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## Teacher Professionalism: What Educators can Learn from Social Workers

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*Although there are numerous calls to enhance the professionalism of teachers, there is little empirical research in the United States that examines educators' understanding of the concept. This exploratory case study compared the conceptualization of professionalism by faculty and students in a college of education vis-à-vis the conceptualization of the construct by faculty and students in a school of social work. Findings revealed that participants in the education program expressed individualistic and somewhat restricted views of professionalism. Social work faculty and some social work students, on the other hand, expressed a collective and extended view of the concept. These findings suggest that in order to empower teachers to be full professionals, a deliberate attention to the development of their professionalism is needed.*

In 1969, sociologist Amitai Etzioni published a book titled *The Semi-Professions and Their Organization: Teachers, Nurses, Social Workers*. In this book he coined the phrase *semi-profession* to refer to teaching, nursing, and social work. According to him, these were “new professions whose claim to the status of doctors and lawyers [was] neither fully established nor fully desired” (p. v). Etzioni (1969) admitted that the concept of professions was not static, stating, “Yesterday’s non-professions may be tomorrow’s professions” (p. ix). Goode (1969) reiterated this dynamic notion of professions and predicted that, over the next generation, social work would achieve the status of a full-fledged profession but school teaching would not. Goode’s predictions were based on the observation that while the social work profession had increased its training standards and was working to strengthen its knowledge base, school teaching had not.

Historically, few occupations were considered professions; most were classified as trades or as crafts. Traditional professions, such as divinity, law, and medicine, were referred to as learned professions because they were “essentially intellectual in character” (Flexner, 1915, p. 154). They possessed a body of abstract knowledge that was applied to deal with individual cases (Abbot, 1988). Such established professions were regulated and guided by members of those professions who collectively determined requirements for entry (Freidson, 1994). These socially-closed educational groupings were considered professions due to their autonomy (Scanlon, 2011), the maintenance of ethical standards established by members of the profession (Sockett, 1993; Strike & Ternasky, 1993), and their devotion to the service of others (Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990). Thus, knowledge, autonomy, and service have been considered the hallmarks of a profession.

It is precisely these qualities that some claim are absent among teachers, thus relegating them to a semi-professional status. Teacher autonomy is constrained by state agencies, which typically determine the parameters for professional entry and exit (Larabee, 1992; Raymond, 2006). In addition, the formal authority for teachers' work is "vested in board members who do not belong to their occupation and are therefore beyond the reach of its internal controls" (Lortie, 1975, p. 6). Similarly, content and ethical standards are proposed and monitored by external governmental agencies and accreditors. For traditional professions, the mastery of conceptual and formal knowledge was a prerequisite for entry into the field; for teachers, their work only required embodied knowledge that would be learned through experience (Pratte & Rury, 1991). Even the notion of service has been challenged by those who see collective bargaining and union activity as primarily self-serving and not in the interests of students. Thus, there are many who question the use of the term *professional* to describe teachers.

Notwithstanding questions about the professional status of teaching, attempts to improve teacher preparation have typically included a call for a greater commitment to teacher professionalism (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). Numerous accrediting bodies, such as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) (2008) and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) (2002), have put forth calls for teacher professionalism, listing attributes like knowledge, competence, dispositions, conduct, performance, and skills.

These attempts to raise the status of teaching from within the occupation define professionalism in terms of teacher qualifications; such attempts to professionalize teachers target teacher education. The goal is to ensure that all teachers are fully prepared and fully certified in accordance with professional standards (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005). There is also a call to involve teachers themselves in setting high and rigorous standards for their own profession (Urbanski & O'Connell, 2003). Within this trend is an appeal to treat teachers like professionals whose "preparation, practice, and career advancement are seamlessly aligned around a cohesive knowledge base" (Carroll, 2007, p. 52).

A second trend comes from external forces that seek to enforce professionalism through the regulation, or increased federal and state control, of the inputs and outputs of teacher preparation (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005). This trend is characterized by attempts to standardize curricula, assessment, and teacher preparation. Within this trend, teacher quality is defined in terms of ability to improve student achievement. Critics have argued that being a professional has come to mean compliance with state mandates on professional standards (Mahony & Hextall, 2000). They also argue that "increased state regulation reduces professional autonomy, thus undermining the professionalization agenda" (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005, p. 45). Increased surveillance and control also means that teachers have become "more like industrial workers than professionals" (Smyth et al., 2000, as cited in Scanlon, 2011, p. 7). The work of teaching itself is being routinized, with teaching reduced to a technical skill (Wills & Sandholtz, 2009).

Thus, the literature on teacher professionalism reveals two seemingly contradictory trends: "a call for higher professional standards and greater professionalism on the one hand, and standardization of teaching and antipathy to teachers' professionalization on the other" (Hargreaves & Lo, 2000, p. 11). Although the literature is replete with discussions of

professionalism and essays bemoaning the de-professionalization of teachers, several scholars have pointed out the scarcity of empirical research on teacher professionalism and the rather surprising gap in our understanding of the institutional contexts for teacher preparation (Grossman et al., 2009; Swann, McIntyre, Pell, Hargreaves, & Cunningham, 2010; Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005).

In 1990, Zeichner and Gore pointed out our lack of knowledge about the institutional and cultural contexts in which socialization into the profession occurs. According to them, most of the research on teacher education ignored the collective character of how teachers are socialized. Fifteen years later, in 2005, the American Educational Research Association (AERA) panel on Research and Teacher Education called for more research that looked at the nature and effect of different components of teacher education. The AERA also pointed out that there has been very little direct study of specific courses and their influence on the professionalism of prospective teachers (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005).

Furthermore, Evans (2008) has noted that “what professionalism *is* and how it is constituted remains under-examined in the broad sociological field and particularly in the context of education” (p. 21). Such lack of attention to professionalism in the field of education is problematic, for without an understanding of what professionalism consists of, it will be difficult to figure out how it may be influenced. Educators are beginning to look toward professions like medicine and law to find ways to enhance the professional preparation of teachers (Cuban, 2013; Grossman et al., 2009). However, as Case, Lanier, and Miskel (1986) suggested, it might also be helpful to compare education with professions that are similar, such as social work or nursing. Curiously, despite Etzioni’s (1969) presentation of social work and teaching as semi-professions, there are no empirical studies comparing the two professions in terms of the concept of professionalism.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purposes of this exploratory, cross-professional case study were to address this gap in the literature and to examine the conceptualization of professionalism by faculty and students in a college of education by comparing it with the conceptualization of the construct by faculty and students in a school of social work.

