

Teachers' perceptions about their own professionalism in the Lejweleputswa district, Free State province, South Africa

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Education reform in many parts of the world is premised on the view that teachers show lack of professionalism. The solution to this problem lies in increasing teacher professionalism. Education reform, therefore, affects how teachers view themselves as professionals, their work and their effectiveness, and how they compose their identities in schools. The study aims to investigate the perceptions of teachers with regard to the extent to which they practise professionalism in their schools. The data collected tended to refute the view expressed in the literature that teachers lack professionalism.

Onderwysers se persepsies oor hulle eie professionalisme in die Lejweleputswa-distrik, Vrystaat provinsie, Suid-Afrika

Onderwyservorming in baie dele van die wêreld is gebaseer op die siening dat onderwysers 'n gebrek aan professionalisme toon. Die oplossing van probleme in die onderwys lê in die opknapping van onderwyserprofessionalisme. Onderwyservorming raak hoe onderwysers hulself as professionele mense, hul werk en hul doeltreffendheid sien en hoe hulle hul identiteit in die skool saamstel. Die studie is gerig op navorsing van die onderwysers se persepsies ten opsigte van die omvang waartoe hulle professionalisme in skole beoefen. Die versamelde data neig om die siening van die literatuur dat onderwysers 'n gebrek aan professionalisme het, te weerlê.

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This article deals with teachers' perceptions about their own professionalism.¹ Murray (2006) asserts that professionalism can be constructed, lived and understood at the level of the individual professional and at the level of collective professionalism, and exemplified in the teachers' practices. Tichenor & Tichenor (2005) argue that it is possible for practising teachers to exhibit professionalism in the field of education. Hence the aim of this research was to determine teachers' perceptions with regard to the extent to which they practise professionalism in their schools.

Focus on teacher professionalism arises from the fact that the teacher is the catalyst for student achievement (Maldonado & Victoreen 2002, Tichenor & Tichenor 2005). According to Yeom & Ginsberg (2007), education reform in many parts of the world is premised on the view that teachers lack professionalism in their work and that teacher education does not adequately prepare teachers to become professionals. The solution to address the ills of education, such as the high failure rate of students in the national examinations, lies in increasing teacher professionalism among teachers and in teacher training institutions. Thus, education reform affects how teachers view themselves as professionals, their work and their effectiveness, and how they compose their identities in school (Smit & Fritz 2008). On another level, education reform means that teacher training institutions, which shape the initial teachers' identity, have to change their approach and the curricula must be in line with the reform agenda.

1. Background

Since the dawn of a democratic dispensation in 1994, the South African government has instituted educational reforms that aim at the provision of quality education for all learners regardless of their background or circumstances (Smith & Ngoma-Maema 2003). This reform was heralded by the enactment of laws that were aligned with the new democratic dispensation. A new Constitution (1996a) established a human rights culture that became pervasive in all aspects of life, including education. Its major aim was to eradicate

1 The authors acknowledge the inputs and contributions of Prof J L van der Walt of the North-West University in the preparation of this article.

inequalities of the past and to treat everybody as equal before the law. It also stipulated that the practice of a trade, occupation or profession may be regulated, thereby protected, by law. The Constitution gave educators a new way of viewing themselves as equal citizens who had a voice in the affairs of education.

The Constitution set the tone for the promulgation of other laws that had a bearing on education. The National Education Policy Act (1996b) and the South African Schools' Act (1996c) established a unitary system of education to replace the erstwhile racially and culturally divided discriminatory education system (Van Wyk 1998). This implied that Black, Coloured and Indian educators were afforded the opportunity to belong to a teachers' council – a privilege that had been reserved for Whites who enjoyed the highest participation in educational matters while it was denied the majority of the population (DoE 1995a). Most teachers were used to practising their teaching under the apartheid regime and its discriminatory laws. The publication of the South African Council for Educators (SACE) Act (2000) meant that all educators were registered under one professional council. Ideally, this provided an opportunity for the development of a unified understanding of professionalism and the development of a professional identity that included all educators in South Africa. In terms of section 5(b) of the SACE Act (2000), the Council has to promote, develop and maintain the professional image of the teaching profession.

