immersed in high school classes and are mentored by an associate teacher, much like an internship or residency. When I asked the participants, why they believed teaching is a profession, the first response always alluded to their post-secondary education and teacher specific training.

Another element that does not seem to be recognized in the literature is the amount of professional development done by teachers. "PD days" are presented in the sociology of professions as being of little use, while additional qualification courses are not even discussed. However, taking additional qualifications (AQs) seems to be extremely common in the field of teaching and can concentrate on a particular subject area or other relevant

topics such as “technology in the classroom”. There were 38,616 additional qualifications awarded to members of the Ontario College of Teachers in 2008 alone (Ontario College of Teachers – 2008 Annual Report). Only four of the participants in my study reported that they had not yet taken an “AQ” course, three of which were in their first two years of teaching. On the other hand, many of the other teachers had acquired their “honours specialist” in a subject area, which consists of three courses and accumulated teaching experience, and a number also mentioned having AOs in multiple areas.

It was not uncommon to have the teachers tell me that they had been introduced to concepts at conferences or workshops, or perhaps they had come across certain ideas or thoughts in reading they had done on educational issues and pedagogy. This sort of upgraded training and personally driven development are in line with the expectations of members of professional bodies.

Despite these measures to keep current in their field, teachers talked about how their authority is often challenged by individuals who had not undergone the same specialized training. The participants seemed wary of the limited respect that they received from people outside of their occupation, particularly when those people were their students’ parents.

Parents and parenting came up frequently during the course of the interviews. None of the questions included in the interview schedule asked anything about the families of students, however, this topic was deemed an important point of discussion by many of the teachers I interviewed. Some discussed the ways in which teaching was similar to parenting, for

example, Ms. Thompson, mother of three young boys, described her teaching as, "... a big extension of parenting. Like, doing things that parents, you know, to go to that extent that parents aren't able to go, because it's too complicated and it takes too much time and has a bit more focus" (Interview December 23, 2009). The ideas she presents here tie back to the notion that teachers are now responsible for the child's development as whole due to the commitments of time and effort that parents have to make outside of their families.

Some may argue that this change is a reflection of the current state of society in which single parents, or adults in dual income families, have little time to spend with their children. As Ms. Williams pointed out, "we're with their children more than [their parents] are, um, simple, mathematically; we are because when they're home often the kids are sleeping. So, we have just as much of a duty to help them grow up as their parents do" (Interview October 8, 2009). This blurring of boundaries may, in fact, have a de-professionalizing effect because parenting is a position that anyone can take on; it does not require a license, training, or even any kind of aptitude for the role.

Another way that the participants discussed the relationships between teachers and parents was the way that families were attempting to encroach on their professional domain. The teachers also felt it important to discuss the mistreatment they were receiving from the parents of their students. Ms. Williams even went as far as to name it as bullying; "Um, it's quite interesting that parents are finding it appropriate, still a small number, but it's

noticeable that it's happening, they find it appropriate to treat their teacher... their children's teachers in a very negative way" (Interview October 8, 2009).

It appears that the major area of concern for parents is the matter of their children's grades, and it is often for this reason that a teacher may be approached. According to Ms. Davis, "when it comes to marks and things they're still very confrontational with us" (Interview October 9, 2009). What is most interesting about this comment in the context of the sociological literature, is that it denotes a lack of confidence in what one may interpret as "professional judgment". When making a visit to a doctor's office, a person may seek out a second opinion, but it is hard to imagine a family member telling a physician that his/her analysis was faulty on technical grounds and that a new diagnosis must be made immediately. However, this is what teachers say happens to them after they have allocated grades to their students.

Part of the issue may be that since most individuals in North America have grown up as part of the education system, they may develop a familiarity with teachers in their work environment, which in turn translates to a false sense of understanding about what the job requires and entails. For example, Ms. Anderson, a teacher of only a few months told me she had been surprised at first by how exhausted she was at the end of each school day, physically from standing and moving about her classroom and school, but also mentally from having to anticipate any possible question a student may pose to her. She had not been anticipating that teaching would be such so draining. (Interview October 15, 2009) As Ms.

Williams points out, the perceptions we had as high school students about what it is our teachers do are incorrect because, “We didn’t [actually] see the other side of it” (Interview October 8, 2009).

4.1.2 Specialized Knowledge and Challenges From Within the Profession

Not only are there external factors that challenge teaching’s position as a profession, there are also challenges that come from within the occupation itself. There appears to be a lack of consensus regarding what it means to be a professional as it relates to teaching. While conducting the interviews one relevant area of ambiguity was concerning what constituted “specialized knowledge.”

The sociological literature refers to course content as the specialized knowledge of a high school teacher, and the teachers I spoke to did acknowledge the importance of having a degree of expertise in the subject area they are required to teach. However, most teachers, like Ms. Moore, remarked that, “[the specialized knowledge of a teacher] definitely [included] more than just content” (Interview November 17, 2009). Ms. Brown agreed saying, “It goes beyond just knowing your subject knowledge really well” (Interview December 16, 2009).

What then did the individuals interviewed report that they needed to know or be able to do in order to be a teacher? There was no single clear-cut answer. The teachers seemed to find it very difficult to pin point exactly what skills and knowledge they had that were specific to their work. Their responses to this question were quite varied, though some ideas were

repeated more often than others, these included; classroom management skills, patience, communication, public speaking, organization, interpersonal skills, the capacity for empathy and passion both for the subject area and for working with youth.

It is important to note that none of these attributes and skills are subject dependent. When the literature discusses subject knowledge as the expertise of a teacher, it discredits them as professionals due to the amount of so called “out-of-field” teaching that happens in most schools, including those in Ontario. However, the teacher-defined list of skills, presented above, are all transferable between subjects, grades and streams. For example, classroom management is every bit as important in a math class as it is in an English class. However, it seems to me, that the diversity of the list may in fact be a detriment to others seeing their work as a profession because there is no one defined specialized knowledge or skill that is deemed as most important by all of the teachers. However, as the focus turns to more structural elements of the occupation, including policies, there is still opportunity for their insights to reflect their occupation as a profession.

4.1.3 Evidence of Teacher Autonomy: The Gap Between Student Misconduct Policies and Practices

Autonomy has long been one of the central, and possibly most important, criteria that define a profession. In the context of occupations this concept refers to one’s ability to exercise control and authority over one’s own work, such as what will be done, how it will be done and when (Ingersoll, 2003; Leicht & Fennell, 2001; Lockhart, 1991; Baldrige et. al., 1977).

For example, doctors use their professional judgment to diagnose and in turn treat their patients. The decisions they make are rarely questioned or reviewed by other bodies. The literature suggests that teachers have little to no autonomy of this kind.

This is likely because autonomy is discussed within the context of authority relations, in which it is understood that certain positions in society are given a degree of power, which in turn allows individuals holding these positions to regulate their own work. In the classic professions of law and medicine, the right to exercise this authority, in relation to others, is said to come from the specified body of knowledge acquired by those who hold the positions, as was described above. Furthermore, one of the criticisms in the literature regarding teaching is that members of school staff are subject to the initiatives developed by their administration, board and the ministry; they are expected to follow directives produced by other levels of the education system's hierarchy, which in turn should decrease the amount of autonomy that teachers possess. This would be associated with their lack of professional status and thus, the literature assumes that teachers are therefore forced to tightly couple their practice with mandated policy.

However, despite this prediction, "researchers have argued [since the late 1970s] that schools respond to pressure in the institutional environment by making symbolic changes in structure and procedures but decouple these changes from classroom practice, buffering the classroom from environmental pressures" (Coburn 2004, p. 211). Institutional theory, particularly as it has been applied to the education system by individuals such as Rowan and Meyer, is used to

explain that this “loose coupling” occurs from the need of the organization to maintain its legitimacy and appease the public, rather than to necessarily improve efficiency or productivity (Meyer and Rowan, 2006). Thus, many initiatives that come from above are deliberately vague, which in turn gives teachers the ability to use their discretion when interpreting and enacting the policies and programs.

In a work environment such as a factory the day-to-day business is very precise and predictable. Everything is controlled and coordinated, starting with inputs, throughout the process and finally with the products that are developed in the end. Like other professional occupations, schools are human service organizations and work with varying clientele. Students in a single class may differ greatly in skill level, interests and motivation. Furthermore, some areas, such as citizenship, leadership and socialization, are “taught” under the education system, but are difficult to operationalize and are not inherently measurable. Thus, while a single teacher is not allowed to alter a particular program or policy, when their classroom door is closed they can exercise a lot of discretion when it comes to how something is accomplished. When “loose coupling” is cultivated, teachers are given the chance to draw on their expertise and experience in responding to individual events, situations and students. This not only creates variation between classrooms and schools, but it also affords teachers discretion.

