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# Policy Reforms and De-professionalization of Teaching

*H. Richard Milner, IV*

Vanderbilt University

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School of Education, University of Colorado Boulder
Boulder, CO 80309-0249
Telephone: (802) 383-0058

Email: NEPC@colorado.edu
http://nepc.colorado.edu

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http://www.greatlakescenter.org
GreatLakesCenter@greatlakescenter.org

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# Policy Reforms and De-professionalization of Teaching

*H. Richard Milner IV, Vanderbilt University*

## Executive Summary

This brief discusses how three recent popular educational reform policies move teaching towards or away from professionalization. These reforms are (1) policies that evaluate teachers based on students' annual standardized test score gains, and specifically, those based on value-added assessment; (2) fast-track teacher preparation and licensure; and (3) scripted, narrowed curricula. These particular policy reforms are considered because of their contemporary prominence and the fact that they directly influence the way teaching is perceived.

This analysis demonstrates that these three reforms, on the whole, lower the professional status of teaching. The pattern is nuanced, however. For instance, value-added teacher evaluation policies could be viewed as increasing professional status by their heavy emphasis on the role teachers can play on student achievement. To the contrary, value-added policies can be considered *de-professionalizing*: pressuring teachers to mechanically teach to tests while systematically devaluing the broader yet essential elements of teaching. Alternative, fast-track teacher preparation programs, such as Teach For America, purport to recruit from academic elites, which can be seen as a step towards professionalization. At the same time, fast-track teacher preparation and licensure programs de-professionalize teaching by the lack of focus on pedagogical training, the small amount of time dedicated to preparing teachers to teach, the assignment of inexperienced personnel to the most challenging schools, and the itinerate nature of these teachers. Scripted and narrowed curriculum could be said to move teaching closer to professional status by defining what should and will be covered. To the contrary, scripted and narrowed curriculum moves teaching away from professionalization by not allowing teachers to rely on their professional judgment to make curricula decisions for student learning, with the consequent sacrifice of higher-level learning, creativity, flexibility, and breadth of learning.

### Recommendations

When the positive and negative effects of these three reforms are weighed together, the scale indicates they are far more de-professionalizing than professionalizing. As the quality

of education provided to the nation's children is dependent upon the professional competencies of teachers, policymakers are provided with the following recommendations:

- As test-based policies such as value-added teacher assessment are prone to excessive error and misclassification and do not validly measure the range of skills necessary for effective teaching, **a moratorium should be placed on their use** until a satisfactory level of accuracy can be achieved in teacher evaluation systems.

- Traditional teacher training programs should consider the extent to which they prepare teachers to make professional judgments, meet the full range of student needs, build positive working conditions, and negotiate and balance multiple layers of bureaucratic pressures. The same questions apply to alternative or fast-track teacher preparation programs. **Policymakers should carefully consider the broader and long-range effectiveness of existing fast-track programs** before expanding or creating new programs of this sort.

- Scripted, narrow curricula can serve a valuable role for novice and underqualified teachers and in locations where an articulated curriculum is not available. They do not represent the full range of necessary learning opportunities for all students in all locations, however. Thus, **a broadening, not narrowing, of the curriculum is needed.** This can only be accomplished by a partial or complete decoupling from test scores the sort of high-stakes consequences that compel the narrowed curriculum.

# Policy Reforms and De-professionalization of Teaching

## Introduction

Since the 20th century, educators have stressed that teaching is complex work requiring particular, specialized kinds of knowledge and skills to be effective.[1] Educators have sought to professionalize[2] teaching, hoping to dispel the idea that teaching is an occupation that anyone can do with success. This push for teacher professionalization has been characterized as a "movement to upgrade the status, training, and working conditions of teachers."[3] Rotherham explained that "true professions are structured like medicine and law."[4] Unlike fields such as medicine, engineering, or law, many believe that one is simply "born to teach," or that if teachers have good intentions or knowledge in a subject matter area like mathematics or history, they will be able to teach effectively. Teaching has been seen as a semi-profession, as an occupation unworthy of professional status.[5] Perhaps because of the compulsory nature of education in the United States and the historical profiles of teachers, teaching has not necessarily been considered or treated as a true profession by the public. Indeed, perceptions of teaching as less than a profession are common inside as well as outside of education.

