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**Professionalization 2.0:
The Case for Plural Professionalization in Education**

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Educational professionalization has long been a powerful, if highly contested, idea. Almost since the field's modern founding at the beginning of the twentieth century, advocates have argued for greater professionalization of the field. If only, these reformers have argued, education could establish a real knowledge base to guide practice, develop training in that knowledge, and establish stringent licensure requirements assuring that credentialed teachers possessed that knowledge, we could eliminate educational quackery the way that the Flexner report eliminated medical quackery. This idea is as old as the Progressive Era and as recent as AFT President Randi Weingarten's 2012 call for a "bar exam" for teaching. Proponents have repeatedly hoped that such a professionalizing process would not only improve the consistency of practice, but also win the field the kind of status, respect, and pay that characterize more established professions like law and medicine.

At the same time, the notion of educational professionalization has had its skeptics. These skeptics have long wondered whether education can ever be a profession on par with law and medicine, given the sheer number of teachers, the lack of funds to pay them like stronger professions, and the fact that the field possesses neither the unity around values nor the knowledge base that characterizes stronger professions. They also point to the very efforts to professionalize as a cautionary tale—despite a century of efforts to develop knowledge, reform training, and increase licensing requirements, there is no sign that the field has either improved the consistency of its practice or achieved the status of more powerful professions.

In more recent years, a group of reformers have argued that professionalization is not only unworkable but also undesirable. From this point of view the kind of faux professionalization that prevails in education is the worst of both worlds—it gives monopoly control to a group that has no track record of success and no knowledge base on which to claim

its authority. From this vantage point, educational professionalization limits educational diversity, prevents innovation, forces a unity of values on a field that is deeply pluralistic, and restricts entry for potentially good teaching candidates and school providers who do not meet the requirements of the would-be profession.

Both sides in this argument have a point, while both sides are also missing the point. Proponents are right that the relatively underdeveloped professional structures in teaching are a key obstacle to durable improvement in the quality of instruction; it is hard to imagine improvement in practice at real scale without a more professionalized system. But critics are right that medicine may not be the best model for a public field with modest pay, an uncertain knowledge base, and widely divergent ends. They are also right that educational professionalization needs to accommodate itself to the winds of change—in a period of skepticism of expert control and lackluster educational results, the field needs a way to embrace new ideas, school models, and approaches to school improvement.

We enter this debate as a proponent (Mehta) and a skeptic (Teles) of professionalization. In this paper, we suggest that there is a way to marry the virtues of professionalization with the best ideas of its critics. To make really significant improvements in teaching, we need to understand that professions come in many shapes and sizes, and that they need not possess the monopoly structure of law and medicine to effectively shape practice and generate cumulative, productive knowledge. The peculiarities of education lead us to support the idea of "plural professionalism"—professionalism without monopoly.

Plural professionalism is not pie in the sky. There are already other professions, such as architecture, psychology and psychiatry, the arts, and the academic disciplines that combine a very high level of expert knowledge, specialized, internally controlled training, and insulation

from extra-professional control with, at least in part, a plural rather than monopoly structure. And there are already elements of plural professionalism bubbling up in the educational field, experiments that if taken to scale could create a new teaching profession, one simultaneously more professional and more diverse than the one we have today. While we do not claim that plural professionalization would magically enhance the status, pay, and respect of teachers to be on par with other leading fields, we do think that it has the potential to develop the kind of knowledge, training, and consistency of quality practice that education desperately needs. We hope that, over time, such improved practice might gradually win its practitioners the autonomy, respect, status, and pay that they have long sought.

We begin by defining professionalism. Then we lay out the cases for and against professionalization, for despite the sometimes-acrimonious tone that that often characterizes the debate, each has much to learn from the other. We then go on to make the argument for plural professionalism in teaching, which incorporates the strongest arguments for professionalization while adopting a model more appropriate to the peculiar—and increasingly unstable—features of primary and secondary education. We conclude by sketching out, from the "teacher's-eye" view, what plural professionalism would look like in practice, and make suggestions for policy change that would move teaching gradually in this direction.

Defining Professionalism

Professions have traditionally been defined as fields which possess the following traits:

1) a well-developed knowledge base that practitioners are required to possess;

2) social closure: the profession defines who can become a certified practitioners and

licenses providers of training to ensure that entering members meet that standard of quality;

3) common norms and standards of practice that ensure that practitioners meet the standards of the field (such mechanisms include hospital rounds in medicine and peer review in higher education); and

4) a moral code that expresses the field's commitment to achieve the common good.

The traditional justification for the state granting professions the right to exclusively license practitioners (such as letting the American Medical Association or the American Bar Association set standards for becoming a doctor or lawyer), is that the potential costs to clients of an unregulated market are high, and thus professional licensing enforcing these standards is an efficient way to ensure competent practice in a field.[1]

From this perspective, teaching, like other feminized fields such as nursing and social work, has been seen as an aspiring or "semi" profession. Training is relatively short compared to more established professions, and is reported by many teachers to be of limited use in guiding actual practice. In part due to skepticism about the efficacy of traditional preparation programs, alternative certification programs which put people into school with almost no training have grown significantly in recent years. Emergency credentials allow teachers to teach before receiving a full teaching license. And teacher licensing exams, compared to their counterparts in law, medicine, and engineering, cover much less knowledge and are much easier to pass. Teaching has some of the accoutrements of professionalization, but it is not a fully professionalized field.[2]

Professionalization can also be seen as an expression of cultural power over a domain. As Andrew Abbott has argued, professions are characterized by their ability to take jurisdictional

control over their arena—to convince other actors that they, and only they, can be responsible for doing the work in their arena. The strongest professions, like medicine and law, have been able to convince the public that their work is grounded in an extensive knowledge base that they and only they possess, which has been a significant source of their professional power. They use this power both to ward off other fields that seek to claim control over their work and to shape the way in which they are treated by the state. In turn, this power affords practitioners a level of autonomy, status, and respect, features which make the field attractive to prospective entrants.