When I began my research I sought to understand how the introduction of a new policy, more specifically adopting a restorative justice model to deal with student misconduct, would

affect teaching in relation to the sociological criteria of professions. Restorative justice is reportedly increasing in popularity and many Ontario boards are said to have begun integrating it into their schools. Traditionally schools have used punitive models including the much-criticized “zero tolerance” policy.

I soon discovered that the data I collected in this area provided excellent evidence for teacher autonomy and was an example of “loose coupling”, because despite the publicity and media attention about the shift, many of the teachers I interviewed knew little to nothing about the approach and instead reported using their own judgment and dealing with students personally. What this means is that while there is campaigning for the use of new tactics to deal with bullying for instance, the looser organizational structure of the education system creates a disconnect between policy and practice. When the policy from the top does not filter down to the actions of those at the bottom (the teachers), the teachers are afforded a lot more freedom to deal with student misconduct as they see fit, and may be seen as having a large degree of autonomy. In this way, the newer, “progressive discipline” policy is more professionalizing than zero tolerance, since the latter serves to remove teacher discretion.

Fourteen of the individuals interviewed taught in a board (board 01) that has been commended for its integration of restorative justice initiatives². Despite this fact, some of the

² Restorative justice is a model that is centered on the ideas of reconciliation as opposed to punishment. In brief, often through the use of mediation, it allows all participants in a conflict to express themselves and aims to reintegrate these individuals back into the community. (Continued...)

participants seemed unsure when asked to discuss their own definitions of the approach, as well as giving examples of the approach's implementation in their own school.

There were a few participants that were at a complete loss, such as participant Ms. Anderson who, when first asked if she was familiar with the term restorative justice, replied, "Not... I am a little... I've heard it, but I don't really know what it means" (Interview October 15, 2009). Many individuals, such as Ms. Davis, floundered through a definition; "I've heard of it, but I don't know the exact definition. I think it means, correct me if I'm wrong, um, that if you do something wrong you can sort of, what's the word for it, um, ok... you explain it to me. Can you give me a definition or you can't?... right. Um, does it mean that you can take vengeance? I don't know. I'm not totally sure. But I think it means you can sort of, go eye for eye" (Interview October 9, 2009).

The teachers primarily discussed restorative justice in terms of what it is not. By and large they understood that it was not associated with the traditional consequences such as suspension and expulsion. They sometimes mentioned, as in the case of Ms. Martin, that the outcome would speak to the original conflict, "Um, I guess rather than simply punishing,

The element of this approach that was most often described by the teachers was the communication between all involved parties. One labeled this coming together of sides as a, "justice circle". There were a handful of participants who reported this tool had been used in their own classrooms or schools, but it did not seem as though it was employed on a consistent basis across schools or within them, no matter what the board.

helping to right whatever the wrong was. Um, I guess that would be something like, I mean, if somebody vandalizes or litters, they say well, can you help me clean the desks, or pick up the garbage or something to kind of make it better... in a very simple example. But, rather than being like, you have to stay and sit at a desk after school for 10 minutes for doing that. It would make the punishment fit the crime” (Interview November 14, 2009).

Given that this approach has been at the fore of proposed reforms and seen as an answer to the rising concern over bullying, I had expected that a larger number of teachers would be able to give me a more comprehensive definition of restorative justice. As it turns out, the interviewees in the sample could not speak to having received any professional development opportunities around this approach, at least not any that had been required by their schools. Though, many mentioned they might be able to seek out more training in this area on their own, a practice, which we now know, is common among teachers.

Mr. Miller mentioned having been to a seminar about restorative justice and had later been asked to be a part of a circle that was moderated by an administrator. However, he indicated that this had taken place a decade prior to the interview (Interview October 16, 2009).

Similarly, participant Mr. Taylor had asked another teacher, who had introduced him to the approach, to moderate a circle regarding a conflict that had happened in a class with his students. He sat largely as a bystander, had no formal training in the area and has only read about it in the context of Native cultures since. The incident in the class took place approximately five years ago (Interview January 12, 2010).

There were few examples given of restorative justice currently being used in schools on a large scale. The one teacher from board 06, Ms. Hall, discussed being involved in a mediation session involving two of her students, in which they were able to bring in individuals for support through the process (one brought his mother and the other brought a sibling). She indicated that this is a process often used in the board and that the situation she described was not her first experience with using an RJ approach (Interview December 21, 2009) However, the majority of teachers discussed these mediations as something that happened within the guidance department, with only those parties directly implicated and did not indicate their own involvement in the process.

Rather than using restorative justice, most teachers exercised a great deal of discretion when handling student misconduct. Teachers discussed drawing on their professional expertise and experience to judge the severity of an offense and appropriate sanctions or punishments. My findings suggest that not only do teachers believe that they have autonomy, but they also have the freedom to exercise that autonomy. This freedom is rooted in the loosely coupled structure of schooling organization in which higher levels may advocate one policy, while the practices of those who work on the ground level practice a different approach. Accordingly, it was much more common for teachers to discuss traditional punitive methods of dealing with student misconduct.

When teachers were asked to describe a case of student misconduct or an altercation with or between students, the majority reported that these instances were handled on their level and

when a consequence was dealt it was most likely to be a detention. However, they noted that suspension and expulsions were also used to deal with problem students depending on the severity or frequency of the altercations. So for example, Mr. Harris told me, "... if something is going on, if something's going on in the school that should not be happening, it's against school rules, [and it's something serious, it's not], you know, you've got a ten minute detention after school, no, you're getting a suspension. You're going home and this is something your parents will be made aware of." (Interview October 25, 2009). It should be noted that teachers do not have the authority to suspend or expel students; the current provincial laws give this power only to individuals at the administrative level of a school. Ms. Clark referred to her school's model as "progressive discipline" (Interview November 1, 2009), a term that signifies that there are varying levels of consequences, and it is repeat behaviour that will advance a student to a more serious form of punishment as opposed to the offense itself.

Interestingly enough, those interviewed often stated that judging student misconduct on a case-by-case basis was ideal. They recognized the importance of context and external forces on each individual's behaviour, and said that this often played a part in how they dealt with these situations. It was not uncommon for the teachers to tell me that methods such as suspensions and expulsions were not always effective and could not get at the root of the problem behaviour or address it in a way that diminished the likelihood of it reoccurring. Yet, the participants defended the punitive model time and time again. For one thing it appeared to be easier to have equal treatment in large school as opposed to equitable

treatment, as Ms. Williams put it, “I would love to see it dealt with case by case. I would love to see that work, um, unfortunately though. Like I said in a school of 1,300 it’s very difficult to do that because people start yelling, ‘This is unfair, this is what happened to me. Why shouldn’t it happen to so-and-so? I’m being treated wrong. You’re so much harsher with me’ so, you do need to work, you do need to have a definite set of guidelines to work with” (Interview October 8, 2009).

Some teachers, like Mr. Thomas, also believed that having a predetermined set of consequences for given types of actions would tend to deter deviant behaviour; “I think the kids need to think that there’s direct consequences. So, I think it has to be sort of understood by the student population that if I do X, Y is going to happen” (Interview October 23, 2009). Dealing with students case by case, was not seen to instill the same sense of fear of, expulsion for example, which may prevent students from engaging in undesirable acts in the first place.

Another term that was used frequently by the teachers was “Zero tolerance”. This concept has been defined in the literature as “mandated suspensions... [and] can also include mandatory consequences for a variety of other misbehaviors identified by individual institutions” (Welch and Payne, 2010: p. 26). When asked about the policies used in their schools to address bullying and school violence 11 of the teachers interviewed made reference to their school dealing with things in this way, “And our school has basically zero tolerance” (Ms. Allen, Interview November 28, 2009), “it’s unusual [to see bullying] because

the policies are zero tolerance” (Ms. Williams, Interview October 8, 2009), “We have a zero tolerance policy” (Ms. Walker Interview December 2, 2009).

Though it is true that the Safe Schools Act of 2000, brought with it a reputation of zero tolerance, this legislation has since been criticized by many, which prompted former Education Minister Kathleen Wynne to address the concerns in 2007. It was then said that, “the words "zero tolerance" [would] be removed from all ministry documents and schools [would] be informed that mitigating factors should be considered before a student is expelled or suspended” (CBC, 2007) Thus, not only is it striking that the participants touted an approach that has been reprimanded and expunged, but it is also a method that is seemingly the exact opposite of Restorative Justice, which is supposedly what is now being implemented.