The perceived status of the teaching profession is the result not only of the general public[6] but of those of other professions and those within teaching itself. According to Ingersoll and Merrill, several dimensions characterize a profession: (1) advanced education—ensuring that those in a field receive professional development and other opportunities for training, knowledge development, and skill-building; (2) disposition towards the profession—ensuring that its members have the opportunity to develop professional attitudes about their work in the service to others; and (3) environmental conditions—being deliberate in constructing organizational and working spaces conducive to production and success.[7] Drawing on work by Ingersoll, Alsalam, Quinn and Bobbitt,[8] Connelly and Rosenberg added several additional defining frames of professionalization. They reported that knowledge construction, both in terms of professional training and induction into teaching, is essential. Establishment of this knowledge and support for the professionals acquiring it were stressed, since professionals develop over time. Professionals are expected to specialize, to develop and "maintain expertise in what they practice."[9] Connelly and Rosenberg determined that professions trust and expect autonomous professional judgment from its practitioners. Further, professionals receive lucrative, competitive pay for the work they do.

Building from sociology, Ingersoll and Merrill framed professionalization around several indicators: "credential and licensing levels, induction and mentoring programs for

entrants, professional development support, opportunities and participation, specialization, authority over decision making, compensation levels, and prestige and occupational social standing."[10]

Challenges to the professionalization of teaching are multifaceted. For instance, teacher preparation is in flux. Unlike countries such as Finland, New Zealand and Italy, the U.S. has few systematic structures to determine agreed-upon areas of teacher development related to their preparation, knowledge, skills and dispositions.[11] The absence of a single

*There are many unresolved questions about whether teaching is in fact considered a profession and whether it should be.*

route into teaching makes it difficult for those either inside or outside teaching to characterize it as a true profession. The lack of control by teachers over the development and implementation of their curricula also stifles professionalization. If teachers are reading from a predetermined pacing guide or script or are teaching to a test they had no input in developing, they are not drawing much from their professional knowledge and judgment, as other professionals are able and expected to do.

Indeed, there are many unresolved questions about whether teaching is in fact considered a profession and whether it should be. While research in a survey study has revealed that prospective teachers believed teaching is a profession,[12] others come to a different conclusion.[13] For instance, Myers found that teaching falls "far short" of achieving professional status.[14] It is beyond the scope of this brief to resolve whether teaching should be considered a profession. However, it does assume that highly qualified and professionalized teaching advances the short- and long-term quality of education in the nation.

This brief discusses how three recent high profile reform policies move teaching towards or away from professionalization. These reforms are (1) policies that evaluate teachers based on students' annual standardized test score gains, exemplified by value-added models, which are the focus here; (2) fast-track teacher preparation and licensure; and (3) scripted, narrowed curricula. These particular policy reforms are considered because they directly influence the practices of most teachers and have a bearing on how those inside and outside of teaching perceive and support the field.

## Teacher Evaluation Policies

In the name of accountability and increased teacher quality, growth models are used to evaluate teachers based on student-performance growth on standardized tests, generally reading and mathematics tests in grades 3-8.[15] While there are a number of growth models, this brief looks specifically at value-added models because of the intense interest they have received in recent years. All states in the U.S. incorporate some version of standardized

testing to gauge student performance.[16] The utilization of these data to evaluate teacher quality is known as value-added assessment.[17] States, districts, and schools use these data in a variety of ways, including teacher termination and incentive pay, as well as to assist teachers in improving their practices.[18] As value-added assessment is a recent policy reform, how might it move teaching closer to or further from professionalization?

## Towards Professionalization

By definition, one might argue that true professions have or should have an evaluative structure in place to determine professionals' effectiveness. In this view, value-added assessment can serve as a mechanism to professionalize teaching because it provides a standardized system to evaluate teachers based on student test-score gains. However, there are many problems with the value-added approach, and until they are adequately addressed, it will be difficult for educators and the public to develop confidence in the technique. For instance, factors outside a teacher's control influence student test scores,[19] including the amount of time parents spend with their children on homework and parents' educational level and income.[20] Durso maintained that "value assigned to the teacher by the prediction method is often called the teacher effect, though generally the extent to which it is caused by the teacher, rather than factors out of the teacher's control, is difficult to determine."[21] Durso's analysis points to the likelihood that value-added formulas cannot adequately address the diversity of learners and the different characteristics and needs of students from day to day. To reiterate, Harris explains that "policies do not account for the fact that student outcomes are produced by more than just schools."[22] Value-added models and practices fail to account for the range of variables shaping student performance, some inside of school, such as teachers and their instructional practices, as well as those outside of school, such as poverty, homelessness, and the location of the home and school.[23]

Measurement concerns are also pervasive regarding value added.[24] Mathis explained:

> Lawmakers should be wary of approaches based in large part on test scores: the error in the measurements is large—which results in many teachers being incorrectly labeled as effective or ineffective; relevant test scores are not available for the students taught by most teachers, given that only certain grade levels and subject areas are tested; and the incentives created by high-stakes use of test scores drive undesirable teaching practices such as curriculum narrowing and teaching to the test.[25]

Briggs and Domingue found that methodological error in value-added models is significant and should be taken into account.[26] A major concern is the margin of error associated with characteristics of particular teachers in measuring teacher quality in isolation from the social environment in which teachers teach and students learn.[27] This error results in frequent misclassification of teacher performance, which, in turn, raises fundamental ethical questions about the use of value-added methods for high-stakes decision making.

Still, although many concerns exist regarding value-added, it can be viewed as moving teaching closer to professionalization by providing a tool for districts to determine student growth on standardized tests. The focus on value added suggests that teachers, indeed, matter.[28] The emphasis on assessing teachers through value added actually helps the field and the general public understand that teachers can make a significant difference with students. Zurawsky declared that "recent studies show clearly that a student can learn more from one teacher than from another and that teachers and schools matter."[29] Yet, individual teachers may have more impact on one group of students than with another. Thus, the actual effect size of teacher effectiveness is debatable. Studies of value-added models for teacher accountability suggest that "teachers differentially affect student learning and growth in achievement. This literature suggests that teacher effects are large, accounting for a significant portion of the variability in growth, and that they persist for at least three to four years."[30]

Sanders and Horn maintained:

> The effectiveness of the teacher is the major determinant of student academic progress.
> Teacher effects on student achievement have been found to be both additive and cumulative with little evidence that subsequent effective teachers can offset the effects of ineffective ones. For these reasons, a component linking teacher effectiveness to student outcomes is a necessary part of any effective educational evaluation system.[31]

Mathis, however, concludes that notwithstanding the importance of teachers to student achievement, their effect size is small: "[T]eacher quality is among the most important within-school factors affecting student achievement. However, research also suggests that teacher differences account for no more than about 15% of differences in students' test score outcomes."[32]

While the research and policy community may disagree on the actual effect size of teachers, the emphasis on value added sends the message that teachers and teaching matter. Educators and the public may thereby be directed to focus on the assumed power teachers can have even though (1) other factors beyond teachers and teaching influence student test-score performance, and (2) serious methodological problems exist with the use of value-added assessment.

## Towards De-professionalization

Value-added models owe much of their appeal to common-sense notions that teacher quality should be measured and compared through some form of systematic evaluation. The danger is that these models may be adopted without proper consideration of their intricate nuances and statistical limitations, the variability in how these measurements are implemented, and the neglect of other vital information that should be considered in evaluating teacher effectiveness. The point is that when news and other media report about

the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of teachers and teaching based mostly on the rise or fall of test scores and without other necessary information to make well-rounded judgments, the field of teaching is subject to unwarranted public criticism and consequently de-professionalization. Indeed, Durso explained that "it is the single score of the teacher-linked effect, particularly the effectiveness classification categories…that the lay reader will be drawn to, and these are unreliable,"[33]

Teachers are often pressured to teach to a test in order to ensure that student growth is evident on exams that do not allow them to rely on their professional judgment. In this way, value-added measurement moves teaching further away from professional status. Williamson and Morgan describe a performance agenda that dominates much of educational policy and results in decreased time "for teachers to connect with, care for and attend to the needs of individual students."[34] Bureaucratic structures that prevent teachers from being responsive to aspects of student development that go beyond student test score gains[35] are at the heart of teacher de-professionalization. As Ladson-Billings points out, teachers must be concerned about students' social success as well as their measured academic achievement on standardized examinations.[36] That is, teachers need to help students with other dimensions such as how to understand, analyze, operate, succeed and function with others both inside and outside of school. Especially in under-served communities, such as those found in some urban environments, researchers agree that teachers should be responsive to student needs that go beyond scores on standardized tests.[37] The need to focus on aspects of student development beyond test score gains is linked to what Delpit called school dependence of some students.[38] In other words, some students rely on educational institutions more than other students for academic, social, and emotional development.