Education has always been a troubled field with respect to claiming this kind of professional power. In part this is because of its external circumstances: as a public field from its inception, it has always been under the thumb of the state, which has limited its ability to develop the kind of extensive professional control that characterizes law and medicine. It does not have an extensive knowledge base that guides practice, or a technical vocabulary that organizes its work. It suffers from the fact that everyone has been to school, and thus everyone thinks they know what good education looks like and how it should be produced. It is also a highly feminized field, with relatively low status and pay. For all of these reasons, education has been frequently subject to the whims of the state, and has not achieved the kind of professional power and autonomy that we see in other fields. State and federal requirements for extensive multiple-choice testing are the most recent manifestation of the state seeking to monitor and control the profession. Overall, both the internal characteristics of the field and the way that it has been treated by external actors suggest that education is an aspiring rather than fully professionalized field.

The Case for Professionalization

The case for greater professionalization of teaching is powerful and long-standing. It draws on very real problems in the quality of classroom instruction and the relatively haphazard quality of teaching instruction, professional development, and feedback from practice to knowledge creation. It also reflects the perception that teaching cannot improve substantially without increasing its competitiveness with other occupations, not just by increasing salaries but also through altering the social prestige and control of the workplace that attract talented people.

The most powerful argument for greater professionalization of teaching is the wide inconsistency of practice in the field. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation reports that in their largest ever video study of American classroom practice, more than 60 percent of classrooms are competently managed, but that only one in five featured ambitious instruction that asked students to reason and to answer more open-ended questions.[3] These patterns in how teachers teach are mirrored in what students can do. Results on the NAEP regularly show that two-thirds or more of American students of all ages have mastered basic skills like reading and recalling information, but that only one-third can do more advanced work that involves application or analysis. American students fall in the middle of the pack on international assessments that measure higher order thinking, scoring, for example, fourteenth in reading, seventeenth in science and twenty-fifth in math on the 2009 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA).[4] Building a twenty-first century school system will require teachers who can help students do this kind of advanced work.

This inconsistency of teacher practice is not surprising when viewed from the perspective of the non-system in which teachers come to do their work. As suggested above, the United States does not have a professional system for producing quality teaching. Teacher training is

conducted by more than 1,300 institutions of widely varying quality; there are fierce debates over what sort of knowledge is relevant for teaching, but little of the kind of codified knowledge base that supports work in other fields. Particularly in high poverty schools, many teachers are teaching in areas that are outside of their area of substantive knowledge. There are many skilled teachers in the United States, but the best have mostly learned it on their own—through watching good teachers when they were themselves in school, through trial and error, and from the advice of their fellow teachers.

Compare this non-system to the way in which more mature professions work. Professions assure quality control by developing knowledge to guide the work in their field, training people in that knowledge and licensing them only when they have demonstrated modest competence in that knowledge base, and then developing ongoing standards that guide the work in the field. We hire dentists to examine teeth, lawyers to draw probate contracts, and pilots to fly planes because there are fairly established ways to do these things that are enforced by members of the field. If serious reform requires establishing quality practice across fifty states, 15,000 districts, and 100,000 schools, the cross-cutting power of professionalization is a very attractive lever.

There is also some preliminary evidence that other countries which are at the top of the PISA rankings use an approach which is more professionalized. A McKinsey & Company study from 2007 found that top scoring countries generally draw their teachers from the top third of the prospective teachers, compared to the bottom 60 percent in the United States.[5] Training is also more extensive and more frequently paid for by state. This emphasis on selection and training on the front end lessens the need for the kind of extensive testing on the back end that we see in the United States. Teaching in such a context is also a much more desirable job (the most preferred

career option for 15-year-olds in Finland, for example), which creates a strong pool of potential applicants that the professional approach requires.[6]

Finally, the professional approach is right to suggest that giving the field power over the core processes of knowledge development, training, professional development, and management of schools is critical both for developing skilled practice and for generating enough autonomy from the state to make it a desirable career. Professions are regulated by the state to ensure that the fields are serving the public interest, but states are generally not good (in any field) at developing the kind of thick processes needed to generate quality practice. And a system in which teachers themselves had more say in the development of knowledge and standards of practice could better link together research with day-to-day work in the classroom, while also engendering less resistance by teachers to efforts to make their behavior more uniform. Thus professionalization has many virtues which should be capitalized upon in a system that seeks to produce consistent quality practice at scale.

Challenges to Professionalization

The argument for making teaching more like other prestigious professions is powerful, but not unassailable. Critics of professionalism in general have made powerful arguments that giving experts disproportionate control over their own field—including the formal power of the state— generates predictable and quite disturbing pathologies. And even those who accept that the professional ideal has some attractions have raised questions about its appropriateness in an era characterized by declining faith in experts and increasingly disruptive organizational change. Other critics have made more targeted criticisms of educational professionalism in particular, noting the limits that inherent disagreements about the purposes and methods of education, the

exceptional size of the teaching corps, the need for innovation in organizing education, and the challenges of technological change pose to increasing professionalization. No effort to professionalize teaching can ignore these concerns, and it is impossible to imagine a professionalization project succeeding without addressing them.