Due to the nature of the teachers’ responses it became clear that it would be difficult to investigate the topic in the manner I had anticipated. However, what emerged was a clear disconnect between what was being mandated by boards and ministries and the feelings and methods of the teachers themselves. Based on the interviewees, there is a gap between policy and practice. While bodies like the Ministry of Education should, at least in theory, be regulating what is going on in the schools and how students are dealt with, it appears that teachers actually have a lot of control over the way they perform their work and do not necessary hold views or act in accordance with mandates from “higher” ranks. Therefore, despite the fact that teachers are said to lack authority, derived from a specialized body of

knowledge, they still report having large degree of autonomy. All of the participants discussed using their own discretion to deal with various aspects of their work, and many talked about the judgment they engage when dealing with cases of student misconduct. As I describe below, my research suggests that it is not just large ideologies that succumb to loose coupling. Even rules that are to be engaged on a daily basis appear to be more symbolic than they are functional and teachers do still largely define their working behaviour. As I discuss in my conclusion, given the high degree of autonomy over their day-to-day work, we need to perhaps rethink whether the term “semi-professional” accurately captures the nature of teachers’ occupational status.

Student misconduct policies provide us with a reasonable tool to gauge teachers’ autonomy. Schools are institutions that operate under a large number of rules and procedures, which in turn affect the way teachers are said to do their jobs. Policies regarding student misconduct are often seen as integral to the functioning of a school. These rules are supposed to set the tone and the ways in which they are adhered to, broken and regulated have a large impact on school culture and climate. On a smaller scale, classroom management is critical and it depends on the propensity of each teacher to address the misgivings of their students. This can in turn impact the overall functioning of the school itself.

The sociology of professions literature argues that the autonomy of teachers is limited because these procedures are implemented in a top-down manner. In theory most policies and procedures are developed by the school boards or the ministry as in the given example of

Restorative Justice, and schools and teachers are seen to have little to no participation in the development of these regulations.

Certainly there are many directives that are initiated by the likes of government or each individual administrative team; however, some of the teachers I interviewed mentioned that they did provide input regarding school procedures. For example Ms. Davis, described the process of producing goals for the academic year:

[Administration is] really pushing for these SMART goals, but they're not coming up with the goals themselves. They're bringing it into a whole collaborative kind of thing, so it's really nice that we're all, um, focusing on and in on this together. There's a smaller group first that focuses on the goals, then we bring it to the larger group, 'Can you live with this? What can we do? How can we change it so we can all live with this?' and um, and then we do... [The groups were made up of teachers.] So, there were some department heads. Some non-department heads.

(Interview October 9, 2009)

This case is an example of teachers playing a part in the implementation of new initiatives. However, it is common for existing school rules and regulations to be reviewed at the request of the staff. Ms. Walker noted that her school's attendance policy, "[is] actually up for review right now, because the teachers aren't thrilled with it... [I]t's both staff and administration who meet together to review. It's not just an administrative decision" (Interview December 2, 2009). Thus, describing this as a top-down model seems to be inaccurate. What is evidenced by the participant's responses is that teachers interact with school policies in multiple ways:

they may execute directives passed down from higher levels, they can play a part in developing rules with administrators, but most importantly, they have the ability to reject those regulations that they do not feel are effective.

There is a clear lack of congruency that exists between the so-called “official” mandates of the schools, boards and ministries, and the ways that teachers discuss, understand and perform their work. I have already mentioned comments made by the teachers that show they have not made the shift from zero tolerance to restorative justice, as the ministry implies they should. This is similar to findings discovered in Cynthia Coburn’s research regarding teachers in California and how they received the introduction of a new method of teaching reading skills. What Coburn found is that teachers’ lessons adhered most closely to the pedagogy that they personally advocated and were most familiar with, and they did not necessarily default to the one that was supported by the school board (Coburn, 2006).

The disconnect between policy and practice happens routinely in schools, and the issues around student misconduct and student truancy are no exception. When it comes to attendance and late policies, it seems they are often dismissed. In another example of “loose coupling”, teachers reported that they tended to use their own personal, (dare I say, professional) judgment to determine a course of action and often even consequences for the undesirable behaviour.

In fact, there was a lot of discussion of teachers using their discretion when dealing with student misconduct, particularly in areas where they felt the policies fell short. Every school

has to deal with truancy and most teachers described the official consequences as consisting of formalities such as late slips and tracking tardy students. However, there was a lot of negative feedback about these bureaucratic measures. A number of the participants echoed the sentiments of Ms. Allen:

I find it really annoying to send kids down to get a late slip. It takes five extra minutes. They're already five minutes late. Sending them down to get a late slip makes them 10 minutes late. They disrupt the class twice. The first time they came in and the second time they come in. So, I'm usually pretty lenient with lates and I just say, 'No, you don't have to get a late slip. Sit down and be quite.'

(Interview November 28, 2009)

While late slips seem like a good idea in theory, in practice they create an extraordinary amount of excess work for the teacher, because now a kid has missed even more of a lesson and needs to be caught up and it distracts the rest of the students from the task at hand.

Making the judgment to let the student stay in the class allows the teacher to perform their job more seamlessly, which is in fact what many of the participants reported they opt to do.

When exercising sanctioned attendance and late policies, teachers also routinely consider students' individual circumstances. Ms. Martin estimates that the rate of absentee students at her school can be up to 35% on any given day. This is in part due to the school's inner city location; many students have other responsibilities such as working and taking care of children (this may mean taking care of their younger siblings or children of their own for

example). The large amount of truancy makes it incredibly difficult to instill policies and follow up with every single student (Interview November 14, 2009).

Even though the problem may not be as serious in other schools, teachers still reported using their own discretion in dealing with students who came in late to their classrooms. Just as in Ms. Martin's teaching environment, other teachers showed concern for the responsibilities their students held outside of school. Mr. Miller says he, "[tries] to be lenient with regard to, um, attendance policies, you know, you need to know where students are, they may need to stay home for a few days, [so] their work might be late." (Interview October 16, 2009)

Similarly, Mr. Thomas acknowledged that there is a particular kid in one of his classes that works a lot of hours at a movie theatre to help supplement the family income. He does not see marking this student late as productive, since there is already so much on this young man's shoulders (Interview October 23, 2009). These sentiments seem to echo principles of the holistic approach discussed earlier. Though there is a specific policy outlined about what should happen in the classroom, teachers seem to be using their discretion and dismissing it if they deem doing so in the best interest of the child. As a number of the participants said, with some students, it is just gratifying to see them in the classroom at all, so it seems counterproductive and may discourage them from coming if they are penalized for being a few minutes late.

Teachers may also deal with students differently according to age and grade, even though the policies are intended to be enforced uniformly school wide. Ms. Allen told me that with her

older students, she tries to sort out attendance issues one on one with them instead of going through all the regular paperwork and bureaucratic run around:

Usually it's the grade 12s that will skip. Grade seven and 10s don't usually skip class and I would usually just talk to the grade 12 and be like, 'What's up? Why weren't you in my class?' And I can talk to them more one on one, since they're mostly adults anyway. I feel like that's more productive than not talking to them, sending a form home, like, then I don't even get to know why they skipped my class. So, I try to talk with the student. So, I don't really follow the policy to a T.

(Interview November 28, 2009)

Again, this shows how when the policies are deemed ineffective teachers find ways of using their own methods to address problematic situations. It is important for a teacher to know why their students may not be in class, but most said that the current systems in place in their schools resulted in a lack of communication of information to the staff. Thus, teachers take matters into their own hands, which in turn allow them to more effectively do their job.

Not only did teachers decide when and in what cases they would adhere to the expectations of administration, they also reported using their own judgment to decide the consequences for student misconduct. Ms. Walker told me that at her school, teachers have the ability to "give [the students] whatever consequence [they feel is justified] for skipping" (Interview December 2, 2009). At her school detentions are often given for this kind of behaviour, however, Ms. Walker indicated that she often adds an extra detention if she has found that

the student has lied to her about where they have been (the difference being an excused and an unexcused absence). This was not common practice for the other staff at her school, but she felt it was justified because the students would recognize that “if they were honest in the first place [the punishment would have been less]” (Interview December 2, 2009).

Other teachers also reported devising their own methods to curb misconduct. Ms. White had this to say about her own way of dealing with late students:

The thing is with my lates, you know, some people may say this is humiliation or whatever. But, um, when a student comes into my class late and this is, like, more than five minutes late, I stop the class and I say to the student, ‘Why are you late?’ And I tell them off the bat that I’m going to do that, because they’re interrupting my teaching and they’re interrupting the learning of my students. And I’ve had kids say to me, ‘You know what, can I talk to you after class?’ Fine. More times than not, the kids do not want to explain in front of the whole class why they’re late and they will get to class on time to avoid that. Not avoid the detentions with the school policy, but avoid being embarrassed in front of the class. And to be honest with you, I don’t like to embarrass them in front of class, but the lates were getting so bad that that’s what I was having to do and it’s working. So, what works is what works.