Another influence on teacher professionalism was the rise of teacher unionism. Resistance to the apartheid regime saw the formation of militant, politicised teacher unions such as the Teachers Action Committee, the National Education Union of South Africa and the Democratic Teachers' Union (Douglas 2005). Unionism differs from professionalism in that it creates the impression that teachers are workers not professionals. Nonetheless, unionism influences teachers to take on policy initiatives by the government and thus influence the effects of government intervention on teacher professionalism. In the post-1994 era, three dominant unions, based on opposing ideals, emerged:

- The National Professional Teachers Organisation (NAPTOSA), which entertained the principle of professionalism without involvement in politics;
- Suid-Afrikaanse Onderwysersunie (SAOU), which also supported the principle of professionalism without involvement in politics, and
- The South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), which saw itself as separate from the state and potentially opposed the state.

Douglas (2005) notes more collaboration rather than confrontation between these unions, resulting in a trend to professional unionism.

The introduction of a new curriculum, Outcomes-based Education (OBE) impacted directly on the educators' work of teaching. It challenged educators to engage learners in meaningful learning activities suitable for a diverse learner population, and implement and assess learners according to outcomes (Du Plessis *et al* 2007). The curriculum meant that teaching was no longer business as usual. It changed the teaching approach from being teacher-centred to being learner-centred, changed learning from rote learning to problem-based learning, and changed the teacher from being a source of information to a teacher as facilitator (Malan 2000). Learning content is decided by the educator after specifying the desired outcomes. The focus is not on content to be acquired but on outcomes to be achieved (Berlach 2004). This changes the educator from a curriculum implementer to a curriculum designer. The changed curriculum casts educators in a new light and forces them to re-examine their professional identity in congruence with their new teaching environment. Yet teachers do not feel comfortable in delivering the new curriculum.

Another example of the effects of state intervention in education, which had negative effects on teacher identity, was the redeployment process instituted in order to achieve equity in the distribution of teachers throughout South Africa. Driven by the need to keep education spending down and to rationalise the civil service, and, at the same time, achieve equity, redeployment was implemented. Redeployment meant that teachers from schools with low pupil-teacher ratios could be moved to schools with high pupil-teacher ratios (Chisholm *et al* 1999), with proper consultation between the

principal and the teacher. However, the process was not implemented correctly and there was a misunderstanding among teachers about the process. Teachers and principals did not receive adequate training in implementing this process. Therefore, it caused untold harm to teachers. In the Limpopo province and the Western Cape, for example, teachers who were declared in excess and were to be redeployed, revealed strong antipathy, loss of morale, resistance, stress, uneasiness, uncertainty and loss of confidence (Chisholm *et al* 1999, Ledwaba 2006). According to Douglas (2005), redeployment severely reduced teacher autonomy. As a result of redeployment many well-qualified and experienced teachers, who could have served as role models to beginner teachers, took voluntary severance packages and left teaching.

2. Problem statement and aim

There appears to be a need for teachers to understand the importance of professionalism and to work towards cultivating a professional orientation in schools. Teachers cannot expect to achieve professional recognition or status until they themselves take an active interest in their professionalism. It is important to understand what it is to be a professional teacher because teachers daily interact with learners from an early age to adulthood. In fact, South Africa, as a developing country, depends on teachers to produce well-educated citizens who can contribute towards making the country economically viable. By being professional, teachers will produce a citizenry that is capable of holding its own in the economic global village, and will ensure that the country achieves its aim of enhancing the academic performance of learners. With all the policy changes that have occurred in South Africa since 1994, it will be interesting to note how the teachers perceive their work and what impact these changes have had on their professionalism. The question arises: Did these reforms encourage or deter teachers from practising professionalism in their schools?

This research aims to determine the perceptions of teachers with regard to the extent to which they practise professionalism in their schools.

3. Conceptual-theoretical framework

The literature shows that the concept ‘professionalism’ (and its associated concepts such as professionalisation, proletarianisation, de-skilling) is problematic and contestable (Helsby 1995) mainly because of the perspective from which the researcher views the term. These terms may be explained from three perspectives: the functionalist or trait theory in which researchers view professionalism as a static concept, and conflict theory and symbolic interactionism both of which entertain the view that professionalism is a dynamic concept that is constantly changing.

