
I Dare You to Become a Teacher: How Society Has Created a Negative Image of the Teaching Profession

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Introduction

As a role of character in America, education has played one of power, significance, and relevance to the success of an individual. However, as audiences can applaud for its contributions of achievement, they fail to see how significant education is in their own life. As a curtain closes, the public only sees a glimpse of a "work of art," not the leader who made the night "one to remember," in this case, not the director, but the teacher. With this being said, our community has only been able to recognize and value education as an essential contributor to those who display a large amount of success, such as Bill Gates or Steve Jobs. However, this snapshot only captures the ending of their journey, not the beginning, where a teacher stood in front of each of these individuals to teach our great successors. Hence, society has lacked an understanding of the role a teacher plays *before* their inspiring stories are released, and, due to this misconception, the United States has evolved an image of teaching as a low status job.

A recognition of education as a right, not a privilege plays a dominant view to our working citizens in the United States. Yet, as a right, those who teach receive less credit and support from those who they have set out to help. How is it possible that with all the successes in this country, the profession that has molded each and every person has lacked an immense amount of respect, credibility, treatment, "worthy" compensation, and yet still continues to push forward? In this research, I will attempt to explain how society has created a negative image of the teaching profession and what this holds for the future of our country.

History of the Profession

Several researchers have analyzed significant changes in the history of the teaching profession and attributed these changes to the lack of positive view of teachers in the United States (Robards "Teaching"; Walhout). Researchers like Donald Walhout argue that the teaching profession was revered for a period of time. However, this analysis pertained solely to European countries and did not reflect American ideals. As our founders moved west in strong opposition to a rigid class structure, a teacher who once assumed respect and dependence from others due to his or her place on the aristocratic class lost value, meaning, and esteemed praise in the eyes of the public (Walhout 32-33).

As the new image of teachers began to develop in this country, many changes, setbacks, and solutions have been made—which at the time seemed reasonable and favorable—to strengthen the

profession. In the United States, a tremendous shortage of teachers caused requisites of entrance to the profession to lower in standard, and created an urgent need for alternative teaching licenses. Meanwhile, when our country experienced an oversupply of teachers, many states began to increase the standards by adding an enormous amount of legislative regulations. These regulations have caused a significant lack of autonomy in this profession (Robards "Teaching" 19). In the end, as reforms continuously took control over teachers, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA), enacted during the presidency of George W. Bush in 2002, has left many teachers against the notions of student achievement-based salary, "teaching to the test," narrowed curriculum, as well as, in essence, against their own profession.

Issues within Colleges of Education

Certain issues are occurring in teacher education programs, which as a result, continue to release teachers into the most difficult classrooms during their first year of teaching without the effective, qualitative, realistic preparation or mentality to teach alone in a classroom. For this reason, many researchers have proposed a required mentoring component to the profession as part of their field experience (Cavanaugh; Obama; Moir; Robards "Teaching"; Robards "Teacher") . As Ellen Moir states, "it is unrealistic to expect new teachers to enter teaching with all the skills and knowledge necessary to provide high-quality instruction" (62). She proposes the usage of comprehensive induction programs where new teachers and experienced teachers go through an intensive training for a two-year period which includes weekly meetings to examine each other's practice and continue to improve their individual training (62).

Adding to Moir's proposal, Sean Cavanaugh and Barack Obama agree that mentoring

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incoming teachers is not enough; working together during these first few years is the determining factor to a beginning teacher's success. As comprehensive induction programs are designed to meet the needs of incoming teachers (such as handling a full range of responsibilities, evaluation of their performance, and further guidance in their work), it is predicted that the average time taken to become an effective educator (3-7 years) can be significantly shortened, allowing students to benefit more from a well-qualified and prepared teacher (Cavanaugh 3; Obama 24).

In addition, according to a study by Patricia Danyluk, many incoming educators are entering the profession scoring the lowest in the areas of classroom management, assessment & evaluation, and differentiated learning strategies, while scoring highest when creating lesson plans (505). This has led to a conclusion that college programs are focusing too much time on teaching educators how to create a lesson plan, but not how to execute them. As a result, this study has revealed that incoming teachers ranked highest in areas of personal performance, such as "professionalism, communication, lesson planning, and selection of curriculum materials," but scored lowest when it came to meeting the needs of their students in the classroom (Danyluk 509). In a nutshell, teachers are entering college and going through their programs, "teaching as they perceive and not as they know the theories of instruction" (Robards "Teacher" 6).