(Interview November 12, 2009)

Time and again teachers told me that they used their own approaches to deal with student misbehaviour. Just as in the quote from Ms. White presented above, many claimed they did so because, ultimately, the schools methods did not seem to be the most effective. When

teachers use their own judgment to deal with students they feel that they get better results. This may be in part because information can be communicated more directly and clearly between individuals. Furthermore, teachers build relationships with their students and working off of this can mean a more meaningful consequence for a student than what is prescribed by a blanket policy.

4.1.4 School Structure, Loose Coupling and How they Enable Teacher Autonomy

Over the past century schools have changed dramatically and have expanded in every way: they are in more areas thus making them accessible to more communities, they have increased in physical size from one room school houses to buildings of multiple stories and wings and, finally, they now service a larger number of clientele which can reach thousands of students in one high school alone. With all of this growth comes formal structure, which includes, codified rules and designated positions or offices (Scott and Meyer, 1994a)

Institutional Theory suggests that as organizations expand, particularly in factors such as size, administrative complexity and bureaucratization occurs (Scott and Meyer, 1994b).

Certainly, this is demonstrated by the hierarchy found amongst employees of the schools (teachers, vice principals and principals, for example) and the multiple secretaries working in high schools across Ontario. This in turn has meant changes to the function of these positions, as Mr. Wilson explained,

“... in the years since the administration was separated from the teachers union, there has been a bit of a change... I think our administration today,

um, see their job more as working with, with staff and not as much dealing with students and they see themselves more as managers... managers of budgets and managers of large complex staff and stuff like that, rather than educators per se”

(Interview October 21, 2009)

This more complex hierarchical structure can in turn lead to a disconnect between the various levels of the organization. Here, I will discuss matters such as attendance, paper work and obscene language and how they are clear demonstrations of loose coupling between policy and practice.

4.1.4.1 Taking Attendance

A clear instance of this growing bureaucratization is the tracking of who is and is not in the classes on a daily basis. Ontario’s Education Act outlines this as one of the required legal duties of a teacher. These records are important for protecting the liability of the school when it comes to student safety. Teachers may respond to these types of expectations in a number of ways, including compliance, reinventing the policy in a manner that works for them, or even ignoring it completely. Many participants told me that it was common for them and their coworkers to stray from the expectations regarding dealing with attendance issues. One might think that administration would be concerned about teachers negating the rules in this way, yet, that does not appear to be the case. Ms. Thompson, made it clear that teachers often get reminder calls from the office if their attendance sheets are late. (Interview December 23,

2009) On the other hand, the repercussions for late or absent students are largely up to the teacher in practice, despite the fact that there is often protocol outlined for them to follow.

None of the teachers I spoke to seemed to be aware of any real reprimand for teachers who do not follow the school's rules for consequences around truancy and lates. At most, I was told, people would be reminded of what the policy was and asked to follow it; "They're always 'reminding' us of things," Mr. Taylor joked (Interview January 12, 2010). Similarly, Ms. Brown said she thought, "...they'd just, I don't know if they'd necessarily single out whoever it was, or if they talked to them individually, they might do that. And I could see them doing a little talk at the staff meeting, a little schpiel about adhering to the policy and that would probably be that" (Interview October 16, 2009).

The most important point to take from this is that the teachers were not intimidated by administration and felt justified in using their own discretion. It seemed that they were quite pleased with the methods they had devised, as well as ready and willing to uphold them. Ms. Allen told me that there would be no substantial reprimand, for example a cut in pay, for dealing with students her own way, so she would likely continue to use the methods that she had devised herself and felt most comfortable with, even if administration "reminded" her to do otherwise (Interview November 28, 2009).

What can be taken from this is that there are proven instances where teachers are at liberty to work in a way that they define themselves. Though sociologists, such as Bowles and Gintis (1976) argue that teachers are subject to top-down directives, which diminishes their

autonomous state and in turn decreases their professional standing, it appears that this view may not accurately represent what is going on in schools. Teachers do not see themselves as contained by the rules and regulations of their individual schools, particularly when they feel that doing so would be ineffective. What teachers report is that they dismiss these directives and employ their own discretion when dealing with their students, as was exemplified in this discussion of the attendance policy. Thus, teachers routinely exercise autonomy in daily practice, much like other professionals, not only despite the hierarchical structure of the education system, but perhaps because of it.

4.1.4.2 Paper Work

The vast amount of paper work that teachers are required to complete is a by-product of this phenomenon of bureaucratization and is not limited to issues of truancy alone. This documentation is meant to be a way to facilitate communication between levels of the hierarchy. The teachers I spoke with reported that paper work can be required for any number of reasons, Ms. Allen noted that, “as a teacher, if we ever have to deal with behaviour or progress, so students not handing things in, things that you might want to involve a principal, you always fill out a behaviour or progress report” (Interview November 28, 2009). What this may then mean, is that the situation is put into a sequence, and the student may not be dealt with right away. However, as a teacher you have fulfilled the requirement of notifying the administration team of your concern.

As was mentioned in the discussion of attendance, teachers are often skeptical about the validity of the paper work that they are required to complete. For example, the intention is that when teachers send students to the office to pick up a late slip, the students' delinquent behaviour then comes to the attention of administration. However, as was demonstrated previously, teachers may choose not to send a student to administration to be dealt with. Many teachers seemed to question the practicality of the official procedures. Ms Martin was particularly vocal about her distaste for the process;

I think the VPs just make it [up]. Like, they, they go, what do you feel like doing? We've got some yellow paper that looks official. Let's print a form on yellow paper. And the last two VPs I had, who both are gone from the school, they made this half a page little slip and it was the lamest thing ever. Like, it was like they didn't want to deal with any problem. It was apparent because it was a list of little check boxes and you were supposed to fill it out and like, send it with the kid to the office. Ya, right! You know? Like, "Kid called me bitch." You know?

(Interview November 14, 2009)

Therefore, while there may be certain rules or expectations that the administration put forth, the teachers need to "buy in" so that the various student misconduct policies can be enforced. The administration can only address those instances that are brought to their attention, and it is the teachers who, by and large, communicate these situations to the vice principals and principals. It is then because of this hierarchical structure of schools that teachers are

afforded the use of their own judgment in regards to dealing with their students. Ms. Johnson told me that, “at least two staff meetings last year [addressed] the issue [of bullying was raised and administration] just reiterated that we should inform them of anything that we see” (Interview October 30, 2009). However, on a daily basis teachers employ their professional discretion in deciding what situations warrant reporting, and most often they decide to deal with student misconduct personally, or not at all, rather than involving administration.

For one thing, there are so many instances of behaviour that could be considered “student misconduct” that administration would be inundated with so-called offenders. Not only that, but let us not forget, that teachers are employed to educate the youth in their classrooms, at times it is necessary to dismiss less problematic behaviour for the benefit of getting on with the real work at hand. Mr. Smith spoke to me about this very process;

I think in a lot of the day to day goings on the classroom...you have to pick your battles in terms of what you are going to um, you know, what behaviour your going to correct and what behaviour, for now, you're going to let go and, you know, and come back to it, right? Because if you're constantly droning on about, you know, don't do this, don't do that, please stop this, please stop that, you know, it... it loses its effectiveness. Um, almost instantly, you know, if, you know if, you're talking, if you do it too much [it loses its meaning]. So, I think that there's a lot of little things on the day to day that I, you know, that I chose to, you know, kind of 'ok, I'm going to let that go for now' um, but that I'll definitely keep my eye on and come back to later.

(Interview October 7, 2009)

The phrase “picking your battles” was one that was repeated by other teachers as well. It appears that there may be many different reasons that one may choose to take up one ‘battle’ while forgoing another, however ‘because it is school policy’ was not as commonly cited as one would expect if teachers were really merely semi-professionals, bound to do the bidding of their administrative teams.

There are a myriad of factors that come into play, and one of the most important is the consequence the interaction will have on the classroom dynamic as a whole, as Ms. Williams said:

Sometimes you have to deal with a situation one way because of the precedent it’s going to set or because there’s so many other people in the room, that you have to weigh their needs above the one person, and it’s unfortunate when that does happen, but, if you can allow something to happen and it’s what’s best for the students involved, ... you make the choice [to let it go]...

(Interview October 8, 2009)

While teachers do have the option of sending someone to the office, many would prefer to deal with student misconduct themselves whenever possible. This establishes the teacher’s authority and affirms their competence within the class. Many participants saw involving the administrative team as a last resort, or a consequence for serious cases, for example, those involving physical altercations.

