



01 An Overview of and Some Reflections on the Current Situation of Teacher Professionalisation in Macao

1. Introduction

I have already started to think about the social status of teachers since I became a teacher. If someone asks if teachers are professionals, it will be hard to answer as it depends on how one defines “profession”. According to the *Revised Mandarin Chinese Dictionary of Taiwan Ministry of Education*, “profession” refers to studies in a certain field or a specific occupation. If this is the case, it seems that all walks of life can be professionals. However, how do we distinguish the profession and professional status of doctors, lawyers, teachers, social workers, postmen and janitors?

2. Teacher professionalisation should be the focal point

With regard to the definition of “profession” in the past, western structural functionalists and sociologists led by T. Parsons (1902-1979) held the view that the professionalism of an occupation could be the factor to determine whether that occupation was a profession. They defined different professions by studying their professional characteristics, thus to explore whether a certain profession required its practitioners to have in-depth knowledge, high capability, professional ethics and the spirit of serving the community. However, this research direction still cannot answer the question of “Is this a profession?”, as the researchers themselves cannot thoroughly study and understand the professional characteristics of all occupations.



H. Becker (1962) pointed out that one would surely fail if he/she intended to assign a scientific or absolutely objective definition to the word “profession”, as “profession” was neither a neutral and scientific concept, nor a static and clear one, nor even had a generally agreed definition. On the contrary, it was just a notion existing in the community.

Shae Wan-chaw, Leung Chi-yuen, Tse Pak-chai and Fred Y. L. Chiu (2004) thought that professional sociology, since entering into the sixties, has raised a wrong question. Instead of asking whether a certain occupation is a profession, we should focus on under what circumstances practitioners of a particular occupation will fight for their professional status in order to become professionals.

To answer this question, we should first orientate ourselves towards these questions: what is the situation of the teachers in a specific region? From the perspective of the teachers in that specific region or that society, is it necessary to professionalise the teachers? Hence, this article is not going to discuss “the nature of profession”; instead, it focuses on the current situation of teacher professionalisation in Macao and provide some reflections on it.

The *Revised Mandarin Chinese Dictionary of Taiwan Ministry of Education* explains that “professionalisation” is “the trend and process of occupational groups becoming characterised by professionalism”. Based on the key issues

that need to be paid attention to during the process of teacher professionalisation as suggested by Ballantine and Spade (2008), we will discuss below the direction of teacher professionalisation in the current situation of Macao.

3. The professional qualification that professional teachers should possess

Any type of professionals should meet the professional qualification requirements of that occupation so as to ensure the professionalism of the practitioners and to protect the interest of the public. With regard to the professional certification requirements for teachers of non-tertiary education in Macao, it is not necessary for the teachers to possess a bachelor’s degree in infant education, primary education or secondary education in order to teach the corresponding education level. As long as the teacher is recommended by the school to study the teacher training course for the related education level after he/she is hired, he/she can teach at the school.

In the past few decades, there were teachers with only a high school certificate or a college degree /bachelor’s degree in non-education field teaching different education levels. They only needed to complete a teacher training course in order to be qualified to teach. Of course, whether this was appropriate still

needs to be discussed. However, if we take a look at the professional requirements of doctors, we will find that no hospitals will hire a doctor without a license or will wait for the doctor to get the license after employment. It is because we clearly know that patients’ health cannot be protected during the time before the doctor obtains his/her license. When it comes to teacher professionalisation, only by enhancing the certification requirements for teachers can their professionalism and professional status be guaranteed, with the result that more talents can be attracted to join the teaching profession.

4. The professional development that professional teachers should pursue

In an era of information explosion, if teachers only play the role of passing on knowledge to students, Internet resources can easily replace teachers. However, the truth is that apart from passing on knowledge, teachers also shoulder the mission of helping students develop holistically as well as enlightening and guiding students. Therefore, it is not enough if teachers only meet the basic teaching requirements and possess knowledge. Only through lifelong learning and professional development can teachers’ professional knowledge keep pace with the rapidly changing society. Hence they can teach the most updated knowledge to students as well as help them develop their global vision.

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I am glad to see that the Macao SAR Government has invested a lot of resources in teacher training. It has also offered professional development subsidy for teachers to support their pursuit of personal professional development. As far as I know, the “System Framework for Private School Teaching Staff of Non-tertiary Education” (hereinafter referred to as “Private School Framework”) has reasonably defined the minimum yearly professional development hours required for teachers. However, it is not easy to transform this mode of pursuing further studies, which is just like dragonflies skimming the surface of the water, to a systematic lifelong learning mode. There is also concern that the “Private School Framework” should encourage teachers to pursue more systematic studies, for example, certificate programmes, Master’s and PhD programmes. After all, scientific research is very essential to teachers’ professional development; it has a direct impact on teaching quality. If teachers enhance their personal teaching quality through professional development, the “Private School Framework” should also attach recognition and importance to it accordingly.