The great waves of professionalization in fields like medicine and law crested in an era in which faith in experts was exceptionally high—an era that seems today like another world. The power that those fields have over their own practice continues to be exceptionally strong, but it is hard to imagine that a field in which only 19 percent of Americans say they have a high or very high degree of trust would obtain the control over practice that lawyers currently have if they had to build it from scratch today. While high-profile scandals and the increasing reach of the market have certainly put a dent in many professions, they have also been damaged by the increasing currency of broader critiques of the professional ideal. Conservatives in particular have argued that while professions claim that their power is necessary in order to protect the consumer, in practice the power of experts is simply a back-door way for the profession and the state to collude to promote their own interests and shrink the scope of the market and civil society.[7] And both those on the left and right have attacked professions as self-interested devices for driving up prices and reducing consumer options by limiting market entry.

Professions have also been attacked on populist grounds for empowering experts at the expense of communities. At least since the 1960s, there have been recurrent calls to shift power away from the expert class and more directly devolve it to the people. If the market critique emphasizes the way in which professional control restricts client choice, the populist critique charges that professions can inappropriately limit democratic voice.

Another set of concerns emerge from what critics take to be the peculiar character of teaching as a field, rather than the nature of professionalism as such. The argument for professional control is strongest where the costs of sub-standard care are acute, immediate and irreversible—bad doctors can lead their patients to die on the operating table, while poor lawyers can cause their clients to go to jail or face financial ruin. While the long-term costs of poor teaching are certainly significant, they are not of the sort that critics believe can justify the risks associated with provider control of market entry.

Just as significant, unlike medicine, where at a minimum longevity is a fairly widely accepted goal, in education there are fundamental differences of opinion about what the goal of expert treatment ought to be—that is, what constitutes an educated person. Particularly in a developed, pluralistic, liberal democratic state, education needs to accept a very wide range of diversity of educational ends. Less normatively, but with roughly the same effect, the United States has sufficient diversity that it may be impossible to get political agreement to impose all but the most anodyne of educational ends, and thus allowing different communities to define those ends is the only way to prevent watered-down, lowest common denominator schooling. The lack of social consensus on ends, therefore, means that there is insufficient grounding for a professional claim to expertly advance broadly accepted goals.

Critics also point to the absence of the kind of knowledge base that exists in other fields. With a couple of signal exceptions (such as early reading), the field has not developed a knowledge base that would legitimate the establishment of a canon of accepted practices, training teachers in them, and clearing out those who fail to conform to them. Of course, many fields in the past established professional control in advance of having a comprehensive set of techniques of demonstrated efficacy, the medical profession above all.[8] But at least the medical

profession had a widely legitimate basis upon which it could promise the discovery of more efficacious techniques, and, over time, has created a progressively accumulating knowledge base that delivered on that promise. But given the fact that a century's worth of educational research has not, in most cases, led to a consensus on effective educational practices, it may be reasonable to conclude that the model of developing a compelling, unified basis for expert control is a fool's errand. And with millions of teachers out in the field, the challenge of corralling them all to consent to a collective understanding of the job is much harder than with occupations like law and medicine.

Finally, the critics contend, all of the trends in the field point in the opposite direction of professionalization. The entire field of education is being wracked by enormous gales of change, everything from new methods of instruction, technology that may replace some of the things currently being done by labor, and innovative models of organizing schools. In such a period of change, the most important priority is to avoid stunting experimentation by locking in particular methods or allowing the profession to have enough power to suffocate disruptive innovations in the crib. Going further, critics like Stanford University's Terry Moe argue that the problem with American education is that teachers' unions have assumed the mantle of professionalization and used their power to create a strangle-hold over the field, limiting change to the margins.[9] Technology and the growth of competing school models driven by charters and choice is beginning to break union power, and, in Moe's view, union-led teacher "professionalization" would push back against these wholesome trends.[10] The future of schooling will be more student (and parent) directed, more sensitive to the idiosyncratic needs of particular children and the choices of parents who—as with so much of American life—are unwilling to defer to educational authorities.

These are serious criticisms, and even those—like us—who think the case for some form of professionalization is strong need to develop an approach to improving teaching that takes them into account, rather than dismissing them. Professionalization faces significant headwinds, and the peculiarities of teaching show the limits of an overreliance on the "medical model" of professionalism. Thankfully, there is not a single model of what a profession is or should be. And in that diversity of models of professionalization we believe there is hope for finding a way forward, that may achieve much of what advocates of making teaching a profession want, while avoiding the problems and pathologies identified by their critics.

A Synthetic Alternative: Plural Professionalization

Professionalizing education is a huge project. It would require changes in status, pay, training, and the way in which the field is treated by external actors. A full treatment of those issues is beyond the scope of this essay.[11] But a critical part of being a profession is developing a mechanism of developing knowledge, training people in that knowledge, certifying them, and getting that knowledge into use. A would-be profession today also needs to find ways to accommodate the dynamism of technological change and innovation. We believe it is possible for education to become more professionalized, in the sense of being characterized by consistent skilled practice, while also being sensitive to the limits of the medical model and the special challenges of American pluralism and education's idiosyncratic features.

The answer lies in what we call *plural professionalization*. The primary virtue of professionalization—assuring core competency grounded in accumulating knowledge—does not need to be tied to the idea that there is one standard, knowledge base, or accrediting body through which everything flows. Rather we take our cue from fields like music, dance,

psychology, architecture, and higher education, in which individual practitioners work within traditions or schools that govern and shape practice, but across a given field there is a clear pluralism of different approaches.

Consider the field of psychology. Psychology has many similarities to education—human clients whose cooperation is essential for successful outcomes; fundamental disagreement over values of what it means to succeed; and the need for licensed practitioners to competently deliver critical services despite these challenges. Within psychology, a range of different approaches have developed over time: cognitive-behavioral therapy, psychoanalysis, humanistic psychology, and many others. None of these approaches is necessarily better than the others, since they have different strengths and weaknesses, and are better suited to some clients (and some definitions of "success") than others. But the critical point is that these disagreements do not impede the field, within its various traditions, from developing knowledge and technique over time. Within each of these strands, there is an evolving sense of what good practice looks like, which is part of the training in each of the schools.