4.1.4.3 Obscene Language

Another more specific example of ‘loose coupling’ between policy and practice is the matter of “obscene” language. Typically, schools admonish the use of swearing and other foul language, however, reporting every single time a student swears is a daunting and “unrealistic” expectation (Ms. Johnson, Interview October 30, 2009) and in some cases there are less well defined policies, where an administrative team may tell their teachers, “that you’re not supposed to tolerate it, but they don’t ever say what you’re supposed to do” (Ms. Walker, Interview December 2, 2009). Thus, teachers deal with these situations according to how they personally judge the context in which it takes place. For example, as Mr. Miller points out, “students swear at one another a lot. Um, and a lot of it’s friendly. So, if it, if it was friendly then I might just say, ‘That’s not ok to talk that way here. It’s a place of work.’” (Interview October 16, 2009) However, when, “they’re saying it very loudly, or directed at a specific person, those are the ones that stop you, typically a verbal reprimand and if it’s sort of, they’re swearing at a person and there’s some sort of altercation going on then you might send them to the office” (Ms. Brown, Interview December 16, 2009).

These sorts of judgment calls are a commonplace occurrence in the teaching profession. It is important for educators to be able to process their impressions of a situation quickly in order to read cues from their students and be able to react appropriately, which in some cases means not at all. As Mr. Wilson argues, “there is a... basic professional judgment that all teachers exercise about which situations [to] escalate and which ones they don’t.” (Interview October 21, 2009) Thus, if one deems it unnecessary to involve the administration, it is

apparent that information and consequences stay at the ground level of the hierarchy, thus once again proving teachers' possession of autonomy.

To summarize, while teachers may lack some of the authority that is awarded to traditional professions, they do still enjoy a large degree of autonomy. The previous literature written on professions does not speak to the committees, made up of staff, which re-evaluate and rework failing policies that have often not been developed by individuals with real life classroom experience and expertise. Moreover, the autonomy enjoyed by teachers comes most often, not from the means of professional designations and specialized knowledge, but rather from the organization of schools. That is to say, schools as institutional organizations give way to loose coupling and it is this phenomenon that affords teachers their autonomy. With this as the case, it seems that teachers do work within an autonomous state and the sociology of professions has overlooked a key issue in the analysis of teachers' professionalization that institutional theory is able to address.

4.2 Understanding Themselves as Professionals

While the sociological literature denies that teaching is a full profession, it is evident that teachers routinely justify their ability to meet many of the criteria by which a profession is judged. A number of these measures were directly and immediately mentioned by the participants, with extended education and specific training being the ones most often referenced. Furthermore, as has been shown, other accepted traits, such as autonomy, were discussed at great length through the use of examples and anecdotes, despite the insistence in

the literature that teachers do not possess this attribute to the extent that the classic professions do.

It should not come as a surprise that individuals, who believe they are professionals, would describe their work using concepts that are usually associated with professions. However, what does seem striking is that a professional trait would, in fact, be rejected by the teachers involved in this study. A professional designation is typically a key signifier of membership in a profession, yet, participant after participant, spoke unfavourably towards the implementation of such a device for teachers. Certainly, this seems counter intuitive for an occupation that is struggling to be seen as more than merely professionalized, and yet, this phenomenon leads to a discussion of how an individual internalizes the culture of professionalism. This final element of self-perception is one that was important to the teachers interviewed, and thus far has not been addressed in the sociology of professions literature.

4.2.1 The Professional Designation

In line with the literature on professions, which cites teaching as an occupation that is low in status, the individuals I interviewed seemed dismayed by how they understood how the public perceived their work. They often disclosed that they felt the general population thought they were “overpaid and under worked” (Mr. Wilson, Interview October 21, 2009). Multiple teachers made reference to getting hassled over large amounts of vacation time; for example, Ms. Williams had this to say:

I think for the most part, society has a stereotype of what teachers are. They look at the summers off. They look at some, March break, Christmas off. They look at the hours we supposedly put in and um, and I think they believe that teachers just stand in front of a classroom deliver some material expect the students to spit it back, and of course we've all had teachers and are coloured by that experience.

(Interview October 8, 2009)

Mr. Wilson mentioned that members of the public may describe the occupation as a whole in a negative light, and yet these same people would often speak positively about teachers they knew as individuals on a personal level:

Well, I think that a lot of the people will go, 'well, this [designation] is just teachers trying to find another way to get extra money, or you know, make themselves look more important' or something like that and the irony of all of this is that, I think that the, the vast majority of, of people who actually know teachers, if you were to actually say, "Well, what about Mr. So-and-so?" "Oh, well he's a great guy!" "Mrs. So and so?" "Ms. So and so?" and they'd go "Great. Great, great, great!" I, I've had those kind of experiences with people who get impressions and they go through, they go through their kids' school and they say "Good. Good. Good."

(Interview October 21, 2009)

In recent decades public opinion of core institutions, including the justice system, have been declining across the board and the education system is no exception. Though, "compared to other institutions, schools fare quite well" (Guppy and Davies, 1999) and overall people do

tend to express confidence in schools and teachers (Guppy, 2005; Hart and Livingstone, 2010). However, as Mr. Wilson has mentioned in the quote presented above, it is common for people to speak better of teachers that they know personally, much like the trend found in Tom Loveless' work which indicates that "local schools are seen as superior to the nation's schools" (1997). The discrepancy between opinions of larger systems and those smaller parts of the system with which they are familiar has been labeled the "confidence gap".

Despite unanimously proclaiming that they are part of a profession, and sharing a concern for the public perception of their field, the teachers that participated in this study, for the most part, adamantly rejected a key signifier of professional status. This is clearly evidenced in their discussion of the Ontario Certified Teacher (O.C.T.) designation. In September 2008, the Ontario College of Teachers, which is the licensing body for teachers in Ontario, introduced this professional designation with the intention that any practitioner in good standing with the college would use the acronym. The O.C. T. would be akin to a doctor's M.D. or the term "Barrister" for lawyers.

Membership in a profession is typically denoted with the use of these designations behind an individual's name. Over time, these acronyms have come to garner weight in society and act as a kind of symbolic currency. Having a professional designation signifies that one has completed a formal training program and has mastered a body of specialized knowledge that is not accessible to the population at large. In turn, the bearer is afforded certain rights (for example, lawyers have the right to represent someone in a court of law and doctors have the

right to diagnose illnesses and prescribe medications) and privileges (often in the form of large monetary gains). The product of all this is that professionals are then held at a higher level of status within society, due to the commitment they have made to their calling and the benefits they acquire as a result. Thus, professional designations are usually highly desirable and valued by the individuals that carry them because it sets them apart within society. It appears, however, that there exists a discrepancy between the classic professions and teaching in the way these individuals perceive using their designation.

Despite ample publicity to launch the new teaching designation, most of my interviewees were unfamiliar with the initiative at the time of their interviews and said that they were hearing about it for the first time. Comments were made such as, “I didn’t know I could do that” (Ms. Allen, Interview November 28, 2009), “No. I haven’t heard of that, no” (Ms. Jones, Interview October 29, 2009), and “Oh! Actually, [no] I’m not familiar with that” (Mr. Wilson, Interview October 21, 2009).

One would think that since teachers saw themselves as part of a profession, and often reported negative public perceptions, they would readily embrace the induction of a professional designation. However, this was not the case. “I think it’s kind of silly” (Ms. Allen, Interview November 28, 2009), “It means nothing” (Ms. Davis, Interview October 9, 2009), and “Most people think it’s really quite dumb” (Ms. White, Interview November 12, 2009) are a few of the negative reactions I received from the participants. More than one

teacher mentioned that some colleagues were already ridiculed by other staff (although not to their face) for listing credentials such as a Masters or Doctorate degree behind their names.

Though the majority conceded that the implementation of the professional designation was likely concocted as a way to bolster the respect for and status of teachers as a whole, they also shared a concern that the idea would likely backfire. Since they believed that the public at large was already critical of their occupation, a major source of apprehension was that using the designation would be interpreted as cocky, arrogant, ‘hoity toity’ or stuck up, much akin to the way they perceived their colleagues who advertised their graduate level educations.

Mr. Taylor told me that, at first, he had quite liked the idea of being able to identify himself as a teacher in this way. “I’m proud of what I do, and a designation such as this allows me to communicate that pride...” (Interview January 12, 2010). Unfortunately, he has not used O.C.T. as he is afraid of being ostracized by his coworkers in the manner mentioned above, “When it first came out many other teachers were laughing at it, saying, ‘Why would I want to use that?’” (Interview January 12, 2010). Mr. Taylor told me that he then became reluctant to use the designation, not knowing how he would be perceived by other teachers if he did. Therefore, though they may be rejecting a professional signifier, they are demonstrating another. This is clearly the effect of peer regulation, which is a fundamental component of sociological professional criteria.