Such a comparison between teaching and social work is warranted because of their similarities. Historically, both teaching and social work were considered semi-professions because of the lack of both a firm theoretical knowledge base and professional autonomy (Etzioni, 1969). Practitioners were perceived to be controlled not by professional norms alone, but also by administrative rules (Flexner, 1915; Toren, 1969). Interestingly, both of the professions have always had a predominantly female workforce. The work of teachers and social workers depends upon the relationship between practitioners and their clients; both professions espouse a mission of service and tend to have vulnerable clients. Both teaching and social work are considered to be professions of human improvement; “these are occupations in which practitioners seek to transform minds, enrich human capacities, and change behavior” (Cohen, 2005, p. 280).

However, there are some differences between the work of teachers and that of social workers. The social work license is provided by the state; to obtain this license a student must complete a program of study in an institution that is accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). The CSWE is the sole accrediting agency for social work education. The bachelor's degree program (BSW) confers basic skills; a master's degree (MSW) is required for an advanced license.

In contrast, to obtain a teaching certificate, prospective teachers need to attend a state-approved program and state agencies determine the criteria for entry into and exit from a program. Guided by the argument that more education does not necessarily make better teachers (Miller & Roza, 2012), some states are dismissing a master's degree as evidence of additional competence. Instead, they are emphasizing teacher performance (measured by students' test scores) over teacher qualifications. For example, in the state of Michigan, teachers are no longer required to earn a master's degree.

Social workers may work in a variety of settings funded by public or private funds; clients might be referred to a social worker or might come voluntarily. Students, on the other hand, are required by law to attend school and most schools are state agencies. Most schools are publicly funded, teachers are state employees, and local school districts are run by local school boards. Consequently, the work of teaching is influenced by stakeholders who may not even be members of the teaching profession.

Although social workers and teachers both need the cooperation of their clients to do their work (Cohen, 2005), social workers are typically not held individually responsible for client outcomes. In contrast, there is a trend toward evaluating teachers based on student outcomes. For example, in Michigan, by 2015, student achievement data will account for 50% of a teacher's evaluation.

Thus, it seems that teaching and social work are similar enough to merit comparison and share distinctive characteristics, and yet their contexts may entail different processes for developing professionalism. It is hoped that a cross-analysis of the two contexts will facilitate a broader understanding of the construct of professionalism with regard to teachers.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study was guided by the social constructivist paradigm (Berger & Luckman, 1967), which states that meaning is created by individuals and that culture and context are critical in this knowledge construction. This paradigm was especially suitable for examining how individuals enter a profession and make sense of what it means to be a professional.

#### **Definition of Professionalism**

A review of the extant literature reveals that, currently, there is a lack of consensus regarding the meaning of professionalism (Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996). Much of the debate about professionalism is "clouded by unstated assumptions and inconsistent and incomplete usages" (Freidson, 1994, p. 169). Moreover, the construct of professionalism is dynamic and contextual and has been subject to different interpretations over time.

Initially, Hoyle (1975) used the term *professionalism* to refer to an individual's professionalism. Evans (2008) elaborated on Hoyle's definition and defined professionalism as follows: "An ideologically-, attitudinally-, intellectually-, and epistemologically-based stance on the part of an individual, in relation to the practice of the profession to which s/he belongs, and which influences her/his professional practice" (p. 28). She clarified that professionalism is the plural of professionalism, that is, an amalgamation of individuals' professionalities.

Likewise, Freidson (1994) described professionalism as a "state of mind," something "central to the identity of the professional" (p. 836). It is important to note that professionalism is not simply the quality of individual practice; rather, it is conduct within an occupation (Evans, 2008; Sockett, 1993). Professions are sustained because they are well-organized and coordinated among group members. What distinguishes a profession is "the collective establishment of widely recognized rules of good service" (Kerchner & Kaufman, 1995, p. 108). Therefore, by definition, professionalism represents the values of a community of practitioners.

### **Definition of Professional Socialization**

Evans (2010) described professional socialization as the process by which the competencies, ideologies, and expectations related to an occupational role are transmitted to novices. During this process the student "shifts from prior reference groups to professional reference groups and develops a relationship to the values, norms, and culture of that profession" (Miller, 2013, p. 369). Socialization is not a passive process; individuals construct their own professional identities. However, the shared social milieu in which the socialization occurs leads to a collective understanding.

### **Research Method**

This research used a qualitative, comparative, case study method to explore the phenomenon of professionalism in a real-life context (Yin, 1994). A college of education and a school of social work served as two cases within which to examine professionalism. An important reason for doing the multi-case study was to "examine how the phenomenon performs in different environments" (Stake, 2006, p. 23). As the researcher, I first examined program-specific experiences to identify qualities and characteristics within each individual case and then compared across cases. While the individual case studies consisted of interpreting the activities in each case, "putting them together, in context, constituted the central findings of the multi-case study" (Stake, 2006, p. 27).

### **Context**

This study was conducted at a large comprehensive university in Michigan. Social work and education are two of the professional schools at this university. The college of education enrolls more than twice as many students as the school of social work. Both programs have a secondary admittance policy; students enrolled in the university are admitted to the professional school as juniors. The admission criteria are similar; most students who apply gain admission.

## Sampling

Initial participants for this study were selected using purposive sampling. In each program I first approached an administrator who was knowledgeable about the undergraduate preparation program. This individual served as my key informant. I asked this key informant to recommend the names of faculty who would be able to help me understand how the concept of professionalism was addressed in the program—that is, individuals who might have rich information about professionalism in the undergraduate program. I then interviewed the recommended faculty. I used snowball sampling (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006) to find additional participants; at the end of each interview I asked each faculty member to recommend others in the program who would have helpful insights to offer on the topic of professionalism. Participating faculty were interviewed until data saturation was achieved; that is, no new information was being gained by additional interviews and it became counter-productive to interview more faculty (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

In the education program I spoke with general education and special education faculty, including those who taught methods courses as well as social foundations courses. In the social work program I spoke with faculty who taught courses related to social work research and practice, field seminars, and the capstone course. In each program, faculty helped me identify classes to observe. Also, guided by faculty recommendations, I surveyed students enrolled in the capstone classes.

## Data Sources, Instruments, Procedures

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with faculty members (seven from social work and nine from education, including three from social foundations and six who taught methods or field courses) to understand their perceptions of professionalism and how professionalism was addressed in their program (see Appendix A for faculty interview prompts).

In each program, paper and pencil surveys were distributed to students enrolled in the capstone classes. The open-ended survey asked students to share their thoughts on professionalism and their professional preparation (see Appendix B for student survey). Responses were obtained from 66 elementary education, 69 secondary education, and 43 social work students.

Finally, documents (e.g., professional standards, syllabi, class handouts, the home page of each program, the web page of professional organizations in each program) were examined to understand how professionalism was defined in those documents.

## Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis was an ongoing, iterative process (Kirby & McKenna, 1989), where data collection and analysis continually overlapped. It was a constant cycle of coding, data reduction and displays, writing memos, searching for themes and patterns, and generating and testing assertions. Data analysis occurred in two modes. In the first, analysis was concurrent with data collection, and in the second, more formal analysis occurred after data collection was completed.