3.1 Professionalisation and the structural-functionalist theory

From the trait theorists’ point of view, professionalism is regarded as a fixed construct which may be defined according to the objective characteristics that differentiate professions from non-professions (Yeom & Ginsburg 2007). According to this view, the aim is to establish the features that an occupation should have in order to be termed a profession. These features or characteristics include specialised knowledge, continuous research, professional authority, access control, professional autonomy, and a code of conduct.² According to Day (2002), professionalism means having a strong technical culture (knowledge base), service ethic (commitment to serving clients’ needs); professional commitment (strong individual and collective identities), and professional autonomy (control over classroom practice).

The structural-functionalist theory presents the view that the characteristics of profession may be linked theoretically. According to this theory, the monopoly that professionals have over a body of theoretical knowledge is the basic characteristic of professionalism (Runté 1995). The trait of specialised knowledge holds the key in linking all other traits into a coherent whole. For instance, the trait of a long period of study, professional development and research, professional authority and autonomy, is related to gaining monopoly

2 CfWeiner & Kallós 2000, Donnelly 2001, Yeom & Ginsburg 2007, Lai & Lo 2007, Helderbran 2008.

over a body of theoretical knowledge. It is this specialised knowledge that keeps the profession free from charlatans and protects the public from unscrupulous practitioners. According to the structural-functional theory, every occupation can become a profession by increasingly fulfilling the traits of a profession. This results in every occupation trying to improve itself in order to satisfy the characteristics of established professions such as medicine, law and theology – a process called “professionalisation”.

In teaching it soon became apparent that the profession will never satisfy these characteristics. According to Helterbran (2008), qualities of professionalism are typically denied to most teachers, notably autonomy in decision-making and curriculum development. In activities such as sports, professionals are distinguished by the level of skill that sets them apart from amateurs. A popular notion that anyone who has undergone formal education can teach (Runté 1995, Hays 2001), which is supported by the South African Schools Act, has exacerbated the situation. Glazer (2008) maintains that the lack of jurisdictional control – for instance, clear-cut knowledge and standard technology that cannot be performed by an untrained person – is the major obstacle to teacher professionalism. Although teachers may regard themselves as professionals, they are not accorded the same respect, rewards and recognition given to other professionals (Tichenor & Tichenor 2005). Talbert & McLaughlin (1994) resultantly assert that teaching is portrayed as relatively weak on each criterion for professional status.

Another way of viewing professionalism is to search for personal characteristics expected of a professional. Helterbran's research (2008) shows that teachers consider professionalism to include characteristics such as doing my job, loving to be with and around children, dressing well, doing my own lesson plans and having a college degree. Tichenor & Tichenor (2005) view “being professional” in terms of appearance, punctuality, using proper language, building strong relationships, commitment to change, continuous improvement, subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and working relationships beyond the classroom. Murray (2006: page no?) defines professionalism “as sets of professional knowledge, attitudes and values which determine and articulate the character of teachers' practices”. However,

these characteristics do not help in setting teaching apart from other professions.

In considering reform in South Africa, one observes attempts at re-professionalisation of teaching. The trend of re-professionalisation is evidenced by Outcomes-Based Education, which places teachers in the position of curriculum controllers whereby the choice of content to achieve the desired outcomes is left in the hands of the teacher (Malan 2000). Berlack (2004) contends that teachers want and need to feel that they are fulfilling their societal mandate of transmitting knowledge, attitudes and values which they perceive to be valuable and worthwhile. Another evidence of re-professionalisation is the introduction of a professional body, the South African Council of Educators (2000), in an attempt to satisfy the characteristic that a profession is controlled by professionals and not by lay people.

3.2 Proletarianisation and the conflict theory

Conflict theory negates the functional-structural theory in that it claims that there is no single trait or characteristic that can link all occupations (Yeom & Ginsberg 2007). Professionalisation is regarded as a historically specific process which some occupations have undergone at a particular time rather than a process which all occupations are expected to undergo. Professionalism is an ideology whereby members of an occupation promote their own interests (Popa & Acedo 2005). Deprofessionalisation occurs as a result of conflicts between members of the profession, opposing forces within the profession, between the profession and the state, and between the profession and the economy. For example, in Canada, England and the US, teachers were regarded as professionals during times of economic expansion where they were viewed as key players in deflecting the impact of radical movements (Yeom & Ginsburg 2007). In South Africa, deprofessionalisation occurred in times of austerity where underqualified and unqualified teachers were employed because they are cheaper to employ (Douglas 2005).