What is more, the teachers felt that their abilities as a professional educator were not to be defined by a simple designation. Many felt that such a thing had no bearing on the way they did their work, nor was it an indication of the quality of their work. As Ms. Anderson put it:

Just because you have an OCT designation, doesn't mean that you're a good teacher. I think that maybe that is partially why ... it's not being [used, or even received positively]. It doesn't mean you're a good teacher. I think being a good teacher to me, is more about... caring and helping [your students], which isn't going to come from a designation.

(Interview October 15, 2010)

Here we see the emphasis of a good teacher being concerned with the needs of their students, rather than the traditional criteria that have been previously been outlined. A clientele focused approach is often seen as a key component of professionalism, in both professionalized occupations as well as the classic professions. This leads to an important observation, which is paramount to the findings of this study. Teachers deem themselves to be part of a profession, not simply because they see their work as equivalent to the classic professions in a measurable way, but because they have internalized the intangible elements of what can be called the “culture of professions”.

4.2.2 Professionals Being Professional

The current sociological literature of professions, though ready to point out the discrepancies between occupations, does not touch upon the inconsistencies that may exist between individuals within a profession. Surely, it cannot be just to claim that all doctors are

professionals, when some show little concern for their patients, do not practice good bedside manners and are held liable for malpractice. Similarly, can a lawyer who has impeccable expertise in their field, but shows little regard for matters such as punctuality and presentation, still be considered a professional? I would argue that an individual should be required to act like a professional in order to be considered one.

Just as these incongruencies may exist between individuals in the fields of medicine and law, not all teachers will conduct themselves similarly in relation to their work. Over the course of the interviews it became clear that some of the individuals, particularly those who had been teaching for over a decade, were concerned about the degree of commitment [or lack thereof] that they observed in some of their peers. When asked why they thought teaching should be considered a profession, this idea of commitment was very much at the fore.

Not only did teachers equate a profession with something one pursues as a long-term career, many also discussed their work becoming a “lifestyle” that permeated the borders of the workplace. “You don’t turn it off and on,” Mr. Taylor asserted that he was a teacher, not just at school, but also at home or anywhere else (Interview January 12, 2010). He was always in that role, for example if he went to the movies with his family, sometimes he would be thinking about how he could bring the film into a lesson for his students. However, it seems not all of the people he works with approach their work in this manner:

I, I keep harping at, at society for not holding us at this higher standard even more, but I know a lot of it is our own fault. A lot of times teachers don't act as professionals. You know, and that there's a good reason why society feels the way they do about teaching. Um, that, you know, sometimes we do, um, certain things that, um, would give society reasons to, to not hold us higher... you know, a lot of times we act like we're doing a job. As opposed to engaging in a, a way of life, you know?

(Interview January 12, 2010)

Mr. Taylor lamented that in the case of some of his colleagues the intrinsic pleasure of teaching has been lost. Instead there are teachers who have become focused solely on extrinsic gains:

For example I know, recently through our, our system of communication we have, um, part of it where our union is, um, sort of, communicating information to the staff and we can respond back to them and a lot of the conversation in that, that thread has been all about bitching and complaining about, you know, how much money we make and the fact that are we getting paid, um, like if we, if you take a day off, um, without pay. How much money we're actually losing and do we have to do any work even though you're taking a day off. Like, in other words, is it your job if you're not getting paid for that day to supply a lesson plan. You know, and I'm thinking, if you start acting like that, no wonder people don't hold you to a higher standard anymore...

(Interview January 12, 2010)

Many teachers spend time outside of school hours tutoring, marking, running clubs and activities as well as coaching. These endeavours are integral to student engagement and success. However, with recent cutbacks to school resources, teachers are now asked to add additional roles to their line of duties, such as working “on calls” – a form of supply which takes place during their designated preparation period, or supervision of areas such as the cafeteria or the “smoke hole”. It has become customary for union representatives to encourage teachers to diligently track the amount of time they are spending on these sorts of tasks and in turn, refuse to do them once their required number of “shifts” are used up. Mr. Taylor weighed in on this as well:

They complain about, you know, an extra few minutes of supervision, you know, ‘Oh, I’m not going to do anymore supervision because that’s, you know, I’m only supposed to do X number of minutes.’ And we’re actually asked to keep track of that, how many minutes supervision we do. Like, I’m thinking, you’re in a school, you want the school to be supervised, you just, you do it! You don’t keep track of it, you don’t, you know, punch a clock. But a lot of times teachers start doing that kind of stuff and they treat it as a job, so of course people are going to see it as nothing but a job. So, you know, ah, as much as I, I’m getting back to my original point, as much as I think society doesn’t hold us in that high, higher position, it’s because we don’t act professional enough to allow society to give us that position.

(Interview January 12, 2010)

The concern for some teachers lies in this idea that a part of the work is to be committed to better the climate of the school, regardless of what that takes. The implication is that a professional should be engaged in their work and perform it to the best of their ability, regardless of what sacrifices need to be made.

Ms. Davis told me that in recent years it seemed her school atmosphere had been affected in other ways as well and that some standards were no longer being observed. The attire of the teachers she works with was her most prominent example of this; “Um, I’m disappointed with the dress code. There is no dress code anymore for teachers and I’m very disappointed with what I’m seeing... Students have commented that I dress differently. Which means I think... professionally, um, and they are shocked to see me dressed that way because it’s just different from most or the rest of the staff” (Interview October 9, 2009).

One may argue that the way professionals present themselves can reinforce the status and prestige given to them by the general public. “I went to parents’ night and I saw teachers dressed in jeans and t-shirts and sweatshirts, and I don’t know, whatever else. I was disgusted” (Interview October 9, 2009); this type of presentation is likely to erode the respect that others have of members of the teaching occupation, particularly when other professions are associated with dress (lawyers in suits, doctors in lab coats) that set them apart from the population at large. Thus, when one perceives themselves as being part of a profession, it becomes important to project that through their personal presentation, which, of course, includes clothing.

These grievances are indicative of a lack of professionalism, which in the literature is considered to be different from the professionalization of an occupation. As Ingersoll writes, professionalism is about attitudes, it is what the individual brings to the job and as such it is to be discussed at the individual level. Professionalization, on the other hand, is a concept used to denote the structural and social attributes of an occupation as a whole and must be explored in terms of the group (Ingersoll in Ballantine and Spade, 2004). It is within the former that the aforementioned concerns about dress code and mindset currently fit.

However, the concepts of “profession” and “professionalism” should not be set so far apart. Indeed, they are not mutually exclusive, as we expect professionals to act and present themselves in a certain way, having attained the other criteria that set them apart from the lay members of society. Professionals should be courteous, punctual, presentable, patient, empathetic, responsible, accountable and honourable among other things. It is these values that represent a true “culture of professions”. Like those individuals practicing the classic professions, teachers must internalize these traits, in order to demonstrate commitment to their work. Thus, it is one’s own self-perception as a professional that regulates the ways an individual relates to their field, their coworkers, their clientele and the work itself; which may be the most indicative criteria of all.

Chapter 5. Discussion

It has become quite evident through the course of this study that the views discussed in the sociological literature of professions and those of actual working teachers, in regards to the status of teaching as a profession, do not align. As I have presented in this thesis, this discord appears to come from the different emphases and angles used to explore the matter. Perhaps, what it means to be a “profession”, should be an idea treated as a folk concept, that is to say that it is a concept that changes with regard to time and space.

The trait approach has focused largely on a set of pre-established criteria used as a checklist. This criteria often consist of those elements that have been discussed here, including but certainly not limited to, membership in a professional association, education and training, specialized knowledge and expertise, status and prestige, and of course autonomy. By and large the sociological literature on professions argues that teachers do not measure up on all of these criteria.

However, in recent decades much has changed about the ways in which teachers are prepared for, certified and maintain their occupational status. For example, the Ontario College of Teachers, which is the professional association for the teaching field in this province, as well, as the body that regulates and distributes licensing to qualified individuals, was only established in 1997 (About the College - Ontario College of Teachers). Thus, teaching does have this component, however, its implementation is too recent to be acknowledged in much of the literature.

Another recent addition in Ontario, was the induction of NTIP (New Teacher Induction Program) in 2005 (Professional Requirements – Member’s Handbook, 2010). This initiative pairs every newly employed teacher with a mentor teacher who has spent some time in the field. This serves as an extension of the practicum placements that candidates do during their preparation year. The intention is that every first year teacher has someone that they can go to with questions and concerns. The literature speaks to the large amount of time that the classic professions spend completing internships, however, it does not yet fully speak to initiatives such as these that target teachers.