Analysis in the field was largely thematic—a search for patterns that would alert me to significant issues to pursue. This preliminary analysis guided subsequent data collection, and also enabled me to check initial interpretations with participants while I was still in the field.

Once fieldwork was completed, I scanned the entire set of raw data, searching for patterns. The next step was to reduce the data into manageable units for closer analysis. The constant comparative method of coding recommended by Corbin and Strauss (2008) was utilized to reduce and analyze the data, identify themes, and articulate assertions. This involved three major types of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

The aim of open coding was to generate concepts to fit the data. In this inductive process, faculty interviews, student surveys, and documents were coded using *in vivo* codes that emerged from the data (e.g., dress, demeanor, work habits, collaboration, non-judgmental, boundaries, and social change). Codes were then grouped into subcategories (e.g., conduct, knowledge, skills, attitude, identity, self-knowledge, values, autonomy, obligation, and responsibility).

While open coding fragmented the data and enabled the identification of categories, axial coding put the data back together by making connections between subcategories and categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). During this stage the following categories emerged: attributes of professionalism, frame of reference, and approach to professional preparation.

The final step was selective coding, where I searched for a main, recurrent theme to serve as a sort of general framework, similar to the edge pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, within which to interpret my findings (LeCompte & Priesle, 1993). Two major themes emerged that captured all of the data: *individualistic professionalism* and *collective professionalism*. Searches were conducted for patterns within each program (education and social work), within each population (faculty and students), and across the two programs and populations.

### **Trustworthiness of Data**

I used data triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to increase the credibility of the data. I gathered data from multiple sources, based on the premise that by combining data from different sources, I could overcome the intrinsic bias that comes from a single method (Denzin, 1978). I interviewed individuals who taught a variety of courses in order to obtain a rich picture of the socialization of novices into the profession. During classroom observations I sought evidence for particular assertions made by the participating faculty during their interviews. I examined documents to corroborate or refute the information provided by individuals and my classroom observations. Finally, students were surveyed to determine their interpretation of the concept of professionalism.

For example, an education faculty member explained that professionalism meant maintaining a positive attitude in all professional interactions. I observed his class, where he told prospective teachers about the importance of maintaining a positive attitude in interactions with parents. Teacher candidates were told to write a child study report using positive language. Later, I observed them participate in a role play of a parent teacher conference where the teachers were



to maintain a positive tone even when faced with irate parents. An examination of the student handbook revealed that “keeping negative feelings to yourself” was one of the attributes of professionalism. On the other hand, I also noted discrepancies in the data. For example, although social justice was a dominant theme in the school of social work as indicated in public documents, faculty interview responses, and classroom presentations, only two students mentioned social justice in their survey responses.

I also conducted regular “member checks” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) during data collection and after data collection was complete. Since data collection and analysis were conducted simultaneously, I checked my initial interpretations informally while I was still gathering data. For example, following classroom observations, I shared my emerging understandings with faculty and asked them whether my interpretation of events corresponded with their understandings. Once data collection was completed and I had analyzed all the information, I shared my conclusions with two individuals in each of the programs. I also presented my findings to the entire faculty of the college of education. Faculty feedback reassured me that my findings were congruent with their experiences.

### **Findings**

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to compare the conceptualization of professionalism by faculty and students in a college of education vis-à-vis the conceptualization of the construct by faculty and students in a school of social work. The following section includes a description of the findings from the college of education followed by the findings from the school of social work. In each case, I first present a description of the institutional context, which conveys the overall values and mission of the university. This is followed by the findings regarding faculty perceptions of professionalism based on interview data and corroborated by classroom observations. Next, I present a summary of student perceptions obtained through anonymous surveys. Each case concludes with a comparison between faculty and student perceptions.

#### **College of Education: Individualistic Professionalism**

At this university, teacher education is jointly provided by the faculty in the college of education and faculty in the college of liberal arts and science. Education faculty teach courses in social foundations, methods and materials, school organization and management, technology, and assessment, and also supervise field placements. Faculty from the liberal arts college teach content areas and content-specific methods courses (since these faculty are located at a different campus and are not members of the college of education, they were not included in this study). Students are admitted to the college of education after the completion of the major and minor requirements in the college of liberal arts and sciences. Since the courses are delivered on two different campuses of the university, it is possible that students receive multiple, contradictory messages regarding professionalism.

The mission statement of the teacher preparation program conveyed “a belief in strong backgrounds in the liberal arts, familiarity with learning theory, and practical experience in diverse settings.” The college website stated that the purpose of teacher education is to prepare

candidates who “enhance the individual growth of their students while working to establish policies and practices that promote the principles of democratic education.” The values listed in the conceptual framework included expertise to guide practice, equity to guide interactions, liberal education to guide perspectives, and social responsibility to guide a commitment to democratic education. These public statements represented attention to the expertise of teachers in the local classroom context and also to the broader social perspective. However, there was no direct reference to the profession of teaching.

The student teaching advising handbook described professionalism primarily in terms of school and classroom behavior. “Teacher assistants and student teachers are expected to conform to standards of professional conduct as specified by the College of Education, assigned school's teacher handbook, and school administrator(s).” The college standards of professional conduct listed in the handbook included “appropriate dress,” being “prompt,” keeping “negative feelings to yourself,” and serving as “role model for students.” Other standards included an expectation that candidates would exhibit professional curiosity, show concern for students, find ways to assess student learning, and be willing to devote time for professional responsibilities such as parent-teacher conferences.

The student teaching handbook also listed a set of attributes of professionalism that focused primarily on the context of the school and classroom: being prompt, positive, attentive, and interested; exhibiting curiosity; showing concern for students and peers; serving as a role model for students; and demonstrating dependability, punctuality, honesty, integrity, curiosity, creativity, appropriate dress, cleanliness, and manners. Thus, the written documents presented to prospective teachers focused on overt behaviors, and many of the expected behaviors were not exclusive to teachers.

### **Faculty Response**

Faculty were asked what they understood to be meant by the term professionalism with regard to teachers. In addition, I visited classes taught by the faculty where, according to them, the topic of professionalism was being addressed. During observations I looked for ways in which the classroom activities exemplified, enhanced, or contradicted what the faculty had said in their interviews. The following section describes my findings, based on an analysis of the interviews and observation field notes.

#### **Attributes of Professionalism**

**Teacher conduct.** When asked what the term professionalism meant in relation to teachers, the most frequent response of the faculty was to mention attributes related to appropriate conduct: “Professionalism is how you conduct yourself, personally, in your classroom, and in your life as you live it.” I observed a class where students were told, “Every time you walk into a school building you are on a stage. Everyone is watching you. Make sure everything you do is professional.”