Thus, an exclusive focus on standardized tests can leave school dependent students underserved. Value-added models have forced many teachers to *teach to a test* in the name of accountability, teacher quality, and student gains, narrowly defined.[39] It has been argued that the pressure brought by value-added systems encourages robotic teaching.[40] Clearly, teachers' professional judgment is marginalized by student-test-score pressure. In some cases, teachers' jobs depend on the scores and gains of their students,[41] yet the use of standardized tests for teacher evaluation has not been shown to be a valid and generalizable practice.[42] The push for high test scores undermines the very essence of teachers' creativity and their ability to be responsive to the particular needs of their students, varying as they do from student to student, year to year, and classroom to classroom. Their ability to draw from and put into practice their professional judgment is compromised..

The overarching emphasis on value added raises additional questions: What about all the knowledge and skills students acquire that never show up on standardized tests? Why is some knowledge more important than other knowledge, and who decides the relative importance of different types of knowledge?[43] Criticisms are common among those both inside and outside of education when teachers teach to these tests, but teachers may feel as if they have no choice.  Teachers feel the pressures from within and outside of teaching and act accordingly.[44] This does very little to boost teachers' confidence and their overall

conception of themselves as professionals trusted to make important decisions for their students.

Thus, when the media report gains—or the lack thereof—or when they simply report results on standardized tests, the confidence and public perception of teachers and teaching may be compromised. In this way, the media seem to feed public ambivalence and opinions that teachers are weak and that teaching is not a profession because it has insurmountable problems.[45] Logically, people are concerned and want teachers and the field of teaching "fixed." Still, teachers and their teaching are only one component, albeit a critical one, of what can be called a test score crisis.

Some have responded to the pressures to increase test scores in an extreme manner. For instance, in the Atlanta Public School System, evidence points to teachers and administrators having changed students' answers on the state's competency examination, the Criterion Referenced Competency Test. An investigation indicated "widespread" cheating in the system.[46] Such practices cheat students and also degrade the educational system. The cheating debacle certainly does not increase confidence in teaching or teachers. Pressure associated with value added seems to have played a role in the decision to cheat. Amrein-Beardsley, Berliner and Rideau conducted a study with teachers to determine their cheating practices and developed a taxonomy of cheating to account for the different ways in which teachers in their study defined cheating:

> The purpose of this study was to investigate the types of, and degrees to which, a sample of teachers in Arizona were aware of, or had themselves engaged in test-related cheating practices as a function of the high-stakes testing policies of No Child Left Behind. A near census sample of teachers was surveyed, with valid responses obtained from about 5 percent, totaling just over 3,000 teachers. In addition, one small convenience sample of teachers was interviewed, and another participated in a focus group. *Data revealed that cheating occurs and that educators can be quite clever when doing so*. But how one defines cheating makes it difficult to quantify the frequency with which educators engage in such practices [emphasis added].[47]

By putting a premium on what takes place on one test rather than on what takes place over the entire teaching year, value-added assessment creates pressures and incentives for cheating, which further contributes to moving teaching away from professional status.

## Summary

Value-added assessment seems to move teaching both closer to and further from professional status. On balance, the weight of the evidence indicates it is more de-professionalizing than professionalizing. Certainly, it is necessary to hold teachers accountable to ensure they provide the best environments and opportunities for student learning. In this sense, value-added assessment offers a standardized model that districts across the country can adopt to evaluate teachers, potentially moving teaching towards

professionalization. Moreover, value-added assessment focuses educators and the public on the role teachers may play in student learning.

With the reliance on student test score gains, however, teachers lose their ability to make professional decisions and judgments because someone else, outside of the classroom, determines what should and should not be emphasized in curriculum and instructional decision-making. Teachers are seen to "add value" only when student test scores improve. Standardized tests only measure a particular dimension of knowledge, when students may (and should) be exposed to other learning. Most troubling is the high error band in value-added models, which precludes their ethical use for high-stakes decision making.

Value-added models may also be harmful to teacher professionalization because of public perception of under-nuanced test score results. Negative messages about teachers' abilities often emerge from discussions of value added in the media. So, while it may in some respects move teaching toward professionalization, the push for and utilization of value-added models may simultaneously de-professionalize teaching by negatively influencing public and scholarly perceptions of teachers and teaching. This contradictory dynamic is summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1: Professionalizing and De-professionalizing Aspects of Value-Added Assessment**

| Value Added | |
|---|---|
| Professionalize | De-professionalize |
| **Standardized evaluation system**<br><br>**Teachers matter** | **Pressure on teachers to teach to a test**<br><br>**Under-nuanced reporting of teacher effectiveness through value added**<br><br>**Responses of pressure from value added: teachers cheating to increase student test scores** |