The arts provide another good example. In visual art, dance, theater, and classical music, there are highly divergent visions of what it means to do good work. But that doesn't mean anything goes—to the contrary, there are exacting standards for how to play Bach or perform a turnout in classical ballet. Again, the organizing unit is the school or tradition—painters may see themselves as drawing on the work of the impressionists, the cubists, or the abstract expressionists; some classical musicians insist on the use of period instruments and a rigorous commitment to how pieces were performed at the time they were composed, while others are open to what they see as improvements in the quality of instruments and the possibility of experimentation in performance. These decisions imply certain choices about technique and

about knowledge of previous antecedents, which serve as the departure points for new work. And, of course, these styles are not entirely sequestered from one another. Original artists can bridge across traditions and on occasion develop new ones. The arts are not a profession in the sense of requiring formal licensing from the state, but they are useful in showing in the way in which a very high level of practice can accumulate in a diversity of traditions or schools.

The academic disciplines are another good analogue. Here the core organizing units are the disciplines, which in some broad sense attempt to maintain similar standards in the awarding of the PhD, but are highly heterogeneous as to what counts as good work. Even within disciplines, individual departments often establish particular specialties in subfields within the discipline. In political science, for instance Rochester University has long been a center for rational choice, while Johns Hopkins University takes a more historical institutional approach. This differentiation allows students and prospective faculty members to choose universities that are strong in their areas of interest and share their definition of the qualities of good scholarship. This kind of pluralism allows disciplines and subfields of scholarship to develop in very different ways, without having to resolve huge underlying disagreements about values, methods, epistemology, and a host of other issues. And, again, as in other fields, sometimes subfields which had considered themselves distinct come together in unpredictable ways to create new disciplines or fields (i.e., biochemistry). The fact of developing knowledge in traditions does not eliminate the possibility of cross-pollination—in fact, it can enhance it by creating different strands which can then both usefully criticize as well as mix with one another.

There are also hybrid examples, which combine knowledge that everyone in the field has to know with some work that develops in schools or traditions. Architecture is a good example of this—all architects have to pass licensing exams which ensure that they know the shared

scientific knowledge underlying the engineering of structurally sound buildings, but there are also different aesthetic traditions of building design that many architects sort themselves among. Psychiatry, because of its ties to medicine, is also a hybrid example—all psychiatrists have to attend medical school and pass common boards in both general medicine and psychiatry—but some then chose to get additional training in the various schools or approaches described above.

Why Education is a Good Candidate for Plural Professionalization

There are four key reasons why these pluralized fields provide the right analogue for the teaching profession. First, education is inherently a highly pluralistic field in terms of both means and ends. Second, enabling this kind of pluralism would link science and craft, as well as training and practice, within traditions in ways that are more likely to be effective. Third, the most successful models that exist in American education already take this form. Fourth, attempts to establish uniform professionalism have not worked well because they have tried to paper over the pluralism of the field in lowest-common denominator ways that are the antipathy of good educational practice.

Our starting point is that education is a highly pluralistic field, in terms of both means and ends. The purposes of education are highly contested—schools are intended to fulfill economic, civic, social, moral, and other functions, and Americans disagree on their relative importance. Some see schooling as inherently conservative, a way of transmitting the wisdom of previous generations to the next; others see it as fundamentally progressive force, seeking to empower the next generation to reshape the world according to ideals of justice and progress. Some think that students should learn the academic disciplines; others think that they should be taught to work across them, or to understand the epistemology that underpins them. And, of

course, there have been huge fights over whether students should be taught the Western canon, or be exposed to a more multicultural curriculum. None of these questions have right answers, nor are they likely to be resolved; across more than 300 million people in a highly diverse nation, people can and will continue to disagree about such fundamentals.

Education is also pluralistic in terms of the ways in which it can be carried out. Teaching and learning can be accomplished through lectures, projects, labs, Socratic seminars, Harkness tables, and case teaching, among many others. Disciplines and fields also have methods that have been found to be well-suited to their aims—business schools use case studies, anthropologists invite students along on digs; physicists and biologists work in labs, architects work in design studios. Often these means are linked to presumed ends: small seminars are critical for a liberal arts education; projects are favored for those who want students to discover as opposed to only receive knowledge; business school cases help professional students think through practical dilemmas they are likely to confront.

This diversity in terms of both means and ends is not a problem to be overcome, but a predictable outgrowth of the diversity of human experience. Education is not one thing; it is many things. Embracing this pluralism allows education to travel in its many tributaries, assuming the form that is most natural for the ends it is seeking to achieve.