Faculty listed dress and demeanor, appropriate communication, and appropriate work habits as the key attributes of professionalism. Dress and demeanor, they explained, meant “looking,

dressing, and acting” the part of a teacher. “No flip flops, no piercing,” emphasized one. “No tattoos, no short skirts or deep necklines,” stressed another. I observed classroom role-plays and discussions that highlighted the importance of appropriate attire.

Most teacher educators stated that professionalism meant the adoption of appropriate verbal and nonverbal communication when talking to students, administrators, and parents. This included the use of nonbiased language, correct grammar, and positive language. One stated, “When we say . . . look someone in the eye and talk to them in a way that they feel valued. All of it boils down to communication.” Another participant encouraged prospective teachers in his class to eliminate negativity: “You need to show positivity and support . . . Think about how you can take a negative and turn it into a positive.”

Several teacher education faculty also mentioned the importance of good work habits. For example, one said, “In most situations you might fulfill contractual obligations by being in the workplace 7.5 hours; professionalism is not watching the clock.” Others mentioned the importance of work habits such as punctuality, being prepared, and the willingness to work hard.

In addition to contractual obligations, faculty stressed teachers’ legal responsibilities and also advised students to refer to local norms for guidance. “Get familiar with building policies and district guidelines,” advised one instructor to the students in her class. “You watch what other people do and follow suit and don’t intrude,” cautioned another.

**Expertise.** Three methods faculty referred to teachers’ expert knowledge as the basis for professionalism. Teachers, they pointed out, specialize in different content areas, such as reading, science, math, social studies, or special education. “We each have our own distinct body of knowledge, our own professional organizations,” explained one faculty member.

Another pointed out the difference in the knowledge base of general education and special education teachers: “Gen Ed teacher is the content expert; special ed person is the strategy expert. Their job is to modify work or reteach in a way that benefits the student with the special needs.” A third clarified that professionalism was tied to the knowledge of the discipline:

There is a body of knowledge—learning theory, reading strategies, child development, adolescent development, also content knowledge—around education that you need to know to be able to teach. . . . It is not sufficient to know what. They need to be informed *why* they do so that they can make good decisions, based on knowledge, to back it up.

For these teacher educators, theoretical and research knowledge was a key attribute of professionalism.

Three other faculty, who taught field-based courses, felt that their expertise was primarily in terms of practical knowledge. “Our focus is not on the scholarly end of things; they get that in the foundations classes. This is more of the practical.” The practical skills they talked about included instructional strategies and assessment techniques. Thus, there were distinctions between those who taught field-based courses and those who taught classroom-based courses.

Similarly, there were contrasts between faculty of foundations courses and faculty of methods courses. Foundations faculty mostly spoke of professionalism in terms of responsibilities beyond the classroom, emphasizing the importance of context in making decisions. “We emphasize the why, not the how,” explained one. Another explained that professionalism, from a social foundations perspective, entailed an understanding of the sociopolitical, historical, and philosophical contexts of education. Typically, instructors of methods and field-based courses tended to ignore such environmental contexts and influences. Thus, despite being members of the same teacher preparation program, faculty did not necessarily share a common orientation.

**Autonomy.** When asked what they understood by the term professionalism with regard to teachers, all faculty brought up the issue of professional autonomy. Each spoke of autonomy in terms of individual teacher autonomy. They felt that, as professionals, classroom teachers should have the freedom to make decisions about curriculum, instruction, and evaluation. They explained that teachers had lost professional autonomy in recent years, noting that the contractual obligations imposed upon teachers from external sources were the biggest threat to teacher autonomy. Other threats included the “imposition of Common Core standards,” teachers being “held accountable for student test scores,” and “performance pay” being used as a way to reward and punish teachers based on their students’ performance on standardized tests. No faculty mentioned the autonomy of the profession to govern itself.

### **Frame of Reference**

There was no apparent common point of reference for teacher educators’ views regarding teacher professionalism. One member of the faculty referred to the classic literature on professions to explain that professionalism meant knowledge, autonomy, and service. Another referred to the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) model of core teaching standards, but could not recall exactly what they stated about professionalism. A third pointed out criteria for the evaluation of professionalism listed in the student teaching handbook; for example, identifying “Showing Professionalism: served as an appropriate role model for pupils, demonstrated dependability and punctuality, exhibited industriousness and initiative, demonstrated honesty and integrity . . . .” A fourth referred to Sockett’s (1993) definition of professionalism. The remaining faculty did not provide any basis for their understanding of what professionalism meant with regard to teachers.

### **Approach to Professional Preparation**

Most faculty agreed that the goal of professional preparation was to help students develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to obtain a job and be successful in their first year of teaching. Only one social foundations faculty member mentioned the goal of preparing students for social responsibility. At the same time, another from the foundations program argued that because novice teachers were so concerned with their own survival in the classroom, they were not yet ready to grapple with broader aspects of professionalism.

All faculty explained that because of the current culture of accountability, the main responsibility of classroom teachers was to increase student achievement. Therefore, the professional preparation of teachers needed to focus on practical techniques, skills and routines, or procedures

that would enhance student achievement.

Field placement was mentioned as an important part of the teacher preparation program. During teacher assisting (one semester) and student teaching (one semester), pre-service teachers were taught how to plan their lessons and manage their classrooms so that mandated standards could be achieved. This included teaching them how to use “informal classroom assessment, how to take the assessment and turn it into instruction,” and how to “implement research-based strategies,” all for the purpose of meeting mandated standards. The focus of teacher preparation was on content that had “immediate relevance and application” in K-12 classrooms.

In addition to practical skills, some faculty also emphasized that professionalism meant that the teacher candidate possessed appropriate attitudes and dispositions. However, they pointed out that some of the affective qualities that characterize good teachers were intangible and hard to teach or evaluate. Three described teaching as “a calling,” implying intuitive skills rather than rational ones: “You either have it or you don’t.” Others felt that the qualities expected of teachers surpassed those of lawyers and doctors, and that some of these qualities were intuitive. One said, “You have to have it in you . . . that is part of the profession of teaching. . . . You have to have dedication and commitment and talent, creativity, knowledge; no other profession has to do all that.”

Since many of the qualities of great teachers were so intangible, faculty questioned whether professional attitudes could be taught. Some felt that rather than explicit instruction, the best way to convey these attributes was to model them. “Professional dispositions can be modeled; my students can see my passion and my empathy,” explained one faculty member. “We need to demonstrate professionalism, walk the walk,” said another. “I try to model these things,” said a third.

In summary, the participating college of education faculty had an individualistic approach to professionalism and the socialization of prospective teachers; that is, there was little common understanding of the notion of professionalism or how it was to be developed. Six of the nine faculty members described professionalism in terms of different classroom behaviors. Some emphasized practical skills, others deportment, and yet others subject expertise. Three faculty described professionalism in terms of an awareness of the broader context of schooling. Most faculty believed that the best way to teach professionalism was to embody it. All felt that teacher candidates would develop professionalism as they acquired more teaching experience.