Conflict theory presupposes a struggle for dominance among competing social groups whereby the dominant groups, through power, authority and coercion, deny subordinate groups success and opportunities. In South Africa, prior to 1994, Black teachers and

minority groups were dominated by the White group, and education was dominated by the Christian National Education philosophy as against the more traditional approaches. In this vein, professionalism represented a struggle between teachers who view themselves as separate and autonomous from the state and those who serve the interests of the state without becoming embroiled in political issues (Douglas 2005). Hargreaves (2000) argues that the post-professional stage in teacher professionalism is characterised by a conflict between forces and groups intent on de-professionalising teaching and other forces seeking to re-define teaching in more positive, flexible, wide-ranging and inclusive ways.

According to Popa & Acedo (2005), professionalism in education shows a conflict between the state and the teaching profession. State intervention in education is a feature found in most countries. In England, the Labour and Conservative parties pursued innovations which included the introduction of performance management and performance-related pay, high stakes government-set tests and high stakes inspection regime (Hall & Schultz 2003). Although government intervention in education was not so pronounced in Canada, in 1994, the province of Manitoba (as other provinces in Canada) introduced accountability, and issued schools with specific curriculum frameworks and teacher manuals (Hall & Schultz 2003). In 1990, the Romanian post-communist government introduced a comprehensive education reform which intensified teachers' work, changed the curriculum, teacher education and examinations. The changes were rapid at a time of social and economic instability, leading to confusion among teachers (Popa & Acedo 2005). Similar interventions are apparent in Korea and the US (Day & Smethem 2009, Yeom & Ginsburg 2007).

As a result of state intervention, teachers experience decreased authority, autonomy and status (Helsby 1995) – a process called deprofessionalisation or proletarianism. Proletarianism, according to Helsby (1995: page nos?), “involves increased managerial control, an erosion of worker autonomy and consequent reduction in authority status and reward”. Day (2002) regards this trend as “post-professionalism”, in which teachers have to contend with centralised curricula, testing regimes and external surveillance, and the economic imperatives of marketisation. According to Lai & Lo (2007), centralised

control is driven by market mechanisms with a strong emphasis on measurable outputs of teachers' work, thus reducing teachers to being mere technicians. In South Africa, the passing of the Education Laws Amendment Act (2002) meant centralised control of teaching by the state, thus eroding teacher autonomy and adversely affecting their sense of belonging to a profession of status. Increased state prescription and control of teachers in the post-apartheid era made teachers civil servants rather than autonomous professionals (Douglas 2005). Sebakwane (1997) confirms that proletarianism decreases the teacher's capacity to initiate and execute work and views the advent of scientific management as the cause of the de-skilling of teachers.

Teachers interpret education reform in different ways due to their special circumstances. Lai & Lo (2007) compared the impact of educational reform on Hong Kong and Shanghai teachers. They found that Hong Kong teachers were frustrated by the intensification of their work and adopted only those policies that had a direct influence on and were beneficial to their students while Shanghai teachers tended to adopt government policy without interpretation. Barty (2004) mentions that research in the UK shows that teachers form their identities based on what is termed principled pragmatism rather than on educational theory and ideology. Ginsburg *et al* (1988) indicate that teachers in India do not have a well-developed sense of professionalism. The power and autonomy, so strongly expressed among teachers in England, seemed to be missing among the interpretations of professionalism among Indian teachers. Sachs (1999) argues that two distinct discourses inform teacher professionalism in Australia: democratic professionalism and managerial professionalism. On the one hand, devolution and decentralisation of power has led to managerial professionalism in which the teacher views him-/herself in terms of compliance to standardised criteria set outside the school. On the other hand, a teachers' corps has developed democratic professionalism that involves students, parents and others in decision-making and views teachers as responsible and accountable for that which is under their control.