A system organized around this pluralism of approaches would be more likely to produce good practice consistently, because it would embrace rather than avoid the necessary intersection of values and techniques that comprise good education. What do we mean by that? Where it has even sought coherence, our current system started from the least objectionable set of ends (basic literacy and numeracy) and then used the methods of science to figure out which means are most likely to achieve those ends. This kind of technical rationality has a number of problems: 1) the

ends are very limited when it comes to good education; 2) given the complexities of classroom teaching, it is very difficult to develop an "intervention" and expect it to be sufficient robust enough to guide teachers across the many contingencies she may face; 3) in practice, teachers frequently ignore research, especially research that is philosophically incompatible with their views of how to teach.[12] This is especially the case when teachers believe that what is demanded of them one year will shift—perhaps radically—the next.[13]

In contrast, decades of research on effective traditional public schools, Catholic schools, and now successful charter schools have repeatedly identified the importance of developing a clear mission and pedagogical approach that is grounded in a set of values about what good education looks like, as well as what kind of people the school is trying to produce.[14] This mission grounds the work of these schools—engendering commitment from faculty, student, and parents—and providing a standard which can guide educational decision-making. These are schools in which the people who run them possess *conviction*—a real view about what it worth learning and why, and what pedagogical activities might achieve these ends. Of course, they differ widely in those convictions, from the strict traditionalism of Catholic schools to the optimistic progressivism of Deborah Meier, but they each have a clear sense of what they are about which organizes their work. Just as important, a clearly stated education philosophy operates as a kind of credible commitment between teachers and education leaders, making clear to teachers that if they invest in mastering a set of practices, their supervisors will not scrap them just a few years later.

The challenge to date, however, has been that these "effective" schools have tended to rise and fall with their leaders. The question is how they might exist at much greater scale. Our hope is that plural professionalism might provide the means by which we could move from

individual schools with distinctive missions to a field that is more organized as a whole around distinct traditions.

What would it mean to organize around "schools" or "traditions"? Consider four examples—Montessori, International Baccalaureate, "no excuses," and "classical education." Freed of the need to achieve consensus, each of these approaches takes a definite stance on the nature of a good education, how to balance breadth and depth, and how students will demonstrate their learning. Teachers (and students and parents) chose approaches that are consistent with their values, removing the problem of philosophical incompatibility. Within each of these approaches is not a single "intervention" (as if there were a series of steps that could magically produce good results), but rather there is a thick body of *stuff*—assessments, materials, norms, teacher trainings, and a thriving community of people who have taught in them—which taken together creates some consistency across different classrooms.[15] The paradigm here is a mix of science and craft, as those working within a tradition are expected to share certain assumptions, work with certain materials, and use certain techniques, which is what marks them as professional members of the clan.

The strength of this approach is that the creation of vertically integrated systems would link together the various levers that guide practice into coherent streams. *Each of these networks would train practitioners, organize schools, create curriculum, develop assessments, and create mechanisms of accountability that are aligned and anchored in a strong vision of good instruction.* We can see this in the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, for example: teachers are trained and certified by IB, IB assessments serve as the anchor for lesson planning and the development of a scope and sequence, and externally administered exams provide accountability for students and schools alike. Individual teachers have considerable flexibility in

developing particular lessons and teaching particular classes, but they are doing so within a framework that has a clear conception of what good work looks like and how to get there.

The result for individual practitioners would be a much more coherent process of developing skill and expertise. Experts become experts from 10,000 hours of practice, yes, but research suggests that all practice is not created equal; practice works only when it is situated within a clear standard of what good work looks like that is enthusiastically embraced by the practitioner, and accompanied by targeted feedback measured against that standard. In a system organized around multiple traditions of good education, the result is that new practitioners know what it is they are shooting for, and they gradually can get better as they move closer towards a shared standard.

At the level of the field, this kind of pluralism could accelerate the accumulation of knowledge by enabling more technical sophistication about how to make each of these traditions work. The pattern in American education has been wild lurching among different poles—one decade is about "back to basics" and the next about "higher order thinking" and back again. Pedagogical debates are fought at 10,000 feet, for example, projects versus direct instruction or patriotic history versus critical history. But these kinds of fights, while great for the op-ed pages, do nothing to advance the more technical and specific kind of knowledge that might help teachers improve their practice. Since each of these educational traditions takes a stand about what is taught and how, they enable increasing debate among relatively like-minded people. Freed of the need to debate first principles, these smaller, more like-minded communities, can more tightly focus on exactly what sort of scaffolds are needed to help students undertake a historical investigation, or how best to help students master "core knowledge."

Research suggests that teachers already do this on an individual basis—rather than looking to a unitary body of "science" for guidance, they consult philosophically aligned teachers that they know, seeking to scavenge materials, activities, assignments, and other teaching materials that will help them solve practical problems in their classrooms.[16] By moving this process up to the level of the tradition, we can enable individual teachers to learn what like-minded colleagues are doing, and, as a field, for knowledge to accumulate within each of these traditions. There are better and worse ways to run a project, organize small groups, or deliver a lecture and thus to be an expert in a tradition would mean knowing the best ways to do these things. What we need are mechanisms that would enable these traditions to develop, to capture and share knowledge, and to make that knowledge part of the training of new practitioners.

Plural professionalism also has the advantage of more closely tying together practice and knowledge production. Currently we have institutions, like schools of education and other research institutes, which are fairly distant from practice and not focused on the needs of the field. Instead of a horizontal model—with a layer of research/theory/training separated from a layer of practice—we would have a vertically integrated model in which differing traditions developed practice and trained their practitioners in those modes. We are beginning to see this already—"no excuses" schools like KIPP, Achievement First, and Uncommon Schools have partnered with Hunter College to create the Relay Graduate School of Education, which trains its practitioners in the kinds of management and other skills one needs in "no excuses" schools. Conversely, High Tech High, a project-based network of schools in San Diego, has created a graduate school of education to train teachers in interdisciplinary project-based methods. Both of these models are heavily driven by the needs of practice—and in fact were started out of the realization that education schools were not producing teachers with the particular types of skills

needed in their classrooms. The result, from the perspective of the potential teacher, is a coherent experience. From the beginning days of teacher training through becoming an expert teacher, she is working within one conception of what good education looks like, which enables an accumulation of knowledge, skill, and technique within that tradition.