Furthermore, teachers are much more highly educated than they have been in previous times. I have already discussed the prevalence of professional development through additional qualification courses, conferences and personal reading and other similar pursuits as reported by the participants. In the past it was acceptable for individuals to be hired right out of high school, however, teachers are now required to complete an undergraduate degree as well as an additional year in a teacher education program at a recognized post secondary institution (also called a Bachelor of Education). What is especially interesting is the number of certified teachers who have taken their own education even further. Unfortunately, because the pursuit of graduate school is not a requirement of the Ontario College of Teachers for certification, they do not keep statistics on how many of their members have obtained these degrees. However, of my 20 participants, one is listed on the website as having completed a Masters and another is currently in the midst of pursuing similar graduate studies (for a total of 10% of my sample). This seems to be relatively representative since of the 109 teachers

from my own high school, who taught during my graduating year, 15 have completed graduate school, which is approximately 14% (this information was looked up through the “find a teacher” database accessible through the Ontario College of Teachers website). Thus, one can make a case that there are many teachers that are very highly educated.

Finally, the criterion discussed at greatest length in this paper was autonomy, and certainly it has been shown that the teachers I interviewed feel that they and their colleagues have a large amount of control over their own work on a variety of levels and in many different circumstances. Not only do teachers now make up committees that develop school rules and regulations alongside of the administrative teams, teachers also regularly use their own discretion and judgment in dealing with students, including those situations involving student misconduct.

Autonomy, in particular, is greatly influenced by the context in which the occupation takes place. As has been discussed, the current structure of public high schools in Ontario lends itself to allowing teachers to have a large amount of autonomy. This is because the bureaucratic organization and institutional structure leads to “loose coupling,” where policies are largely symbolic rather than functional. As Maister put it, “Most professionals don’t want to be either led or managed and are highly resistant to anyone’s making suggestions about how they practice, or commenting on their performance” (1997, p. 65). Teachers are certainly no exception. They are given a large amount of leeway in their dealings with students and their parents. This is facilitated by the gap in communication created by school

hierarchies that place administration in a separate tier to the teaching faculty. Since teachers can make autonomous decisions that are rarely scrutinized by their “superiors”, in effect the school structure seems to render policies almost irrelevant.

The checklist approach, which is presented in much of the sociological literature on professions, does not take this organizational environment into account. Yet, this is an integral piece to understanding the pressures, privileges and day-to-day activities of any type of work, especially since all occupations continue to develop and change. Even the environment in which doctors work is very different compared to 30 years ago. In many professions there has been a move towards a service and client based definition rather than an emphasis being placed solely on technical skills (Maister, 1997). This shift is influenced by the appeal of intrinsic rewards, those that are achieved by helping another human being. This is in contrast to some of the extrinsic rewards that have typically been associated with professions, for example large monetary pay offs, as well as status and prestige. Therefore, the ways in which professionals interact with the public and those who engage their services has become increasingly important. We see that this happens on the “front” lines, by those in occupations such as teaching and not as much by those in other levels of bureaucratic hierarchies.

Finally, this brings us to another important element of professions which is absent from the literature - internalizing a sense of professionalism. The attitude that one brings to their work is integral and may vary as much within a given occupation as it does between occupations.

If one has adopted those values that are linked with professional behaviour, the individual is likely to garner the respect and admiration of their clientele; however, merely holding a particular position (say, as a doctor or lawyer) no longer guarantees prestige as it once did, particularly if you do not conduct yourself in a professional manner. This self-actualization as part of a profession, and all that entails, should certainly be a discussion point in the literature. It is just as valuable a criterion as any that currently exist and could prove to be a suitable last step in the process approach to professions.

It appears that the way that we as sociologists approach this domain needs to better reflect the changing nature of work for many occupations and professions. Perhaps the representation of teachers as merely semi-professional may have held true in the past. However, in today's schools teachers are not only more educated, but they also play a bigger role in consulting with administration and shaping the ways in which the schools operate. Thus, they do in fact, meet many of the criteria discussed in the literature in ways they are not currently given credit for.

However, perhaps the criteria itself needs to be changed as time passes and trends in occupations shift. There is much diversity not only between professions, but within each of these professions as well and the current literature does not necessarily speak to this. As it stands, it is too narrowly defined to capture these changes. It is time to broaden the scope of the literature in order to fully speak to the evolution of society's professions and how they truly operate in their given organizational and bureaucratic contexts.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

When I began my journey as a masters student, it was not long before I became acquainted with the sociological literature on professions. What was there became of interest to me, not because I could identify with it, but rather because I so vehemently disagreed with what I found. As someone who had completed the teacher education program at an Ontario university and intends to pursue a career as a high school teacher, I could not help but notice how much my own perceptions of the occupation seemed to differ in comparison to what I was reading. The discussion seemed incongruent with what I had experienced, what I felt about my chosen career path and what I believed it meant to be a teacher. Having spent time in placements, shadowing seasoned educators and interacting in staff lunchrooms and department offices, I had an inkling that others might feel the same. Thus, I began my research with the intention of answering two main questions: How do teachers understand their occupational status? And finally, if there is a discrepancy between how teachers feel about their work and what has been written in the sociology of professions, and if so how can this discrepancy be explained?

6.1 How Do Teachers Understand Their Occupational Status?

Despite what the sociological literature on professions asserts, it appears that teachers do believe that they are professionals. When debriefed and told that the sociology of professions builds the case that teaching is merely a semi-profession, reactions often included shock and disgruntled disbelief. All twenty of my interviewees made counter claims to this position.

They were emphatic that their work deserved to be recognized as that of a profession, citing many of the criteria set out in the literature's trait approach.

Most commonly the high school teachers I talked to mentioned the lengthy post secondary studies required as evidence of their being a profession, though many touched upon other aspects of their work such as ongoing professional development and licensing.

The matter of autonomy is one that the literature reflects on at great length. It is argued that teachers have little to no autonomy, outside of how curriculum is taught in their own classrooms, because they are subject to the rulings and decisions made by other individuals, such as administration, school boards and the ministry, in a top down manner. It is not believed that teachers make contributions to the development of these plans and they are therefore seen as merely pawns of the "higher ups". They are expected to follow the rules and do their work in the way that has been prescribed to them.

Originally, I wanted to see how teachers understood and navigated the implementation of a model for dealing with problematic behaviour and social relations. Unfortunately for me, following a particular policy from its inception did not see fruition. However, I did manage to discuss a number of school rules and regulations with the participants, all of which were concerned with the area of student misconduct. It was evident that teachers did not feel that their work was constrained by the rules and regulations of the schools in which they worked. All of the teachers I spoke to reported feeling that they were able to use their discretion in

dealing with students in a wide variety of situations and in relation to a number of school policy, even to the point of disregarding a policy all together.

Thus, teachers asserted that they had the ability to frequently use their own judgment in deciding how to go about their work. Not only did they choose which cases of student misbehaviour to deal with and how they would deal with them, there was also references made to teachers sitting on committees to inform the administration of more effective strategies, prominent concerns and realistic goals. Thus, the ways in which teachers discussed their interaction with rules and regulations differed greatly from the picture painted by the sociological literature of professions, and gave evidence of a large degree of professional autonomy.

However, while touting themselves as professionals, the teachers also rejected professional markers such as the designation, “OCT” (signifying Ontario Certified Teacher) which was implemented by the Ontario College of Teachers just as I was beginning my research.

Though this may seem counter intuitive to some, the denunciation of this initiative, could in fact show an effort to disassociate from the Ontario College of Teachers. Specifically, this may be an attempt at displaying their autonomous condition given that the Ontario College of Teachers was not a “grass roots” organization with which teachers identify, but rather as collective introduced by the government. The ability of teachers to peer regulate in relation to the use (or perhaps more appropriately, discouraged use) of the designation is a sign of a different professions criterion. However, perhaps most importantly, rejecting the designation,

allows teachers to seek out a self-concept that promotes intrinsic values and client-focused work, rather than traditional elements that can be seen as superfluous and narcissistic.

6.2 Is There a Discrepancy Between How Teachers Feel About Their Work and What Has Been Written in the Sociology of Professions, and if so, How Can this Discrepancy be Explained?

My research has shown that there is a clear discrepancy between the way that teachers talk about and understand their work and that which is described in the literature. As I have explained, with respect to autonomy, the literature does not consider the structure of educational organizations as it relates to teachers' perceptions of their professional status. It assumes that the hierarchy in schools indicates that teachers are at the mercy of their administration, school boards and the ministry. It is believed that these higher levels make the decisions and push policy forward. However, when using institutional theory as a lens to investigate these relationships, one soon recognizes that the so-called hierarchy is merely symbolic. The rules and regulations that are developed by the upper levels are often "loosely coupled" with what teachers do in practice. While teachers may consider the rules, they tend to use their personal assessments of a particular situation and rely mostly on their own discretion when dealing with their students. The hierarchy then further facilitates the autonomous state of teachers, because it is up to the teacher to take information to the next level and involve the administrative team in instances of student misbehaviour. They report that most often they choose not to involve administration, which in turn allows them to dole out the consequences they see fit, which at times can mean no consequence at all.