3.3 Teacher identity and the symbolic-interactionist theory

The concept of teacher identity is often used interchangeably with professionalism. Teacher identity refers to teachers' perceptions about "who they are" and "who they want to become" (Smit & Fritz 2008). It concerns the view of the teacher about what teaching is and what behaviours are expected of a teacher. Lopes & Tormenta (2010) differentiate between individual and collective identity. Individual identity is a combination of the ideal of oneself in the social role (such as teaching) as a function of the possibilities available in the culture. Collective identity refers to representations of the profession shared by groups. Teacher identity is formed even before a prospective teacher enters a pre-service college as part of the teacher's desires and personal conditions in the choice of the profession. This basic identity changes when the teacher enters service and meets real work conditions, for teacher identity is shaped by social interactions with colleagues, especially those with whom the teacher shares the same teaching subject. Educational reforms affect the teacher's identity in that "the ways and extent to which reforms are received, adopted, adapted and sustained or not sustained will be influenced by the extent to which they challenge existing identities" (Day 2002: 683).

Smit & Fritz (2008) explain the concept of teacher identity from the symbolic interactionist perspective. According to them, "meaning is central to human behavior in the sense that humans act towards people and things based on the meaning that they have attributed to those people and things" (Smit & Fritz 2008: 92). Through interaction, people act with one another in terms of symbols that they have created and are common in their milieu. To understand the meaning of what it is to be a teacher, a beginner teacher interacts with administrators and students in the course of fulfilling his/her role and in the performance of his/her tasks. The teacher puts him-/herself in the shoes of a significant other to see the world through the eyes of the significant other. His/her individual identity is merged with the collective identity of the group in the school, leading to continual change in his/her identity. If there is mismatch between the individual identity of the teacher and the collective identities of

significant others in the school, the teacher reduces it by transforming him-/herself or by changing contexts (Lopez & Tormenta 2010).

4. Synthesis

Among the theories underpinning the study of professionalism as discussed above, the trait theory seems suitable to investigate professionalism among teachers. This study is based on the notion that professionalism is defined in terms of characteristics that include actions taken by the teacher (Helterbran 2008). In support of this, Tichenor & Tichenor (2005) speak of “being professional” and “behaving professionally”, thereby indicating that professionalism may be defined according to actions such as punctuality, appearance and using proper language, and so on. The characteristics identified in the trait theory can be operationalised into actions and underlying skills, knowledge, beliefs and attitudes displayed by the teacher in the course of teaching and interacting with learners, other teachers, parents and the school management team. The characteristics identified by the trait theory include specialised knowledge, professional development and research, professional authority and autonomy, control of access, and adherence to a code of ethics. In a recent study, Douglas (2005), citing Villegas-Reimers (2003), used almost the same categories, namely knowledge base, social function, practitioner autonomy, collective autonomy, professional values, and job satisfaction and morale.

Despite its weaknesses, and the apparent failure of teaching to display fully the required characteristic traits of a profession, the trait theory remains a useful tool for understanding and describing teacher professionalism (Webb *et al* 2004: 86). The question that begs an answer is: To what extent do teachers display the characteristic traits of a full-fledged profession in their practice and to what extent do teachers behave professionally?

5. Empirical design and methodology

The empirical investigation was conducted using a questionnaire derived from the framework provided by the trait theory. The authors aimed at determining the perceptions of teachers about the

extent to which they practise professionalism in their schools. The questionnaire included 16 question items derived from the literature study on professionalism.

Participants were required to indicate their perceptions on a Likert-type scale, namely the extent to which they practise professionalism on a scale of 1 to 4. The scale indicated the following extent of professional practice: 1 = no extent; 2 = less extent; 3 = some extent, and 4 = great extent.

To ensure reliability and validity of the questionnaire it was submitted to empirical research experts in education management and the Statistical Consultation Service of a recognised South African university for evaluation, and was subsequently approved. In addition, a pilot study of the questionnaire was conducted. Due to the fact that some categories contained less than five question items, the Cronbach *alpha* coefficient test yielded no results on the reliability of the questionnaire.

As a result of a number of factors, including distances between the schools in the region of investigation, time constraints and costs, convenience sampling was used. The reason for the use of convenience sampling was that the investigation occurred at the time when schools were busy with examinations and teachers were not readily available for the use of other sampling techniques. A target of 239 teachers was set but data was eventually collected from 171 teachers in the Lejweleputswa Education District in the Free State province of South Africa. The response rate was 71.5% which, according to Ary *et al* (1990: 453) and Anderson (1990: 167), is adequate to draw valid and reliable conclusions.