## Alternative, Fast-track Teacher Preparation

If there is a consensus that teacher quality matters, there is less agreement that teacher-preparation programs matter. Teacher shortages in the U.S., particularly in mathematics and science, complicate the issues of how (and if) teachers should be trained, for how long, and at what cost. Vasquez Heilig, Cole and Springel found that "staffing schools is becoming increasingly difficult, especially in historically low-performing schools; schools

that have consistently reported low test scores and poor academic achievement for their students."[48] In their analysis of the National Center for Alternative Certification (NCAC) data, they found:

> In 1984, 275 alternative certificates were issued. By 2009, the number of licenses issued by state-run alternative programs swelled to 59,000. The following year, forty-eight states and the District of Columbia reported having in place at least some type of alternative route to teacher certification, with only Alaska and Oregon abstaining from implementing such programs. As of 2010, there were 136 different paths to certification spread out over nearly 600 programs. Altogether, NCAC data concludes approximately half a million teachers have been placed in classrooms through alternative routes since 1984. In some states, this represents between thirty to fifty percent of new teacher recruits."[49]

Attention has been placed on whether traditional or alternative teacher education programs are more effective[50] based on student performance on standardized tests, teacher persistence and attrition, as well as teacher self-efficacy.[51] Zeichner cautioned, however, that "We need to ensure…that all programs, no matter their structure or who sponsors them, have the necessary components to prepare teachers to successfully begin teaching the diverse learners who are in the public schools."[52] Researchers who examine routes into teaching tend to focus on which routes, traditional or non-traditional, are more effective in order to discount the other. Fewer studies focus on which features of different programs are the most effective.

## Towards Professionalization

One way fast-track teacher preparation seems to move teaching closer to professional status is through the efforts of such programs to recruit high GPA students from prestigious institutions of higher education. Most Teach for America (TFA) "corps" members have earned undergraduate degrees from major, elite higher educational institutions but have rarely earned an undergraduate degree in education.[53] According to the TFA website,

> You [potential Corps members] must have a cumulative undergraduate grade point average (GPA) of 2.50 on a 4.00 scale (as measured by the institution awarding your degree) at the time we receive your application, as well as at the time of graduation. The GPA requirement is mandated by the school districts and credentialing programs with which we work. Graduate school GPAs should not be used or averaged in with undergraduate GPAs. If you are accepted into Teach For America and your final GPA falls below a 2.50, you will forego your position with Teach For America. Applicants must also pass any coursework indicated on their transcript as "in progress" at the time of their interview.[54]

The idea that teachers should graduate from top institutions and have high GPAs likely moves teaching closer to professionalization. Yet a closer examination raises a number of questions about that assumption.

First, one could argue that a 2.5 GPA (C average) is no automatic guarantee that students are the "best and the brightest." Further, is the cumulative GPA of 2.5 really necessary in every subject matter domain? For example, what if a potential teacher earns a 4.0 on a 4.0 scale in mathematics—the subject he or she aspires to teach in a secondary classroom—but earns lower grades in other subjects, resulting in a cumulative GPA of 2.49? More broadly,

> *At the heart of alternative, fast-track teacher certification programs is the assumption that teaching is not difficult work and that anyone who has learned a particular subject has somehow acquired the ability to teach it.*

who decides what it means to be considered the "best and the brightest?" And why is it necessary to recruit TFA members/candidates solely from elite institutions of higher education? This recruitment strategy and the ways it is trumpeted can send the message to the public that teachers from "lesser" institutions are substandard at best.

According to the TFA website, the following universities contributed the largest number of graduating seniors to the TFA program in 2007: University of Michigan—Ann Arbor, University of California-Berkeley, University of Texas-Austin, University of Florida, and University of North Carolina-Charlotte.[55] While other institutions contribute Corps members to TFA, including historically Black institutions such as Spelman and Morehouse Colleges, the institutions that TFA targets are rarely those that are not perceived as prestigious, and these institutions often have disproportionately low enrollments of people of color and the economically disadvantaged. In short, is it possible for outstanding students from less prestigious institutions of higher education to emerge as successful teachers? Moreover, in what ways might the emphasis on recruiting potential teacher candidates from prestigious institutions of higher education limit interest from students of other institutions, in particular, institutions with higher numbers of people of color? TFA inevitably raises perceptions of who teaches and who should be recruited into teaching. But the program's aim regarding the image of teaching, who should teach, and from what institutions teachers should be recruited does little to address the low numbers of teachers of color, especially Black males, in public schools. It is important to note that TFA has worked to increase the numbers of teachers of color into the program, and has made some progress through those efforts.[56] Both TFA and traditional teacher education programs, however, need to place much more attention on the recruitment of teachers of color.