Of course, there may be some knowledge about teaching and learning that is more universal or broadly shared. If there is a growing knowledge base about early literacy, the importance of non-cognitive skills, or how people learn, students in all of these traditions should learn it. But, even here, the role of the traditions are important—as each of the traditions needs to think about how to incorporate these findings into a coherent educational approach.

Plural Professionalization in Practice: The Teacher's Eye View

What would plural professionalism look like in practice? Compare the experience of a hypothetical teacher, Pam, in today's system vs. the plural professionalism system of the future.

Under today's system, Pam graduates from college in the spring of 2014 with a major in biology and a determination to help children, and so she decides to become a teacher. She applies to education schools chosen primarily by geographic proximity, is accepted to one, and picks the one that offers the lowest tuition. She attends school there for a year, and learns a hodgepodge of material, including some about Vygotsky and Dewey, some about adolescent development, the achievement gap, and the importance of helping students become active thinkers and learners. She does some student teaching in a nearby suburban school, drawing mainly on what she remembers from her own tenth grade biology class, but receives little feedback from her university supervisor, who himself has not taught in many years.

The next year she starts her full-time teaching in the urban school nearby. She finds that she is radically under-prepared for what confronts her. The students are in her classroom because of geography rather than alignment with a particular approach to education, won't pay attention to her directions, and some of them are years behind in their respective subjects. The first year is miserable. Over the summer, before the second year, she asks some veteran teachers for some advice, and they suggest a set of behavior management routines that will enable her to achieve some modicum of order in her classroom. She tries these, and, over the second and the third year she is able to achieve some level of stability in her classroom. Her kids are mostly doing worksheets in biology (so much for Dewey!), but at least they are doing some work.

After three years of working at the school, the district contracts with the Expeditionary Learning network to take over the school. Expeditionary Learning is a network of schools that emphasizes inter-disciplinary, project-based methods that feature heavy levels of student inquiry. Pam is intrigued but concerned. On the one hand, she knows that the worksheet-heavy routine that she is currently employing is unlikely to give the students her excitement of biology, but on the other, she is deathly afraid of the return to chaos the first year. There is also the problem that her evaluations are dependent upon the state science tests, and she fears that doing long projects will mean they won't cover the topics needed to pass the tests. The network has contracted with a university to develop some sample lessons, but these don't seem well-attuned to the needs of her students. She decides to keep teaching basically as she has, but partners with one other teacher to try a project on the local water supply. She finds the results of this project puzzling as well— some of the students really take to it, but others are goofing off, and she is not sure whether they are actually really learning anything. She also needs a way to make up the lost time, and

schedules massive doses of test prep in the time leading up the exam, focusing, as advised by a colleague, on the standards that have been most frequently tested in past years.

Imagine instead Pam's experience in a plural professionalism system. Upon graduating from college, she looks at the local options for teacher preparation, and identifies five broad networks of teaching, which might be classical education, IB, project-based, "no excuses," and a new network of blended learning schools. Excited by her work in a lab in college, she elects the project-based option. Once there, she learns about how a project-based approach fits into the broader landscape of educational choices, and she learns that as a method it values depth over breadth. She then begins an extensive apprenticeship in how to do project-based teaching. She watches lots of videos of expert teachers' running projects, and develops a series of project-based lessons as part of her unit on lesson planning. She learns how to incorporate mini-lectures and other more traditional teaching techniques into units that feature projects but are not exclusively organized around them. Her student-teaching takes place at a local school that is project-based and is also run by her teacher training institution, creating continuity between her classwork and her initial entry into the profession.

When she begins teaching full-time the following year, she looks for another project-based school that is also part of the same network. Things look familiar from her student teaching—the same conceptions of what good work looks like, same teaching philosophy, same language around how projects should be appropriately scaffolded. The school also provides explicit guidance on how to solve the most common problems of project-based teaching—she works with other teachers to plan projects while also providing the needed background and contextual information needed to develop deep biological understanding. The school is organized to support projects—it uses longer blocks than most traditional high schools, and teachers spend

part of their time teaching in interdisciplinary teams. Parents and students explicitly chose the school because their needs align with its tradition. Pam has a highly successful first two years that grow coherently out of her teacher training programs.

As she moves into her third and fourth years, Pam wants to spread her wings and build upon what she has initially learned. She begins to attend conferences sponsored by her network and learn how other project-based teachers are incorporating the new knowledge that is rapidly developing out of the human genome project. She becomes part of an ongoing network of 10th grade project-based biology teachers, who meet online to exchange ideas and materials. She and one other teacher work particularly hard to develop a genetics unit, which she works on and refines over the course of several years. This lesson is then deposited into the network repository as a highly expert lesson, completing Pam's movement from novice learner to contributor to knowledge.

In her fifth year, Pam's school is visited from an accreditation team that is steeped in project-based methodology. Accountability through this kind of accreditation frees the school from the need to do the kind of broad but not deep testing that has bedeviled project-based schools in the past. The accreditation team offers detailed feedback on what the school is and is not doing well in a way that is consistent with its goals; in particular, it draws on the work of leading schools in the network to suggest ways to integrate technology and to deepen the instruction. The school comes out of the accreditation visit energized and with a number of new ideas about how to extend its already ambitious practice.

Plural Professionalization in Policy

The vision of a pluralized teaching profession that would give Pam the kind of experience we just described is deeply attractive. It holds the potential to attract a great number of motivated, idealistic young people turned off by the thinner and more uniform face of the teaching profession today. And in many ways, it represents the "hidden potential" in many of the changes already afoot in the sector.

But it is far from obvious how policy can help us get to that more attractive world, and if anything easier to imagine how it might harm it. Since the wind is to some degree at the back of plural professionalism, the keyword for policy reform is to tread carefully, focusing on removing obstacles in its way and providing resources and encouragement to those willing to push plural professional experiments, rather than trying to strong-arm the recalcitrant.