Problems for Beginning teachers

As several statistics show that beginning teachers quit within the first five years of teaching (Cavanaugh; LeBar; Robards), researchers like Sean Cavanaugh have pinpointed some areas and

factors that cause such continuous high teacher attrition rates: “too heavy of a workload, lack of planning time, problematic student behavior, and lack of influence over school policy” (1). In addition, most teachers feel “seldom praised, often blamed, and find the working environment increasingly intolerable” (Lebar 51). More importantly, since all teachers feel the lack of autonomy in the classroom and complete domination of education by local and state school boards, they feel that the teaching profession has become an unfavorable job, not worthy of a meager salary, and find it reasonable to quit in pursue of another profession (Cavanaugh; Robards). As attrition rates continue to rise, students are not the only one who pay the cause by having a substitute teacher for the remainder of the year; their parents and other workers alike also help pay the very real costs, which have been predicted as a national estimate of \$2.2 billion a year to replace teachers who have dropped out of the profession (Cavanaugh 1).

So What Is Missing from All This?

As it is evident that the teaching profession has faced several issues in terms of history, preparation, and attrition rates, the question that is left unanswered serves as the focus of this research paper: Why has a country of men and women who have risked everything to live in a place where dreams are not limited, goals are not discouraged, and success is seen as “in reach,” failed to present the profession who has *guided* our citizens to success, as one of praise, worth, and recognition? As George S. Counts states, “the survival of every form of society rests upon education and...the survival of every complex society rests upon a system of organized education that is staffed by competent professionals” (qtd. in Robards “Teaching” 17). In other words, these “competent professionals” are teachers who we depend on but yet continue to be seen in a negative view by those whom they have served. My research is dedicated to presenting an explanation of this pessimistic image and creating an understanding of how this development will affect our country in the future.

Filling in the Gap

As I have analyzed this information, a number of findings have led me to propose a series of gaps, which I will attempt to use to create an understanding of how they each indicate definite relevance towards the development of an unfavorable appearance of American teachers. I will begin by presenting a gap, followed by its contribution towards establishing a negative image of the profession, and propose a solution to raise the level of respect and recognition of teachers.

Gap 1: *The United States has failed to notice that because of the lack of control teachers have in the classroom, many educators, generation after generation, are not prepared to determine their own curriculum, assessments, and evaluation methods.*

A. Relevance to my research: Because of this lack of autonomy, America has created a culture where teachers are not expected to have the ability to make tough decisions, assume sincere responsibility, or carry an inner desire to serve as the representation and vision of their student’s success; hence, the teaching profession no longer demands a body of *leaders*, but of *followers*. Due to this development, the profession continues to attract individuals who do not carry these qualities—since seen as unnecessary—and has devalued in terms of respect and prestige in the eyes of the public.

B. Solution: Because the erroneous belief that “leadership skills aren’t required” to teach has remained a stagnant public misconception, I recommend building a new profile for educators where their profession demands a higher level of authoritative and highly knowledgeable individuals. To start, I propose for each state department of education to redefine the purpose of local school boards (those who currently govern) so their contribution complements rather than control the work of teachers. I am cognizant that their position is needed and provides structure,

unity, organization, and standards for our education system, but as Robards expresses, “These controls from outside the profession [have dampened] the spirits of [educators]...causing less recognition and empowerment” (“Teaching” 19). As a body of people whose initial purpose is to *oversee* local school districts, I propose to implement more autonomy within the teaching profession, allowing the individual in the classroom to truly inspire and create brilliant minds. It does not matter how much local school boards and districts can change policies, curriculum, state standards, common core, teacher evaluation methods; they cannot change the students. They cannot change the way they learn, their struggles outside of their school, or their perspective on goals. It is up to the teacher to be well prepared, knowledgeable, and ready to identify these variables in the classroom. They are the professionals who change academic achievement, not those who govern.

However, because of such a long period of existence where teachers have not obtained the right of control in their classroom, our country has yet to create and prepare a generation of teachers with this new idealistic goal. Therefore, the public is not ready to trust, respect, and see teachers as a high-status profession because their traditional role for our youth is not yet comparable to those who have gained reverence, such as doctors or lawyers.