5. The professional autonomy that professional teacher should have

Recently I have heard a news item about “home schooling”. Some parents in the neighbouring region were dissatisfied with the primary and secondary education their children received and thus they have decided to teach their children at home. Actually this is an issue of “Who has the right to teach?”. Parents think that they themselves or private tutors can teach, while principals think that a certain type of teachers can teach. Every person has his/her own point of view on “teaching students”. Certainly, we can work together to educate students. However, in order to protect students’ rights to learn and to be educated, we should take into consideration the professional autonomy of teachers and teacher organisations. “Profession” and “autonomy” are two sides of the same coin; they cannot be separated. Besides, autonomy must be based on profession and profession cannot be achieved without autonomy (Lin Tsai-Hsiu, 1987). Teachers are the only professionals who can educate students. If the dominant direction of teaching students is not based on “profession”, the following phenomena will appear: qualified teachers will be mismatched to education fields that they are not qualified for; the learning of students can only be attended to partially but not comprehensively; school administration will dominate the profession of teaching; infant education will become primary education-oriented and primary education will become secondary education-oriented. Teacher professionalisation is a long process. Only when teachers possess professional autonomy can they secure a position at the teaching level, school level and teacher professional committee level and can they have the rights to take part in the formulation of education policies. Only by this means can teachers educate students in a more comprehensive way and with a macro perspective.

6. The remuneration that professional teachers should deserve

Concerning the remuneration of teachers, many people have a misunderstanding that teachers should be altruistic and selflessly devoted to teaching. Besides, it is also believed that they shouldn’t be concerned about their salaries. However, “profession” and “remuneration” are closely linked to each other and this applies to every type of professional. For example, doctors and lawyers dedicate themselves to saving others and fighting for justice, yet they get the remuneration professions deserve. This is also one of the manifestations of teacher professionalisation. While exploring the salary and remuneration of teachers, Ballantine and Spade (2008) believe that there are three aspects that should be considered, which are “teachers’ common basic salary”, “teachers’ teaching experience” and “teachers’ capabilities”.

Here I would like to mention that the difference in the common basic salary between the same type of professionals should be minimised in order to avoid unequal pay for the same work. Teachers are professionals because they have



the same basic professional qualities and they pay the same level of effort to obtain their professional qualifications; thereby they deserve the same level of basic salary so as to be recognised. It can also avoid teachers comparing their salaries among themselves stabilise the teaching team, and ultimately ensure the learning effectiveness of students.

On the other hand, the “starting” and “ending” salary indices of teachers should also be formulated (Ballantine and Spade, 2008). Every person should have the motivation to achieve upward mobility and make progress, thus he/she can have ambition and make improvements in his/her work. The career in teaching and passion for teaching of teachers, of course, cannot be quantified, but it is really necessary to set up a salary scale for teachers to promote teacher professionalisation.

7. The status that professional teachers deserve

“Status” is an abstract notion. A prestigious occupation is always respected by the society and is always the envy of many people. The profession of teacher is also placed in the hierarchy of labour division of the society, and different occupations have their corresponding status in the society too. The professionalisation of the teaching team can promote its upward mobility. Teachers are the people on the frontline of education. Education also serves as a process of helping students move upward. Therefore, only when the professional status of the teaching team is improved can teachers be the role models for students, with the result that students can climb up the ladder through learning and receiving education at school.

8. Conclusion

The rapid development of Macao in the recent decade has brought challenges and pressure to every sector and industry, especially to the education sector. With the society setting higher requirements on education quality, teachers, as the frontline workers of education and promoters of education reform, through the process of professionalisation, enhance their professional qualifications, pursue continuous professional development, increase their professional autonomy and improve their salary and status, so as to respond to the needs of the society. Teacher professionalisation is beneficial to students, teachers, schools and the society as it will certainly attract more new blood to join the teaching team, so that the professionalism of teachers can be enhanced and service quality can be guaranteed. This can eventually provide a better education for citizens and enable the region to achieve greater development. Last but not least, the success of teacher professionalisation also depends on the degree of support from the society and the government. After all, no professional teachers can succeed without the trust of the policy-maker and the recognition of the society.

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