### **Pre-service Teachers’ Perceptions of Professionalism**

Pre-service teachers in the college of education were asked the question, “What do you understand by the term professionalism with respect to teachers?” For the most part, their responses mirrored those of the faculty. In their survey responses, student did not mention any readings or class discussions to support their views on professionalism.

### Attributes of Professionalism

**Teacher conduct.** Approximately 92% of the participating students explained the concept of professionalism by listing attributes related to dress, demeanor, and communication: “Act, dress, and speak like a professional”; “Dress and carry oneself in a manner that commands authority”; “Use correct grammar.” Approximately a quarter of the students also wrote that professionalism was important because teachers were “constantly being watched,” both in school and outside. Therefore, they needed to act as “role models” for students.

In addition, approximately 30% of the students indicated that professionalism meant having good work habits, such as being “punctual, prepared, hard-working, and respectful.” Approximately 20% also mentioned the ability to work collaboratively with other staff members as an important attribute of professionalism.

**Knowledge, skills, and attitudes.** Only two out of 135 students listed content knowledge as an aspect of professionalism. Similarly, in explaining what they understood by professionalism, only two students mentioned responsibility for student learning. One wrote about going out of her way “to make sure my students are learning,” while another wrote of the need to present “yourself and your instruction in a manner that develops student education.” Of the 16 students who described professionalism in terms of skills, 12 mentioned practical skills, such as “having thoroughly prepared lessons” and “properly addressing classroom problems.”

Like faculty, students mentioned affective attributes like passion as a key component of professionalism. For example, one wrote, “While they should dress, talk, and act respectably, more than anything their passion and abilities as teachers should lead them to be viewed as professionals.” Nearly 30% of all students mentioned the importance of having “respectful” and “positive” attitudes, and being “open minded.”

### Frame of Reference

Students described professionalism solely in terms of responsibility for what happened in their classrooms and schools. No student response on the survey mentioned teacher responsibility for anything outside the school. When I observed a classroom discussion regarding the meaning of the phrase *professional community*, I noted that students focused on the term “community,” interpreting it to mean local community. “Community is those whom we directly influence,” said one student. “A community is people you interact with on a regular basis, a close-knit group. So it would be my classroom, my grade level, and my school; that is my community,” agreed another. A third student described a district-wide professional development that she had attended, and expanded the notion of professional community to include the whole school district. When the instructor asked how many students belonged to a professional organization, most responded that they did not. Most seemed unfamiliar with the idea of a broader professional community; some struggled to understand the relevance of membership in professional associations. One student asked, “I don’t even know those people. I don’t interact with them every day. How can they be my community?”

### **Goal of Professional Preparation**

Approximately 78% of pre-service teachers described the goal of professional preparation as “preparing for certification” and “to help me get a good job.” Students echoed the faculty sentiment that there was something intangible about teaching: “Not everyone can teach.” Therefore, professionalism was to be attained by “observation of role models” and “experience.” Students reported that they valued their field experiences because of the opportunities to observe the cooperating teachers and to gain hands-on experience.

### **Summary of Findings from the College of Education**

The conceptual framework of the college indicated a concern for the local classroom context as well as for broader goals like social responsibility and democratic education. However, seven of the faculty and all of the student responses described professionalism only within the context of the classroom and school. While the majority of faculty and students emphasized aspects of professionalism such as dress and demeanor, only a few faculty and students also mentioned the importance of specialized knowledge and skills, including content knowledge, instructional strategies, and classroom management techniques. Those who did mention expertise indicated that expertise ought to give teachers the freedom to do as they saw fit in the classroom. During interviews and classroom observations I noted that several faculty and students also shared the sentiment that since good teaching involves intangible elements, the best way to teach and learn about professionalism was by observing role models. They were of the opinion that professionalism would develop with experience.

### **School of Social Work: Collective Professionalism**

Like the education program, the social work program is built on a foundation of liberal arts, requiring cognate courses and coursework in the major. Students are admitted to the school after they have completed their general education requirements. However, unlike the college of education, all social work courses are taught by faculty in the school of social work. Because of this, students are more likely to receive a consistent message regarding professionalism.

The stated goal of the BSW program is to prepare students for entry into the social work profession as generalist practitioners; there is no sub-specialization at the undergraduate level. The goals indicated a commitment to the client and the local context: “serve individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities in need.” But they also indicated a commitment to broader issues, such as “social and economic justice, multiculturalism, and diversity,” and to furthering “the goals of the social work profession.”

The school website described field education as the “signature pedagogy” of social work education, providing students with opportunities to integrate and practice the skills necessary to demonstrate achievement of the CSWE competencies and practice behaviors. Both the school mission statement and the field manual also referred to the expectation that students in the field will abide by the National Association of Social Work (NASW) code of ethics. According to the mission statement of the school of social work, the program seeks to develop social workers who are knowledgeable, critical thinkers, with a deep commitment to translating social work ethics

and values into practice, and to support “continual improvement of the social work profession through participation in practice-based research and evaluation, and membership in professional organizations.”

Students are required to complete a learning contract based on the 10 core competencies identified by the CSWE as the standards for social work education. Each competency has specific practice behaviors, and students are evaluated on the ability to demonstrate the stated behaviors. The first core competency is to identify with the social work profession. Others include the application of ethical principles and critical thinking; the incorporation of diversity; advocating for human rights and social justice; engaging in research and policy practice; and responding to the contexts that shape practice. The listed competencies range from working with individuals to working for social change. They include knowledge, skills, and attitudes related specifically to the social work profession.

The school’s field manual corroborated this mission, stating that students will be evaluated based on their ability to demonstrate social work behaviors related to the core competencies. These included attending to professional boundaries; using research evidence to inform practice; making ethical decisions by applying standards of the NASW Code of Ethics; recognizing the extent to which a culture’s structure and values may oppress or enhance privilege and power; using self-awareness to eliminate the influence of personal biases and values in working with diverse groups; and advocating for policies that advance social well-being. Out of 41 expected behaviors there was only one that referred to appearance: “Demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior, appearance, and communication.” Thus, the written documents presented to prospective social workers focused strongly on the professional identity of a social worker, and the sense of being part of a larger professional community.

### **Faculty Response**

There was considerable consistency in social work faculty responses to the question, “What do you understand by the term professionalism with respect to social workers?” Each of the participating faculty talked about the 10 core competencies laid out by the CSWE. “True professionalism would mean that you are competent in all of these things,” explained one participant. Each participant also mentioned the code of ethics approved by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), the largest organization of social workers, explaining that professionalism meant using these social work ethical principles to guide professional practice.