The data revealed that the population under investigation consisted of teachers whose age ranged from 30 to 40 (82.4%). Most had teaching qualifications of Primary Teachers' Diploma (38.0%) and Secondary Teachers' Diploma (20.5%). Academically, the majority of the investigated teachers had STD 10/Grade 12 (61.4%) and Degrees (32.8%) qualifications. Most were drawn from primary schools (52.6%) with an equally high number from secondary schools (47.4%) and had teaching experience ranging from 11 to 30 years (77.0%). These characteristics are significant for this study as they show a population that has been subjected to education reforms

since 1994 and that their perceptions of professionalism and teacher identity have undergone changes. What remained was to establish the identities they formed as a result of these reforms.

The questionnaire survey method was used to collect data. The researcher delivered and collected questionnaires personally to and from the participating schools to ensure a high response rate. The researcher made an appointment with the selected school and requested participants to gather in a room to complete the questionnaire. This enabled the researcher to explain the purpose of the research, to guide participants in completing the questionnaires, and to respond to problems that participants encountered in responding to the questionnaire.

6. Findings of the research

The responses of teachers were divided into three categories according to mean score rankings. There were nine (9) question items that rank high (more than 3.00) (*cf* Table 1); five (5) question items rank medium (above 2.50) (*cf* Table 2), while only two (2) items fall below 2.50 (*cf* Table 3).

In the ensuing presentation of the results, each of the above tables is discussed separately.

6.1 High-ranking mean scores

Table 1: High-ranking mean scores

Item no	Teachers ...	Mean score	Ranking
B6	attend workshops organised by the school and by the Department.	3.71	1
B11	are members of the professional council for teachers.	3.44	2
B4	improve their qualifications in order to improve their teaching skills.	3.42	3
B1	have sufficient knowledge of the subject they teach.	3.35	4
B3	have undergone a long and intensive period of teacher training at tertiary institutions.	3.30	5

Item no	Teachers ...	Mean score	Ranking
B2	possess didactical skills to teach the subjects they teach.	3.17	6
B12	know and understand the contents of the code of conduct for teachers.	3.10	7
B7	make decisions on what to teach and how to teach it.	3.05	8
B14	are directed in their behaviour by their commitment to the teaching profession.	3.02	9

The highest ranking question item was B6 with a mean score of 3.71. This question item relates to the criterion of continuous professional development. A mean score of 3.71 is almost 4 on the Likert scale; this may suggest that respondents are of the opinion that teachers practise professionalism to a great extent in schools. It will be noted that most question items, ranked between 3 and 6 and 8, all relate to the knowledge base of teachers. This implies that teachers view themselves as having a sound knowledge base and adequate didactic skills that enable them to teach effectively.

Items B12 and B14, ranked 7 and 9, respectively, relate to knowing and understanding the ethical code of conduct. The reason for the high ranking of these items arises from the fact that there is a written code of conduct that was distributed to teachers. Among the highest ranked items relating to professional authority only one item is listed (B11, ranked 2). Item B11 is ranked so high because the majority of the teachers have been registered with SACE. Item B7 (ranked 8) is related to professional autonomy.

6.2 Medium-ranking mean scores

Table 2: Medium-ranking mean scores

Item no	Teachers ...	Mean score	Ranking
B16	regard teaching as a calling.	2.97	10
B13	adhere to the code of conduct for teachers.	2.94	11
B15	serve their community regardless of monetary reward.	2.87	12

Item no	Teachers ...	Mean score	Ranking
B9	went through a strict selection process before they were appointed.	2.86	13
B5	improve their teaching skills through action research at their schools.	2.79	14

The medium-ranked items have mean scores of between 2.97 and 2.79, which is above the cut-off point of 2.50. It will be noted that two items (B16, ranked 10) and (B15, ranked 12) are related to the criterion of unique service and a calling. Thus, respondents do not regard their profession as a calling in which they deliver a unique service. Question item B9 (ranked 13) relates to the criterion control of access and its medium ranking shows that the selection process is not as strict as it should be. Question item B5 (ranked 14) relates to professional development. The medium ranking of this item, while its counterpart (B6) is ranked number 1, shows a discrepancy in the practice of professional development.