What makes our vision of professionalism "plural" is that we don't envision a single set of training, classroom practices, tests, and licensing requirements that would be applied to every teacher. While there might be certain minimal standards for teachers (college degree, passing a test which shows basic competency of essential knowledge and skills), we think that the logic of plural professionalism pushes in the direction of encouraging the development of vertically integrated networks with rich standards of their own, rather than uniformly imposed generic rules.

The basic principle here is that the role of the state should move to licensing networks, rather than licensing individual teachers. One could begin by keeping all of the existing apparatus of state regulation—rules for what degrees teachers need to have, state testing of students and curriculum, etc.—but allow vertically integrated networks of practice to be waived out of them if they can demonstrate their own rigorous internally imposed standards. To a

degree, portfolio districts provide a kind of model for accountability in a world of plural professionalism, since the central authority is held responsibility for ensuring that schools meet the standards that they have established for themselves. The same approach could be applied to the wider range of functions taken by networks of practice in a world of plural professionalism, with an accrediting authority ceding authority to networks that incorporate the full range of professional functions, and which meet well-specified outcome standards. As those networks grow and new ones develop, the one-size-fits-all rules and regulations would not necessarily have to be eliminated, but they would gradually become less and less important. And the opportunity for opting out of the mass of state regulation would provide strong incentives for new networks to develop, and for smaller groups of schools to align with other practitioners who share their values and pedagogical approach. We think it would be particularly promising if leading traditional providers that had a defined point of view (like Bank Street College of Education, for example) decided to form such networks, as well as the new entrants that have been prominent in recent years.

Particularly important in moving towards this world is shifting the mechanism of accountability. Today's insistence that all schools be measured by the same standards are a critical impediment to plural professionalism, as holding teachers and schools accountable for one set of tests inevitably focuses attention on those assessments. The result for teachers and schools will be to direct them to try to pay attention to multiple masters in ways that will inevitably lead to incoherent education (projects one day; test prep the next). Rather, as is already the case with private schools and universities, accountability should be done through accrediting teams, who share the basic values of what schools are trying to do. The role of the government is thus to certify these vertically aligned networks, which would need to show that

they have robust processes of accreditation in place.

In the model we are proposing, the existing network of regulations and standards does not disappear. For example, nothing we are saying here would impede the roll out of the Common Core State Standards or assessments based upon them. They would still apply to all parts of the educational system outside of certified professional networks, and they would provide a baseline against which those networks would have to justify their curriculum and assessments to accrediting authorities. But in the world we are describing students within these networked schools would be trained against quite divergent measures of what constitutes an educated person, and thus tests in one network would be incommensurate with those in others. This is a feature rather than a bug. The more of the educational terrain covered by these networks, the less "common" assessments based on Common Core would become. But that only suggests the need to move toward universally-applicable measures of "outcomes" based on long-term measures of success, rather than universal testing—things like college admission and completion, future employment or involvement in the criminal justice system.

To be certified in the way we are recommending, vertically integrated education networks would need to develop institutions that cover many of the functions currently filled by different institutions across the sector. They would need to develop their own teacher-training institutions (which would not be primarily M.Ed. machines, but networks of graduate schools to which teachers would continually return throughout their career), their own research shops (through which federal research might increasingly flow), their own curriculum and assessment tools, their own teacher accreditation system and network-wide processes for removal. Within themselves, they would perform most of the functions that other professions do, the only difference being that there would be multiple professional networks, organized regionally or

nationally, rather than a single one.

We can imagine two ways that this policy approach could go awry. The first is that it could develop fairly unsavory "insider-outsider" dynamics, as the accrediting authorities get captured by existing networks of practice, who use their resources and attention to keep out innovative new professional challengers. The second is that the standards for accreditation could become too lax, with networks developing political allies who allow them to opt out of existing state policies without developing the full range of professional infrastructure (not developing their own richly specified curriculum, not establishing processes for developing knowledge within their professional network and using it to inform practice, not developing their own institutions for training teachers) or without developing sufficiently high standards for student performance. Either of these would defeat the goals of plural professionalism, but we are somewhat encouraged by the fact that there seem to be directly conflicting political incentives in our proposed institutional design, which could push against one another. Outsiders will lobby to lower standards, but insiders will probably push back. This could keep the system at equilibrium.

Overall, we think the best way to nudge teaching in the direction of plural professionalism is less by "weeding" (removing bad teachers, closing bad schools) than "watering" (nurturing networks that want to vertically integrate and raise their own self-defined standards and deepen their own connections between knowledge and practice). Rather than attacking the mass of existing institutions and rules, we should create clearer pathways and incentives for networks to escape them entirely. This will allow for a gradual transition from the existing system and minimize political resistance—or at least reduce the political opportunity for stopping plural professionalism from growing.

We do not know how far a model of the kind we have described could go. It is possible to imagine a future in which all education in places with enough population to support multiple schools would be characterized by plural professionalism. But there may be limits to such growth. Their success depends upon parents and teachers having reasonably clear ideas about what they want education to do for children, and how it should do it. We think that the growth of these networks would probably increase the number of parents and teachers who do have such well-developed preferences, by providing an outlet for them. While it may turn out that the pool upon which our networks can draw is limited, there is no way to know in advance and no risk to letting them grow as capaciously as demand for them will allow.

It is possible, therefore, that a two stream educational system would persist for the foreseeable future. Ted Kolderie, one of the founders of the charter school movement, has described a somewhat similar "split screen" strategy for educational improvement, in which a minority of schools innovate aggressively and the rest do so incrementally, drawing on the lessons of the innovating minority.[17] The greater capacity for genuinely deep testing of ideas in professional networks would allow for that split-screen strategy to roll out in an even more ambitious way. If all that allowing some networks to opt out of our system of education regulation does is to more deeply satisfy those who participate in them, while also creating more innovation for mainstream schools to draw upon, we would consider that a success.