### **Attributes of Professionalism**

**Social worker identity.** The first aspect of professionalism addressed by most of the faculty came from a key competency: “Identify as a social worker and conduct oneself accordingly.” Faculty emphasized the first part of this competency. One participant explained social worker identity by using the metaphor of an instrument or tool of the profession:

The only tool that I have in social work is really me. I am the tool. In education you have all the accoutrements; the goal is something external to the individual, defined external to



the teacher. . . . But in social work, you are the instrument. It is the relationship that is the critical piece. Folks have to have confidence in the relationship.

Other faculty emphasized the “use of self” or “disciplined use of self” as a unique characteristic of the identity of social workers. “We use our personal skills and our personality; that is the unique thing, combining who you are as a person with professional skills,” explained one participant.

**Self-knowledge.** With the self as the main instrument of social work, most faculty explained that self-knowledge was a critical and vital aspect of professionalism:

Professionalism is about performance. . . . you can know all the stuff, but if you as the instrument are not in tune and don’t have the right parts of yourself adjusted and in tune, you aren’t going to be professional and accomplish professional performance.

To identify as a social worker, you need to first understand yourself, explained one participant. Another instructor pointed out to students that successful outcomes with clients were determined by client factors (40%), the therapeutic relationship (30%), models and methods of practice (15%), and the ability to engender hope (15%). “Of the 60% that is within your control, 45% depends on you. . . . You must believe that people can change. In this class we work on developing your personal self into effective professional selves.”

Faculty emphasized the need for social workers to reflect and be aware of their own biases. One instructor described these predispositions and biases as one’s “default mode.” Professionalism, according to her, meant examining one’s default mode and then engaging in professional conduct guided by this self-knowledge.

**Professional values.** To help students distinguish between their personal and professional selves, in one class the instructor introduced the six values of social work: service, social justice, dignity and worth of the individual, importance of human relations, integrity, and competence. Students were given a questionnaire to identify their personal values and then asked how those compared with the professional values. Several students discussed how they were “raised Catholic” and how these religious values, such as women’s right to choose abortion or honoring the individual’s dignity regardless of sexual orientation, differed from social work values. The instructor emphasized the need to be authentic, yet nonjudgmental. Students were encouraged to use social work values in interactions with colleagues and clients. In professional interactions, “social work values trump personal values,” explained the instructor, advising students to identify some mechanism for visualizing a shift from a personal to a professional self. In another class, the instructor explained that professionalism involved the adoption of a nonjudgmental stance: “For example, you are meeting therapeutically with a family. The husband is abusive. Being nonjudgmental means not judging him.” The instructor suggested being aware of the work at hand, and reserving judgment in such situations.

**Social responsibility.** Social work faculty described the multifaceted roles and responsibilities of social workers:

Social workers wear many hats . . . macro and micro settings. Macro settings refer to the community, for example, work with the Latino community, help with community events, health fairs that sort of thing. Micro settings they may work with individual clients in an organization, connecting people with resources.

Awareness and ability to act in these roles was considered a professional responsibility.

The most frequently mentioned responsibilities of a social worker were “advocacy for the client” and “connecting people with resources.” Faculty acknowledged the professional work that social workers do in terms of direct contact with clients, assessing their needs, and intervening on their behalf. However, they also described the work of social workers in terms of broader roles, such as advocating for human rights and social and economic justice. They referred to this as the “person and environment” perspective. One faculty member explained, “You cannot be a social worker without being political.” “It is our job to be an agent of change,” explained another.

The faculty also described the work of the profession in terms of responsibility for others. “We teach about privilege. You are not the one in need and you are responsible for the ones who are.” This responsibility was not only to the client, but to broader social change. “Social justice is key to the whole profession,” stated one. Another said, “You are responsible to the client, to your colleagues, to the profession in general, and to society at large. . . . and you are accountable to the ethical standards of social work.”

Another participant explained that social work was not charity work. Rather, it was about empowerment:

Everyone is empowered, like a pilot light on your furnace. Everyone has power. For some that light has been turned down so low they might not even recognize it. As social workers our job is to fan that flame so that they themselves can use that power. This is not charity; we are not charity workers.

From this point of view, individuals are free to make their own choices. The role of the social worker is to promote the clients’ socially responsible self-determination.

Social work faculty acknowledged that their license and accreditation gave them autonomy as a profession. However, instead of the term autonomy, most of them spoke of an internalized sense of obligation to “uphold the public trust,” a trust that bestowed the “privilege of working as a licensed social worker.” To uphold the public trust and the ethical standards of the profession, social workers must maintain professional boundaries. This was crucial, explained one participant, since social workers constantly work with people who are vulnerable: “Social workers have issues where clients would like to have their cell phone number; this is a role or boundary violation. . . . Need to be clear about what is okay and what is not okay.”

### **Frame of Reference**

Each faculty member mentioned the CSWE core competencies and the NASW code of ethics, explaining that professionalism meant applying social work ethical principles to guide professional practice. The syllabus of each class listed the relevant competencies and the

knowledge, values, and skills of the profession. A capstone seminar class provided students with the opportunity to reflect on their mastery of the 10 core competencies and their respective practice behaviors.

Students were explicitly taught about the NASW code of ethics. The code of ethics, one social work faculty member explained, “set the standards for professional behavior” and therefore was a description of “an idealized view of what things should be like.” Another instructor explained that the NASW code of ethics, which was adopted in 1955, brought unity to the profession by bringing together hitherto separate factions of social workers into one organization.

### **Approach to Professional Preparation**

Faculty acknowledged that because a shift from the personal to professional was difficult, the primary goal of professional education was a deliberate process to help students take on the identity of a social worker: “It is the process of helping students think—not like students but like social workers.” In other words, since the social worker was the instrument of action in the clinical setting, this instrument had to be “tuned” through the professional preparation program.

Participating faculty further clarified that, while the self as an instrument was an apt metaphor, in the social work profession, art and science were inextricably linked. Social workers were expected to use evidence-based practice, and this was another critical aspect of professionalism addressed in the preparation of social workers.

This was exemplified in a class on professional communication, where students were asked to distinguish between description and interpretation and also to provide evidence to support the terms they used to describe clients. One instructor told a group of students to “Separate yourself from the situation. Use specific and descriptive evidence. Use clinical descriptors. . . . Do not make assumptions of any kind.”

Another participant used case studies to connect students’ field experiences with theory and research. “My job is to help them recognize that these issues connect to concepts and abstract ideas that they learned about during the curriculum.” Students who were grappling with the case study were told to “take off your student hat and put on your professional social worker hat.”

In summary, social work faculty exhibited a collective approach to professionalism. There was consistency in the manner in which social work faculty talked about professionalism and the preparation of social workers. All social work faculty referred to the core competencies of the profession and the social work code of ethics as the source of their understanding of the concept of professionalism. While faculty discussed the importance of the knowledge, skills, and attitude needed for professional decision making in the clinical context, they also emphasized the responsibility of the social worker to the profession and to society. They also agreed that an important goal of social work preparation was to facilitate the development of a social worker identity.

