

Introduction

Teachers are considered to be professionals. However, it is not always clear what makes someone a professional. This short essay looks at the different aspects that characteristics of professionals. It then applies these characteristics to the teaching profession to determine to what extent teachers are professionals.

Characteristics of professionals

Looking at what makes some people professionals, three main groups of characteristics can be determined: people that are part of a group that is considered to be a profession, having passed some standard of education and having a certain degree of autonomy in one's work¹. These three characteristics will be compared to the work of teachers.

Being part of a group that is considered a profession

Teachers can be part of professional associations or specialized unions. These groups often have requirements for individuals to become members of this group. Although these requirements exist, they are often not very hard to fulfil as the main requirement is often to have a job as a teacher in some kind of educational institution. Sometimes, this is not even required as well as individuals who are still part of teacher training programmes are also admitted into these bodies.

Having passed some standard of education

In most countries teachers need to have some form of formal education before they are allowed to call themselves teachers. In the Netherlands (where I live) this education takes four years for primary and secondary education and consists of a combination of subject matter knowledge and pedagogy. This training is completed by a 6-months full time internship in which the teacher in training is more or less on his/her own with a group of students (there is supervision but it is limited). If you pass this educational programme you become licensed to be a teacher.

Having a certain degree of autonomy in one's work

Although the curriculum is often determined by policy makers, how this is delivered is often free for schools and teachers to determine. Teachers have a high degree of autonomy in their work even though they have to comply with more and more standardized testing. This characterises teachers as professionals.

¹Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Professional>

Conclusion

Given the evidence presented above, it is clear teachers are professionals. They are part of a group that is considered a profession through professional bodies and specialized unions, they often have passed some kind of formal training and are licensed to be teachers and have often a high degree of autonomy in the delivery of the curriculum. Therefore, teachers are definitely professionals. However this degree of professionalism is sometimes threatened by outside factors such as: a lower degree of teachers being part of professional bodies and unions, not necessary demanding specific educational backgrounds and policy focussing on how teachers should deliver the curriculum.