Item B13 (ranked 11) relates to the criterion of adherence to the ethical code of conduct. It is surprising that B13 should be ranked medium. The possible reason is that the great number of misconduct cases referred to SACE show that adherence to the code of conduct leaves much to be desired.

6.3 Low-ranking mean scores

Table 3: Low-ranking mean scores

Item no	Teachers ...	Mean score	Ranking
B10	that are qualified (REQV 13) are allowed to teach.	2.34	15
B8	recommend the appointment and promotion of other teachers.	2.14	16

This category consists of only two items B10 (ranked 15) and B8 (ranked 16). It is interesting to note that both items refer to the criterion of access control.

The low-ranking of question items B10 and B8 suggests that the respondents believe that professionalism concerning the criterion

of control of access was practised to a less extent in schools. This low ranking is consistent with the medium ranking of B9 (selection process). As indicated earlier, the South African education system is still populated by un- and/or underqualified teachers. One of the possible explanations for the ranking of B8 is that teachers are minority members in the SGBs, thus their voice is not heard in the short-listing and interviewing panels.

7. Discussion

The above results show that the majority of respondents were of the opinion that they practise professionalism in schools. One of the key traits of a professional person is the possession of a sound knowledge base and didactical skills. Considering the high-ranking mean scores of items related to a sound knowledge base and didactical skills, teachers in this sample considered themselves to have sufficient knowledge and possess the necessary didactical skills in the subjects they taught. This finding is surprising in view of the fact that research findings (Douglas 2005, Wits Education Policy Unit 2005) label teachers in South Africa as having inadequate subject-content knowledge and suspect pedagogical knowledge. In addition, it appears that the existence of un- and underqualified teachers in the South African system of education (Dikgomo 2002) did not have any impact on the views of teachers about their knowledge base and didactical skills. According to the study by Douglas (2005: page nos?), many teachers felt "inadequately prepared for classroom management, teaching methods or for changes in their subject or learning areas". The study shows that teachers' qualifications were matriculation and primary education teachers' diploma, with only 32% having degrees. These qualifications are low and one wonders why respondents regarded their knowledge base and didactical skills as adequate. However, perceptions of adequacy of knowledge and didactical skills augur well for the motivation and confidence of teachers and this may positively influence learners' achievement.

Equally important for the development of teacher professionalism is the length of training and efforts to improve qualifications. The post-1994 era in South Africa has seen a push by the government for teachers to upgrade their qualifications to comply with the minimum

requirements of a 3-year diploma awarded by a college of education or university (the so-called REQV 13) by offering bursaries to teachers to improve their qualifications. In some provinces, teachers with fewer qualifications were transferred to the Public Service as administrative clerks in accordance with proclamation 103 of the Public Service Act of 1994. This might have resulted in the elimination of un- and underqualified teachers from the education system, fostering the perception that teachers have improved their qualifications. Douglas (2005) maintains that between 1999 and 2002 un- and underqualified teachers reduced from 25% to 16%. The significance of improved teacher qualifications is that it provides a boost for teacher professionalism in that it fosters feelings of adequacy in meeting learners' needs.

An interesting result is the high mean score for professional development. The prominence given to mandated professional development by the Department of Education in the form of workshops relating to the implementation of the new curriculum seems to have influenced participants to opt for a higher scoring of this item. It appears that these workshops were more meaningful and useful to teachers because of having directly addressed classroom activities and enhancing the skills that enabled teachers to teach more effectively. This finding supports the widely held view that professional development, which directly relates to the teachers' core activities, is more likely to be effective than those activities that have no direct bearing on classroom activities (Mashile & Vakalisa 1999). Douglas (2005) found that in-service training was inadequate in providing teachers with up-to-date knowledge, neglected teachers' needs and was insubstantial. Mokgalane (2001) also mentions that professional development projects that were identified covered only certain areas and not the entire country. It is hoped that the National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development (2007) will help in improving the situation of professional development among teachers.