### Social Work Students' Perceptions of Professionalism

Prospective social workers were asked the question, "What do you understand by the term professionalism with respect to social work?" Their responses were similar to the responses of the faculty, yet with some notable differences.

#### Attributes of Professionalism

**Professional conduct.** When asked what they understood by the term professionalism in relation to social workers, the most frequent response (two-thirds of the participating students) involved some aspect of appropriate conduct. Some wrote that professionalism meant maintaining "professional boundaries" between self and client. One student explained, "The term professionalism is often followed by the word 'boundaries.' I understand as a social worker that boundaries are necessary and important." Another student gave the following example to illustrate a boundary: "Not grabbing a drink with a client after a therapy session."

Half of the students also mentioned some attribute related to demeanor. They described the need for appropriate dress and appearance, appropriate language and communication skills, and the need for social workers to carry themselves with maturity and poise at all times. A couple of students also mentioned attributes like punctuality and hard work.

**Knowledge, skills, and attitudes.** Only five students mentioned the importance of the "knowledge base of the profession," or of engaging in "evidence-based practice," by "going to trainings to stay informed."

A third of the students mentioned the importance of affective characteristics such as nonjudgmental and respectful interaction with clients and colleagues. One wrote, "Professionalism is keeping personal bias or thoughts out of your interaction with clients." Another wrote that "professionalism means meeting the client where they are and never judging." Although faculty had stressed the importance of self-knowledge, only a couple of students listed this as an attribute of professionalism. For example, one student wrote that professionalism meant "understanding your own biases and how that might affect your work, knowing personal strengths and weaknesses."

A few students specifically wrote about the notion of working with a diverse clientele. Professionalism for one meant being "culturally competent and being able to successfully work with diverse populations"; for another it meant "not discriminating, no racial slurs"; and for a third it meant "being open to all diversity."

A couple of students mentioned the importance of clear and effective communication. One student clarified what this meant for social workers: "provide clear speech and written documents. Ex: psycho-social assessments must be completed with detail to support statements made."

Three students mentioned the importance of client self-determination, explaining professionalism meant that "clients must make their own decisions and we must respect them. We cannot make

them do anything only encourage them to do it.” In a similar vein, another wrote that professionalism in regard to social workers meant “helping and supporting clients but remembering that we cannot make changes or do things for them.” A third student explained that it was important to “value individuals’ freedom to choose life goals.”

### **Frame of Reference**

Like the prospective teachers, social work students described professionalism solely in terms of interaction with clients. Only two student responses on the surveys also mentioned issues of social responsibility. One referred to the responsibility of the social worker “for bettering society,” while another wrote, “being a social worker is a lifestyle. There are elements of the profession that must be maintained in daily life i.e.: social justice.” However, unlike prospective teachers, most social work students seemed to be acquainted with important professional organizations like the NASW and the CSWE.

When describing professionalism, a third of the students referred to the NASW code of ethics. For example, one student wrote, “really it narrows down to following the NASW code of ethics.” Another student wrote “professionalism means adhering to our code of ethics.” Others simply wrote “social work professionals are bound by the NASW code of ethics.” While only a few students explicitly mentioned the CSWE, several referred to the core competencies required by the organization. For example, one student wrote that professionalism with regard to social workers meant “abiding by core competencies.” Another student explained that professionalism was “understanding and practicing the core competencies.”

### **Goal of Professional Preparation**

Like their peers in the college of education, most social work students described the primary purpose of their professional education in terms of acquiring skills and qualifications to be successful in a job: “. . . to learn skills necessary to perform job duties.” A few mentioned the goals as “learning to uphold the standards of the NASW.”

A few students were on their way to internalizing the social worker identity as exemplified in the words of a social work student: “When I started I had never heard of the code of ethics. Now I really identify as a social worker, who I am, what I value, and my beliefs really coincide with the social work profession.”

### **Summary of Findings from School of Social Work**

There was consistency between the mission statement of the school, the faculty responses, and the student responses. Both faculty and students mentioned the core competencies of the profession, which were also articulated on the school website and in the student field manual. More than half of the students wrote that professionalism meant attending to professional boundaries (a core competency). However, while every faculty member mentioned the NASW and it was included in every syllabus, only a third of the students referred to it. Similarly, all social work faculty, but only a third of the students, mentioned the importance of a nonjudgmental stance.

There were some other discrepancies between the way faculty and students described professionalism. While faculty only made a passing reference to appearance, more than half of the students identified professional demeanor in behavior, appearance, and communication as vital to professionalism. Despite faculty emphasis on social justice and social change, only two students mentioned these values when asked about professionalism. Instead, students focused on the immediate clinical aspects of their professional responsibilities, such as respectful interaction and being nonjudgmental.

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the notion of professionalism as understood by teacher educators, prospective teachers, social work faculty, and prospective social workers. This cross-site comparison generated some interesting patterns.

Various scholars have pointed out that, while professionalism can represent characteristics of the individuals who constitute the profession, by definition, it is a collective notion, representing a common set of norms and skills that are used by a community of practitioners (Evans, 2008; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Sockett, 1993). Individuals in the social work program seemed to share a collective professional identity. All social work faculty and a few social work students referred to the 10 CSWE core competencies (and additional students also identified the NASW code of ethics) as the standards for professional decision making. Not only did many consistently identify the formal documents that articulated their identity, but they referred easily to the principles contained therein, such as professional boundaries, sense of self, and individual dignity.

In contrast, there seemed to be no profession-wide or even college-wide set of values or techniques that guided the professional preparation of teachers. No students identified a frame of reference for their descriptions of professionalism. Most education faculty did not cite any professional document or identify any consistent frame of reference; the two that did so referred either to general, non-education sources or a college handbook that limited its description to observable behaviors such as punctuality and industriousness.

This absence of a consistent frame of reference may be partially explained by the fact that teacher preparation is split between two colleges: the college of liberal arts and sciences and the college of education. Even within the college of education itself, courses are offered by faculty in separate programs, each claiming expertise in a separate area (for example, reading, special education, or social foundations). Furthermore, there is no single professional association in education as there is in social work. Rather, professional organizations tend to be discipline-based for teacher education faculty and employment-based for teachers. Few references were made even to those organizations, however, and students demonstrated no connection to these wider professional communities. Thus, both faculty and student responses in the college of education indicated individualistic notions of professionalism rather than a collective sense of identity. As Lieberman and Miller (1991) pointed out, “It is perhaps the greatest irony—and the greatest tragedy of teaching—that so much is carried on in self-imposed and professionally-sanctioned isolation” (p. 101).

Hoyle (1975) used the term *extended professionalism* to describe the adoption of a rational, not just practical, approach to the job of teaching and the use of that knowledge to make more effective and appropriate decisions. Social work faculty demonstrated this vision by teaching about evidence-based practice, using case studies to connect theory and research with practice, and advising students about overcoming personal bias and assumptions in order to assist clients.