As Lebar mentions, “If a community wants competent teachers, then they must hire the competent in the first place” (51). Despite the validity of this statement, our country needs to first prepare for this transition by increasing the standards and objectives for teachers in colleges of education, and then start preparing a group of educators who will serve as leaders of their community to begin gaining credibility for their professional judgments. In addition, colleges will need to maintain these standards of excellence and become strategically and rigorously selective when choosing those who are fit or exceed this new criterion.

Gap 2: *Education programs continue to release teachers into the field without effective professional preparation, yet they do not realize that the issues beginning student teachers face are only heard after their students have graduated.*

A. Relevance to my research: When beginning student teachers enter the classroom, and then notice the problematic issues within the profession, they portray their own occupation in the negative light, out of spite, unexpected responsibilities, and unfamiliarity of issues that educators are currently facing.

B. Solution: The struggles that beginning teachers face need to be spoken about before declaring their major and during the development of their career, instead of just being painted a “pretty picture.” This will not only strengthen their skills of professionalism inside the classroom, but will also create a consistent generation of incoming teachers that are well-informed, wary, and cognizant of areas that demand a level of expertise. Many researchers have proposed implementing “comprehensive induction programs” where “mentors and beginning teachers collaboratively [work] by [setting]...goals linked to professional teaching standards and content standards” (Moir); however, I believe that although mentors are definitely effective and beneficial to a student teacher, these programs must begin to stray away from a “buddy system” relationship, and provide college students with a senior educator who can teach them *how* to excel in areas that incoming teachers are scoring low on: classroom management, pedagogy, and understanding of lesson design with evaluation systems (Danyluk 512).

Moreover, *beginning* teachers continue to graduate from colleges of education unaware of and uninformed about problems within their profession. As this generation develops, it's caused *present* teachers (formerly unaware) to not recognize the significance of their knowledge and possible inputs towards these issues. How should we stop this cycle? In addition to improving mentoring within the profession, teacher education programs should inform beginning teachers on the local, state, and national issues that the teaching profession is facing. These issues should include, but are not limited to, changes in job benefits, teacher evaluation systems, technology-

incorporated learning, laws currently up for debate, implementation of new standards such as the Common Core, and effects of budget cuts on school districts. Informing students that this profession is not stagnant and is being changed by school boards, superintendents, and other elected officials will allow them to become more involved within the decision making to benefit their profession, schools, and student achievement.

As Robards states “a nation is never finished; it recreates for each generation. Professionalism for educators cannot be built like the pyramids, it must be rebuilt and recreated by committed, caring professionals ”— teachers (20). Therefore, education programs need to start creating a culture where incoming graduates are not only equipped with the qualities of an effective teacher, well-informed of changes within their field, but an understanding of how their voice and “true professional spirit [will] enable [them] to continue to improve the profession... [and] march bravely forward” and realize that it is time to stop *hearing* about reform, but be *part* of its creation (Robards “Teaching” 20).

Gap 3: *In our society, education has taught that the implementation of standards set limits and boundaries to strengthen a particular entity.*

A. Relevance to my research: When alternative teaching licenses were established, providing the public a “roundabout” way to earn a teaching certificate, it significantly lowered the standards and weakened the entrance of the teaching profession. This has allowed the public to see teaching as a simple, technical career, rather than an actual profession.

B. Solution: I agree that recruitment of teachers and a push for a well-educated common body of citizens caused our country to open up a different avenue for certification in the profession. However, this demand has allowed teaching to become a “back-up” or “if all else fails” job, which, with significant opposition from what sociology researchers have characterized as “true professionals,” has portrayed a mediocre level of professionalism and preparation to the public (Robards “Teaching” 18). Therefore, I propose a complete elimination of alternative teacher programs. The continuation of allowing a group of people, who receive a bachelor’s degree in an area of complete irrelevance to education to become teachers, and a belief that a subject exam, professional exam, and 5-6 weeks of training in the classroom could ever *replace or equalize* a 4-6 year preparation of understanding the foundation of education, theories of pedagogy, and the art of creating a deep sense of commitment towards our youth, is unlikely, unfortunate, and unfitting to an ideal development of competent individuals.