Another factor that seems to exacerbate the discrepancy between teacher perceptions and the literature are the effects of time. Much of the literature, particularly that affiliated with the trait approach, was written before many of the changes in the Ontario Teacher Certification process, including mandatory post secondary education, a year of teaching training (also from a recognized university), the establishment of the Ontario College of Teachers and the New teacher Induction Program.

Recently, I had someone say to me, “Of course teaching is a profession! In fact, it’s probably the most important, because without teachers there could not be any other professions!” I found this to be an interesting sentiment. I believe this thesis can contribute to the sociological literature in such a way that leads to the definition of “profession” no longer being so narrowly defined. The landscape of professions has been in a period of change for quite some time. It is important for the sociological literature to be broadened in scope to accurately reflect the true nature of the professions that exist today. Many occupations that were once considered mere jobs are making amendments to their training and certification processes and now meet the criteria set out for a profession, it appears, from my findings, that teaching is at the fore of this trend.

Appendix A

Interview Schedule

Section 1

“For the purposes of the study, it is important to have some background information on the participants.”

1. What are your teachables?
2. Have you ever done any additional qualification courses?
3. What subjects have you taught on a regular basis?
4. Have you ever taught out of your subject areas?
5. What grades do you most often teach? What Streams?
6. How long have you been teaching?
7. Why did you decide to become a teacher?
8. What do you think it means to be a teacher?
Would others agree? Co-workers? Admin? Society at large?
9. What specialized skills or knowledge do you need to do your job?
Where have you gained these?

Section 2

“Now, I would like to ask you about some of your experiences in this role, particularly as it relates to dealing with students.”

10. Please describe for me a time when dealt with an altercation between students.

Is this type of event out of the ordinary?

What was the conflict about?

What happened?

What did you do?

What was the outcome?

In hindsight would you do anything differently? Why or why not?

11. Now, please describe for me a time when you chose not to deal with an altercation between students.

Is this type of event out of the ordinary?

What was the conflict about?

What happened?

Why did you choose not to get involved?

What was the outcome?

In hindsight would you do anything differently? Why or why not?

12. In your own words, please define the term, “bullying”.

What informs this definition?

13. What does the administration at your school do in response to instances of bullying and school violence?

Do teacher have any input?

14. What does the administration expect you to do when confronted with instances of bullying and school violence?

How was this protocol developed?

In what ways are you made aware of these expectations?

What happens when students get sent to the principal?

Do you think these expectations are reasonable? Why or Why not?

Is there anything you would change?

15. If you were walking down the hallway and heard one student swear at another student, would you react? How?

16. If you were walking down the hallway and saw a student push another into a locker, would you react? How?

17. Would your reaction be different if these events took place in the context of your own classroom? How?

Strategies used in the classroom?

18. Do you feel that you have the ability to handle such situations following your own discretion and judgments?

Section 3

19. Are you familiar with the term Restorative Justice?

a. *In your own words, what does restorative justice mean?*

20. The popularity of restorative Justice models has been on the rise in schools across the globe. Has your school implemented an RJ approach? How?

Have your methods of dealing with students changed in order to follow RJ methods?

21. Which approach do you feel is best for instances of bullying and school violence?

Dealing with these situations case by case or having a predetermined set of consequences for this kind of behaviour. Justify your response.

22. What training, if any, have you received regarding dealing with student altercations, bullying and school violence?

Was this RJ influenced?

Was this Mandatory?

Did you seek it out yourself?

Do you feel that it has prepared you adequately?

Are you aware of any opportunities to do so?

Sections 4

23. What is the attendance policy at your school?
24. How was this protocol developed?
25. Do you always follow these guidelines?
26. In what cases would you not adhere to these expectations?
27. Do you know other teachers who do not always follow the attendance policy?
28. What would happen if the administration found out?

Sections 5

29. What makes a job a profession?
30. Do you consider teachers to be professionals? Why?

Would your co-workers agree? Would society at large?

31. Are you familiar with the professional designation OCT?

How were you made aware of it?

What does the acronym stand for?

What does having this designation mean to you?

Have you used it, or do you intend to use it?

Why do you think it was implemented?

How do you think society at large will receive it?

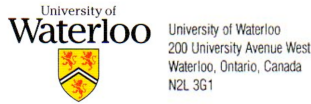
Section 6

“We are now approaching the end of the interview”

32. Are there any questions that I have not asked, which you feel are important to address in relation to these issues?
33. Do you have any other comments or concerns about this issues that you would like to bring up at this time?
34. Can you think of anyone else who may be interested in discussing these issues with me?

Appendix B

Introduction Letter



Date

Dear Participant

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my Master's degree in the Department of sociology at the University of Waterloo under the supervision of Professor Janice Aurini. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

This study will focus on the introduction of policies and how they affect the everyday work of teachers in relation to student misconduct as well as their own professionalism. When the ministry, board, or individual school puts a new initiative into place, it is expected that teachers will adapt their methods and reinforce the new regulations. It is important to understand how and why policies are developed, what determines teacher reactions to these initiatives, how they are or are not implemented across the school community and what all of this means for teaching as a profession. Therefore, I would like to include you as one of several teachers to be involved in my study. I believe that because you are actively involved in teaching, you are best suited to speak to various issues, such as teacher autonomy and policy implementation in the classroom.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately 60 minutes in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish. All information you provide is considered completely confidential and will be grouped with that of other participants, therefore the principal or school board members will not see your responses. Your name, the name of your school and the name of your board, will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study. However, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be retained for two years in a locked office at the University of Waterloo. Only researchers associated with this project will have access. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 519-807-0110 or by email at cmwall@uwaterloo.ca. You can also contact my supervisor, Professor Aurini at 519-888-4567 ext. 38343 or email jaurini@uwaterloo.ca.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. However, the final decision about participation is yours. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Susan Sykes of this office at 519-888-4567 Ext. 36005 or ssykes@uwaterloo.ca.

I hope that the results of my study will be of benefit to teachers at large, the field of education, as well as the broader research community.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Sincerely,

Chantal Wall

Chantal Wall

Appendix C

Consent Form

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Chantal Wall of the Department of Sociology at the University of Waterloo. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact Dr. Susan Sykes, Director, Office of Research Ethics at 519-888-4567 ext. 36005 or by email at ssykes@uwaterloo.ca

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

YES NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

YES NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

YES NO

Participant Name: _____ (Please print)

Participant Signature: _____

Witness Name: _____ (Please print)

Witness Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D

Interview and Sample Breakdown

Pseudonym	Board	Board No.	School No.	Date of Interview (DD/MM/YY)	Subject Area	Years Teaching*	AQ courses	Out-of-Field Teaching
Ms. Allen	Private	00	01	28/11/09	Math	6	Y	N
Mr. Smith	Public	01	02	??/08/09	Math	1	N	N
Ms. Johnson	Public	01	03	??/08/09	English	1	Y	N
Ms. Williams	Public	01	03	08/10/09	English	11	Y	N
Ms. Jones	Public	01	03	29/10/09	English	6	?	?
Ms. Brown	Public	01	03	16/12/09	English	5	Y	N
Ms. Davis	Public	01	04	09/10/09	French	23	Y	Y
Mr. Miller	Public	01	04	16/10/09	Drama	20	Y	N
Mr. Wilson	Public	01	04	21/10/09	Guidance	20	Y	N
Ms. Moore	Public	01	04	17/11/09	Social Sci.	15	Y	Y
Mr. Taylor	Public	01	04	12/01/10	Social Sci.	13	Y	Y
Ms. Anderson	Public	01	05	15/10/09	Math	< 1	N	N
Mr. Thomas	Public	01	06	23/10/09	Physics	11	Y	N
Ms. White	Public	01	06	12/11/09	Social Sci.	3	Y	Y
Mr. Harris	Public	01	07	25/10/09	English	< 1	Y	N
Ms. Martin	Public	02	08	14/11/09	Science	3	Y	Y
Ms. Thompson	Catholic	03	09	23/12/09	Social Sci.	18	N	Y
Ms. Clark	Public	04	10	01/11/09	Social Sci.	2	Y	Y
Ms. Walker	Public	05	11	02/12/09	English	5	Y	N
Ms. Hall	Public	06	12	21/12/09	Social Sci.	2	Y	N

* Defined here as the year of teaching in Ontario that is being completed at the time of the interview.

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