The findings of this research indicate the commitment of the participants to a strong service ethic. Participants indicated that they regard teaching as a calling, that their behaviour is directed by commitment to teaching and that they would serve the community regardless of perceived low financial benefits. A word of caution is

essential in this instance because items relating to this aspect had relatively low mean scores. This finding is consistent with the findings of Day *et al* (2005) who point out that policy changes have led to new “performativity identities” (Day *et al* 2005: 566) that challenge traditional notions of professionalism. This “performativity” notion is apparent in South Africa by the introduction of Developmental Appraisal and Whole School Evaluation, which assessed the work of teachers. Teachers regarded Developmental Appraisal (DAS) as stressful, requiring a great deal of paperwork under unfavourable conditions of overcrowded classrooms, inadequate learning support materials, and unsafe working environments. Whole School Evaluation, especially, was regarded as intimidating and judgemental and not contributing to school improvement, thus having a negative effect on teacher morale (Douglas 2005). The responses, therefore, seem to support a shift from regarding teaching as a calling to the view of teachers as workers. This idea is fostered by unionism in which teachers are regarded as ordinary workers and not as professionals. Thus, respondents did not view their profession as a calling in which they deliver a unique service.

The opinions of teachers show that they knew and understood the contents of the ethical code of conduct but indicate a low adherence to it. This finding is to be expected because there is always a discrepancy between knowing and doing what is right. The statistics of the South African Council for Educators, a professional body instituted through Act 31 of 2000, show that the highest number of cases of misconduct were experienced in 2002 while sexual misconduct and assault were the highest in 2005 (SACE 2005). This resulted in a number of teachers being struck off the roll of practitioners. Little wonder then that the opinions of participants drifted towards low mean scores in this aspect. Non-adherence to the ethical code of conduct impacts negatively on the professional identity of teachers. Media reports about teacher misconduct damage the teachers' standing and prompt the public to demand stricter measures to improve professional values (Douglas 2005).

Professional authority and autonomy are rated indications of the degree of professionalism in a profession. The autonomy of a profession is indicated by a regulating body consisting of members of that particular profession. This is what Douglas (2005) refers to as

“collective autonomy”. Findings in this research show that teachers were registered with a professional body as this item had a high mean score. While it may be argued that being registered with a professional council does not necessarily give members authority over their affairs, it holds promise that teachers, at least, are given the opportunity to influence decisions with regard to matters pertaining to their profession. Douglas (2005) argues that collective autonomy of teachers is hampered by the central government agenda and its policies which are politically driven and constructed by outside experts. In addition, teachers are of the opinion that they exercise discretion in what, when and how they teach, as evidenced by the high-ranking mean score of this item. Glazer (2008) presents a view about improving teachers’ professionalism and argues that the greatest threat to teaching as a profession is the lack of jurisdictional control.

Participants in this study were of the opinion that access control to the profession is still lacking in the profession. As a result of the unique situation in South Africa about the disparity of qualifications among teachers, a resolution was taken in the Education Labour Relations Council to register all teachers regardless of their qualifications. While other professional councils require their members to re-register periodically, either annually or every five years, this is not applicable to teachers. It may be concluded that access control is still at its lowest peak in schools; this hampers teacher professionalism.

Although the literature tends to show that teachers lack professionalism in terms of preparation and practice, the findings indicate that teachers did not view themselves as lacking in professionalism. This finding is consistent with Helsby’s (1995) findings whereby teachers felt that they measure well to “being professional” in terms of the length of their training and the acquisition of knowledge and skills. The findings may be indicative of the shortcomings of the self-report measures used in this research. As noted in several reviews of research, self-ratings contain an “error of misplaced precision” (Wortley 1997: 37).

8. Conclusion

The value of this research lies therein that changes must be implemented to ensure that teachers get the professional esteem they

deserve, because education is an extremely valuable service to our society (Hays 2001). Professionalism remains in the hands of the teachers who should increasingly hone their practice in order to meet or exceed the demands and expectations of society. For instance, instead of worrying and complaining about policy overload with regard to curriculum changes, teachers will do well to see to it that their dedication and commitment, and their work ethic, overcome these challenges. In the light of the findings in this research, the Education Department should intensify efforts to hold workshops for teachers as this will increase the teachers' jurisdictional control. Glazer (2008) suggests that teacher professionalism can be improved by concentrating on the variable of practice because most professions control practice.

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