Robards states, “Extended programs of five and six years of preparation should become a reality for the teaching profession. It is unrealistic to try to prepare teachers in the academic discipline and the clinical knowledge at the same time” (Robards “Teacher” 7). Certainly, I am in complete agreement with—and a strong advocate of—this statement, but in order to make Robards’ idea a reality, we must first work to terminate these alternative routes: “We are not attracting the people in education who should be there” (Robards “Teacher” 7). We must stop letting in others who only seek this profession when failure in any other job has guided them here, and start creating a culture of teachers where an inner desire to be part of molding excellence, not failure, has served as their method of guidance. We must understand that a high number of educators will only hinder, and never substitute a generation of *quality* educators: “Certainly it is within the power of teachers [and us] to make their [our] own contribution toward the restoration of a more fitting national image of the teacher” (Walhout 35).

Gap 4: *Teachers are designed to teach. However, the innovation of pedagogy, the art and skill of teaching, has not been correlated to the effectiveness of teachers.*

A. Relevance to my research: This lack of correlation has presented a faulty and inaccurate appearance that, to become a teacher, the fundamental skill of teaching is no longer the principle or

determining factor of evaluating or ranking this profession. Therefore, by eliminating the core, society has created a false meaning of a teacher's purpose, challenging them to base their judgment of educators on factors of complete irrelevance to their initial objective—to teach. For this reason, teachers have been under a negative light for the creation of a misinterpretation of their primary duty—to specialize in the art of teaching.

B. Solution: A beginning focus and emphasis in pedagogy needs to emerge in teacher education programs; an addition of pedagogical classes must be added to all education majors. I propose a requirement of classes that will cover in-depth areas such as teaching a specific subject (for secondary education majors), the importance of different learning styles, *how* to teach to all these learning styles, understanding the process of how a student receives information, and methods proven to recall and retain information better. Depending on a student's major, future educators should not only be *taking* classes in college, but learning *how* to teach those subjects and how to grasp and fully understand the development, theory, concept, and application of an idea or skill in order to transmit this knowledge to a group of students who will be completely anonymous and incognizant of this information. With this being said, instead of focusing on standardized testing to determine if a student has learned given material, teachers need to be trained on how to determine this on their own and specialize using differentiated learning to meet the needs of all their students.

According to Patricia Danyluk, a correlational analysis of surveys revealed “the lowest mode” in teacher skills “was in the area of teaching strategies with a score of 2” out of a “5-point Likert type scale” (504). Therefore, colleges should not have student teachers seeking *extra* help in this area, and the help should not be *extra*; it should be mentioned from the beginning of their programs, *required* from each student, and presented as the fundamental skill and purpose of their profession. Danyluk's data also “indicated [that] student teachers were somewhat prepared in their knowledge of teaching strategies” (504). Somewhat? Teachers need to be experts, specialists, and have a clear proficiency and understanding in this skill. By establishing concrete meanings of their purpose and value to our future generations in the beginning, the United States will begin to create a body of teachers who recognize their *true* role and impact on the youth, while developing an image whose profile will reflect the same fundamental ideals.

If our country continues in this direction, teachers will remain in the classrooms, but their enthusiasm, passion, and will to teach—qualities that make an effective teacher—will only diminish their quality of teaching, and, therefore, affect our future generation.

Conclusion

In the end of my research, I have pin-pointed gaps within other scholarly articles to create an understanding of the negative image of the teaching profession. However, why am I such an advocate for this issue? Because I see this public thought is deeply affecting the United States as a whole; our citizens are becoming accepting of depreciating and undervaluing the individual who has molded their ability to communicate in this world. This is so unfortunate, upsetting, and unprincipled to put those who work so hard to help our nation towards a common objective—become educated—in such a negative light. Society has failed to realize that it is extremely challenging to motivate a group of students to participate in class, think critically, question, and respect other points of view. This lies within an innate ability to word ideals in such a way to appeal to the emotions of their audience—which is not a simple task.

If our country continues in this direction, teachers will remain in the classrooms, but their enthusiasm, passion, and will to teach—qualities that make an effective teacher—will only diminish their quality of teaching, and, therefore, affect our future generation. As a result, our country will be put at a pause; we cannot move forward as a unit when we have failed to realize and respect the effort of *everyone*—especially our leaders—not just the individual. An education is the foundation, principle, core, and root of our community. Therefore, we cannot sustain ourselves and continue to grow as a country without strong and well-developed minds. I believe that humanity was created as individuals first, and united as a whole to *create* a sum whose impact is limitless. If we continue to accept this barrier between the public and teachers, we will fail to reach so many opportunities, and the United States will lose. In the words of Marcus Tullius Cicero, “What nobler employment, or more valuable to the state, than that of the man who instructs the rising generation.”

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