Conclusion: Pluralism but Not Balkanization

The obvious danger in what we are proposing is fragmentation or balkanization. Much as legal scholar Cass Sunstein hypothesized that the Internet was leading to different groups reading only the news that was already consistent with their assumptions, there is a potential concern that the

kind of pluralism that we are proposing here could result in parochialism and insularity within each of these various traditions.[18] We think this is a serious concern, but there are ways to potentially mitigate its effects.

The most obvious mechanism of balkanization would be racial or ethnic segregation of schools, especially if networks develop that explicitly or implicitly appeal only to particular groups. On the one hand, there is no way to avoid the fact that networks that have a clear branding will not be proportionally attractive to teachers or students. For instance, "no excuses" networks will almost certainly have more appeal to relatively disadvantaged families, as do charters in this tradition today. Up to a point, this is a feature rather than a bug—the challenge of teaching such children is different than for children of wealthier, college-educated parents, and it makes sense to develop a professional culture built around serving their needs. But that does not get professional networks off the hook. While parents or teachers of particular groups may choose at the end of the day not to "buy" what each network is selling in a proportional way, networks should still face an obligation to try to "sell" it. Accrediting authorities should hold these networks accountable for advertising for students in their schools widely across communities, and for recruiting teachers from diverse communities into the network as well.

Another important element of network credentialing would be to require all new entrants to the profession to be taught as part of their training how their respective traditions fit into the landscape of potential approaches, so that they can reflect upon the pedagogical choices they are making. We also think that richer traditions will influence one another over time, as practices worked out in one network of institutions spread to others. Our general instinct is that real learning within the teaching profession will come, perhaps paradoxically, when we insist on less

uniformity from the start. When members of particular traditions are confident in their ability to develop and implement their own practices, they will be less resistant to learning from others.

What is true of networks of practice is also likely to be true of individuals. Much as experienced scholars often turn to interdisciplinary work, we think that it is possible that highly skilled teachers might eventually be able to work within multiple pedagogical modes. But to do this work would likely work best if those teachers had mastered one tradition first, much as scholars generally need to master a particular field or discipline before they begin to work across them.

The most important lesson of the almost century-long effort to professionalize teaching is that the United States is too diverse, the needs and preferences of students and parents too varied, and the question of "what works" too indeterminate, for teaching to become a unitary profession. Working with such a goal leads only to frustration and resistance, and a convergence—if on anything—to the lowest common denominator. But that does not mean that the professional ideal is a pipe dream. By nurturing a range of professional communities of teaching practice to form, to learn, to innovate, and to build their own institutions, we can build a uniquely American teaching profession. We owe the teachers of the future, their students and the nation as a whole nothing less.

[1] Eliot Freidson, *Professionalism: The Third Logic* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001).

[2] For a lengthier discussion of education as a profession, see Jal Mehta, *The Allure of Order: High Hopes, Dashed Expectations, and the Troubled Quest to Remake American Schooling* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[3] Gates Foundation Measures of Effective Teaching Project, "Gathering Feedback for Teaching," (Seattle: Gates Foundation, 2012), accessed online at:
http://www.metproject.org/downloads/MET_Gathering_Feedback_Research_Paper.pdf

[4] OECD, Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education: Lessons from PISA for the United States, (OECD Publishing, 2010), http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/32/50/46623978.pdf.

[5] Michael Barber and Mona Mourshed, *How the World's Best-Performing School Systems Come Out on Top*, (McKinsey & Company, 2007),
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[6] OECD, Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education: Lessons from PISA for the United States, (OECD Publishing, 2010), http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/32/50/46623978.pdf.

[7] Irving Kristol, *Neoconservatism: The Autobiography of an Idea* (New York: Free Press, 1995).

[8] Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

[9] Terry Moe, *Special Interest: Teachers Unions and America's Public Schools* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2011).

[10] Terry Moe, *Liberating Learning: Technology, Politics and the Future of American Education* (New York: Jossey-Bass, 2009).

[11] See Mehta (2013) for more detail.

[12] Jack Schneider, *From the Ivory Tower to the Classroom: Understanding How Scholarship Becomes Common Knowledge in Education*, unpublished manuscript, Holy Cross.

[13] Frederick M. Hess, *Spinning Wheels: The Politics of Urban School Reform*, (Washington, DC: Brookings, 1998).

[14] On effective schools, see Stewart C. Purkey and Marshall S. Smith, "Effective Schools: A Review," *Elementary School Journal* 83 (1983), 426-452.; on Catholic schools, see Anthony S. Bryk, Valerie E. Lee and Peter Blakeley Holland, *Catholic Schools and the Common Good* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993) ; on high performing charter schools see David Whitman, *Sweating the Small Stuff: Inner-City Schools and the New Paternalism* (Washington, D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2008).

[15] On the importance of this kind of "infrastructure," see David Cohen and Susan Moffitt, Cohen, David K. and Susan L. Moffitt. *The Ordeal of Equality: Did Federal Regulation Fix the Schools?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

[16] Michael Huberman, "The Model of the Independent Artisan in Teachers Professional Relations." In *Teachers' Work: Individuals, Colleagues, and Contexts*, edited by Judith Warren Little and Milbrey W. McLaughlin, 11-50. (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993).

[17] Ted Kolderie, "Where National Policy Goes Next—To Succeed" (working paper, Education Evolving, 2012).

[18] Cass Sunstein, *Republic.com* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).