USE OF THESES

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TEACHERS' STATUS IN AUSTRALIA

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Australian National University, Canberra.

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Preface

THE THESIS

Summary of Contents.

Teachers are very concerned about the status of their occupation. This is evident from the opinions of teachers expressed in Teachers' Journals and in educational literature. Teachers believe their occupation has a low status and that it ought to be higher. The opinions held by teachers about the status of their occupation generally agree with the opinions held by various 'publics' in tests designed to measure the relative status of occupations. The tests reveal there is general agreement in placing occupations in such a scale, with the professions and higher business occupations at the top, the skilled trades and technical occupations in the middle group, and the semi-skilled and unskilled occupations on the lowest ranking. In respect of individuals in these occupations, the doctor has the highest rating, followed by the solicitor, the clergyman, the engineer and architect. Teachers come lower down on the scale, although the secondary school teacher appears higher on the list.
than the primary teacher.

Teachers' ideas about the prestige rating of their occupation are fixed on the status of professions, particularly of medicine and law. Teachers want their occupation to be recognised as a profession because they believe that such recognition would result in individual teachers improving their social status, their position in society vis-a-vis other individuals. (Chapter One)

Teachers, however, are most confused and inconsistent in their statements about the status of teaching. Some maintain teaching is a profession but it lacks public recognition of this fact; others maintain teaching is not yet a profession but it is making progress towards that status. Much of the confusion stems from the fact that teachers have no clear picture of a profession.

Previous studies on the characteristics of professions in England are reviewed, (Chapter Two). There have been no similar studies of the professions in Australia. Thus it is difficult to ascertain what is meant by a profession in Australia and which occupations are so regarded. It is safe to assume that the older professions of medicine and law are so regarded and possibly occupations such as
architecture and dentistry. As there is fairly general agreement on the fields which mark off the professions as an occupational group, these must be used as a basis to build up a model of a profession in Australia, (Chapter Two).

The training requirements for occupations of a professional type are analysed, and certain general conclusions drawn regarding the duration and location of training, the content of the course, and the overall control and administration of the training, (pp.56-57).

Professional associations, such as the British Medical Association, the Law Societies, the Institute of Architects and so on, are examined in regard to their legal status, their constitution and membership, their aims and objectives, their activities and their methods. From this analysis some general conclusions are drawn regarding professional associations, (65-67).

Codes of Ethics, which are acknowledged as characteristic of professions, are examined. The origin and purpose of the Code is discussed. The part played by the professional association and by the statutory committee in regulating the conduct of members is analysed.
From this, the main principles underlying professional conduct are determined and stated, (pp.84-85).

The incomes earned by professional groups are analysed, using, in the first instance, the Reports of the Taxation Commissioner. Differences between the incomes of employed and self-employed professionals are noted. Other evidence relating to the incomes of professional people is examined, (Public Service Salaries, Reports of University Appointments Boards, etc.). Some general conclusions about professional incomes are drawn, (pp.96-97).

The size of professional groups and their distribution within one State, Queensland, are noted. The pattern of the professional life is indicated. The relationship between the size and distribution of the group and certain aspects of professional status is discussed, (pp.97-109).

Teaching is then measured against the professional model. Teacher training is examined and measured against professional training, (Chapter Three). Differences are noted and stated, (pp.137-151). Teachers' Unions are considered as professional associations.
(Chapter Four), and the differences observed and stated, (pp. 196-201). The Teachers' Code of Conduct is examined, (Chapter Five), and the differences between this and the Code of Ethics of a profession are set down, (pp. 226-239). Teachers' Incomes are compared with the incomes of professional people, (Chapter Six), and the difference observed and measured. The size of the teaching group and the dispersion of teachers are considered, (Chapter Seven). The effects of these two factors in producing an occupational pattern different from that of the professions are analysed.

From the differences which have been observed between teaching and the professional model it is possible to analyse the problem of teachers' status more closely, (Chapter Eight). The first argument advanced by teachers, that their occupation is 'an avocation having all the requisites and hallmarks of a profession', is clearly false. The second statement that teaching is making progress towards the position of medicine and law is examined, and it is found that whatever progress there is, is very uneven and very
(vi)

slow. Overall, this claim is not convincing. This leads to the discussion of the third statement about the status of teaching, that 'there are no insuperable impediments to its continued advance towards a professional goal'.

It is apparent that there are factors which tend to make the development of teaching towards the professional model much more difficult than is the case with other occupations. Teachers are all employees, and in rendering the service of education, they must be employees, whereas professional groups are mainly self-employed. Employee status for teachers produces conditions which make the group unlike the professional model.

Total employee status is a disability for teachers in their attempts to be like the professional model; moreover, the State is the largest employer of teachers, and in fact virtually the only employer. The State is also the training authority. The State is also committed to providing a free and compulsory system of education. The largeness of this activity produces problems of finance and recruitment. When such problems arise
the State solves them by diluting the teaching group, and by lowering standards, and by keeping down costs (particularly of teachers' salaries which constitute the greater part of educational expenditure). Even though the service of education is already extensive, costly and expanding, teachers believe that, before teaching will become a profession, certain reforms will have to be introduced to improve the service. These are analysed in terms of extra costs and of additional teachers required. The probability of adequate finance being available and of recruiting sufficient numbers with high intelligence are discussed.

The first set of conclusions are set forth at this stage. Teaching is not a profession such as medicine and law, it is not making much progress towards professional status of this kind, and there are limiting factors of such magnitude that it is extremely unlikely teaching could ever become a profession like these occupations.

It is pointed out, however, that the comparison so far has been between teaching and a model based mainly on the older acknowledged professions of medicine and law.
Although there are reasons why teaching could never become a profession like these occupations, it is important to note that this professional model is itself in process of change. Medicine and law are examined to discover the changes which are taking place. It is possible to see in these changes the outlines of a new professional model. Members will be highly specialised in function and subject to a long course of training at a university; some, but not all, will be salaried employees of the State and of private organisations; the average income will be lower and the margin of the professional group over other occupational groups will be less; the ethical code will become less important as members accept employee status; the professional association will be concerned with economic as well as professional problems; the profession will be more dependent on the State for financial assistance in training and for making the service available at a reasonable cost to greater members in the community; the State will acquire closer control over certain aspects related to the provision of the professional service, probably by
having government nominees on the present governing bodies of the professions.

Although there are seemingly impassible barriers for teachers in their attempts to be like the old style professional model, teaching and the professions could well come together in the form of this new professional model.

Teaching is therefore re-examined and any changes which might take it towards this new model are observed. Some, but not all, of the teaching group, may well advance towards the status of a profession. Advancement will necessitate progress in all aspects of the occupation reviewed in this study. As teaching acquires the characteristics of the new model it will automatically reduce the gap in prestige between it and the professions and consequently teachers as individuals may expect their social status to be closer to that of doctors and lawyers.

Professional status is much more involved than the comments in Teachers' Journals would seem to indicate. It has proved a will-o'-the-wisp for teachers because the old model has been unattainable, yet it is only by striving to be like such a model that teachers may meet the professions in a new place which will be determined by the forces of social change.