In contrast, rather than talking about decision making, teacher education faculty and students talked about fulfilling contractual obligations, familiarizing themselves with district and school guidelines, and observing others to learn how things are done. These practical skills were largely divorced from educational research. Although teacher educators talked about expertise and research-based practice, prospective teachers were not required to take even a single course in educational research. Others have commented on this tendency for educators to rank “personal experience and colleagues as a more powerful influence on their beliefs than either professional development or research” (Levin, 2010, p. 309).

Hoyle (1975) also pointed out another aspect of extended professionalism: the ability to recognize the importance of the social context in professional decision making. That is, teachers need to keep in mind that what happens in the classroom is affected by matters outside the classroom and the school. Although social responsibility and democratic education were important components of the conceptual framework of the college, unfortunately, field-based teacher educators, those who taught methods courses and student teachers, tended to ignore this broader context of schooling. Issues related to theory, social context, and social responsibility were generally perceived as being the domain of the foundations courses. Grossman, Hammerness, and McDonald (2009) have pointed out that this separation between methods courses and foundations courses is problematic because it causes a disconnect between theoretical knowledge and the practical work that teachers do in classrooms. Such a separation between the social context and the work of the classroom not only inhibits the development of an extended sense of professionalism in the students, it may also contribute to the lack of a collective sense of professionalism amongst the faculty.

In contrast, social workers emphasized the “systems theory” and the “person and environment perspective,” which attends to the micro, meso, and macro context of their profession. The top two values that were stressed in the social work program were service and social justice. Students were taught that they were responsible not only to their clients, but also to their colleagues and to the society at large. Social work students were told that they were expected to work for social change. Thus, while social work faculty valued the relationship between the social worker and the client, they also saw their roles and responsibilities in terms of broader social change and global social justice. These values, however, had not yet been fully internalized by students, as evidenced in their survey responses.

Professional socialization (Miller, 2013) refers to the process by which an individual constructs an identity through the acquisition of knowledge, values, attitudes, skills, behavioral norms, and ethical standards related to a professional role. In this college of education, faculty did not describe any systematic, college-wide effort to help students shift from prior reference groups and identify with the profession of teaching. Instead they seemed to assume that students would

develop a teacher identity through the observation of role models and with experience in the classroom. This might explain why, even at the end of the teacher preparation program, many faculty and almost all students identified superficial aspects of professionalism that seemed to be informed by years spent in what Lortie (1975) has called the apprenticeship of observation. In contrast, faculty in the social work program articulated keen awareness of the need to shift the naïve preconceptions of students into a fuller understanding of social work professionalism. They described this as a deliberate process of tuning the personal self into an effective professional self. Social work students were told that professionalism was the ability to uphold the integrity of the profession. They were expected to identify with the profession and bear responsibility for contributing to social work knowledge and practice through research and scholarly inquiry. While faculty and students shared a collective understanding of the notion of professionalism, some social work students' responses revealed a more superficial understanding of the concept.

### **Conclusion, Limitations, and Recommendations**

This interpretive case study sought an in-depth understanding of the concept of professionalism by examining the concept in two different professional schools at one institution. The findings of this study revealed that faculty and students in the education program expressed individualistic and restricted views of professionalism. They did not share a common frame of reference and described professionalism mostly in terms of classroom procedures. Social work faculty and some social work students, on the other hand, expressed a collective and extended view of the concept, describing professionalism in terms of core competencies of the profession. Referring to the social work code of ethics, they described clinical events in the context of social policies and the goals of social justice.

It is important to note that this was an exploratory case study, and the findings reported here are not intended to be representative of an entire profession. Since this was a case study, only a small number of faculty were interviewed and observed, and when there were multiple sections of a course, only one section was observed. Therefore, the observations may reflect the views of the individual instructor and not the entire program. Student responses were obtained through anonymous surveys, so there was no opportunity to ask clarifying questions. In addition, because the number of social work students is low compared to the number of the education students, it is possible that this skewed the results.

I took several measures to enhance the credibility of my data. My sampling strategy led me to relevant faculty members who had been identified by others within the organization as key to the professional preparation program. I conducted member checks to ensure that I was representing the perspectives of the participants. I spent a year in the field, until I felt that I had achieved data saturation. I utilized triangulation to ensure that different data sources corroborated one another. Therefore, although the findings reported here are tentative, and their validity may be ascertained by replicating the study at other institutions, the following recommendations nonetheless may guide teacher preparation programs to better address the issue of developing teacher professionalism.



First, if teacher educators in this program want to prepare teachers to be full professionals, they have the obligation to articulate the basic ethics, values, and competencies of the profession. They need to keep in mind that professionalism is not just the quality of individual practice. Instead, it is a mind-set that is shared by members of a profession. Therefore, they need to undertake some critical and possibly difficult conversations until they come to a collective understanding about the source and meaning of teacher professionalism.

Second, teacher preparation coursework should provide pre-service teachers with opportunities to reconcile their prior conceptions of teacher professionalism and their individual identities with the core values and identity of the profession as a whole. This might help prospective teachers see that they are being prepared not merely to “act like a teacher,” but rather to “be” a teacher. Teacher educators must deliberately and systematically address the development of teacher identity, not just the functional competence of teachers.

Third, while there is no denying the importance of preparing teachers to fulfill their contractual obligations, they also need to be prepared to be ethical decision makers. The ability to make ethical decisions is a complex process. It involves simultaneously attending to the knowledge base, the context of the situation, and the ethical values and principles of the profession. Students must be provided with opportunities to learn and practice these forms of reasoning and receive constructive feedback on this process, such as through the use of case study analysis. Teacher educators, like their social work counterparts, could develop a learning contract that includes ethics, values, and competencies of the teaching profession, along with an evaluation form that would measure the student’s grasp of these concepts. This foundation is necessary for building a solid professional identity.

Finally, given the daily attacks on public education, it is clear that professionalism needs to be taken beyond the private world of the classroom into the public sphere. If we truly want to empower teachers to be change agents, teacher educators need to pay attention to the socio-political context of schooling. We need to prepare teachers who have an understanding of the larger context of education and can take responsibility, not only for the students in their classrooms, but for the future of the profession itself.

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Appendix A

Faculty Interview Prompts

1. Please tell me about the courses you teach.
2. Would you please tell me what you understand by the term *professionalism* with respect to teachers/social workers?
3. What do you see as the primary purpose of the teacher/social worker preparation program?
4. What are the most significant strategies or approaches you use to develop professionalism in prospective teachers/social workers?

Appendix B

Student Survey

1. Using specific examples, please explain what you understand by the term *professionalism* with respect to teachers/social workers.
2. What do you see as the primary purpose of the professional education you are receiving?
3. Please describe the aspects of your program that have had the most significant impact on your preparation and development as a teacher/social worker. Please explain why they were significant to you.