## Towards De-professionalization

Routes into teaching vary from traditional teacher education programs in colleges and universities to nonprofit-organization-sponsored programs such as the New Teacher

Project to Teach for America (TFA). Currently, TFA "is…the largest teacher preparation program in the country,"[57] providing between 10% and 30% of the new teachers hired annually by public school districts in the U.S.[58] The amount of time and the level of support for teacher training and development vary widely between and across different teacher education programs. For example, their duration can vary from four-year undergraduate programs to just a few weeks of training. Such wide variation in credentialing and education is unheard of in other fields, such as medicine or law, and it moves teaching further away from professionalization.

The contradictory evidence about the usefulness of teacher education also likely moves teaching away from professional status. For example, Rotherham argued:

> To date, the research evidence from states as diverse as New York and Louisiana shows that the differences within these various routes into teaching are greater than the differences between them. In other words, who the candidates are and their traits matters more than whether they come through a traditional or alternative route into teaching. The only exception to this is emergency credentialed teachers with no training at all, who underperform other teachers as a group."[59]

This insight suggests that, if the routes into teaching are not important for student success on tests, perhaps teacher preparation or training is a useless enterprise and the traits of teachers—recruiting "born" teachers—should be emphasized over their preparation structure.

On the other hand, Laczko-Kerr and Berliner compared performance by students taught by under-certified teachers with that of students taught by regularly certified teachers. They found that

> students of TFA teachers did not perform significantly different from students of other under-certified teachers, and…that students of certified teachers out-performed students of teachers who were under-certified. This was true on all three subtests of the SAT9—reading, mathematics and language arts. Effect sizes favoring the students of certified teachers were substantial. In reading, mathematics, and language, the students of certified teachers outperformed students of under-certified teachers, including the students of the TFA teachers, by about 2 months on a grade equivalent scale.[60]

This evidence suggests that a more traditional teacher education preparation is necessary and more advantageous for student test-score performance. Laczko-Kerr and Berliner conclude:

> Traditional programs of teacher preparation apparently result in positive effects on the academic achievement of low-income primary school children. Present policies allowing under-certified teachers, including those from the TFA program, to work with our most difficult to teach children appear harmful. Such policies increase differences in achievement between the performance of poor

> children, often immigrant and minority children, and those children who are more advantaged.[61]

The very existence of alternative teacher-certification programs that usher people into teaching without any real intensive training in pedagogical methods—that is, training in how to teach the subject matter—reinforces a perception that teaching is a field that just anyone can do. At the heart of alternative, fast-track teacher certification programs is the assumption that teaching is not difficult work and that anyone who has learned a particular subject such as mathematics, science, or social studies has somehow acquired the ability to teach that subject to students in P-12 schools because he or she will "learn on the job."[62] From this perspective, teacher education programs play a small role, if any, in teacher development and effectiveness.

Too little attention has been paid to the pervasive problem that teachers educated through alternative teacher certification programs such as TFA disproportionately teach in high-poverty urban and rural schools. In other professions, the most talented and skilled professionals are trained and encouraged to solve the most difficult problems. As Veltri has pointed out:

> TFA's emergency certified teachers are not hired in Scarsdale, New York; Greenwich, Connecticut; or Los Altos, California. In those affluent communities, children do not often learn from uncertified teachers. Only in poor, urban [and rural] school districts of mostly minority populations does TFA appear to have the collective ability to "save America's tough schools.[63]

The distinctive nature of the population of students served by TFA was central to Darling-Hammond's provocative critique nearly two decades ago, focusing on the program's training structure, assessments, and operations, in which she concluded: "[Q]uick fixes don't change systems"[64]. Even then, she noted that to join TFA cost more per corps member than a more rigorous master's-degree program at a top graduate school of education at the time. Sixteen years later, Vasquez Heilig found little had changed: In 2010 the estimated cost per TFA recruit was more than $70,000, while a one-year teacher-training program at major institutions costs far less.[65] For instance, the education school most highly ranked by U.S. News and World Report in 2012,[66] Peabody College of Vanderbilt University, costs approximately $1,265 per credit-hour. Master's level students must earn a 32 credit-hours to get a high school teaching credential and degree, costing roughly $40,000 in tuition alone.[67]

The higher costs of TFA, moreover, are born by school districts, not teachers themselves, as Veltri observes: "TFA believes that its brand of TFA training is sufficient for intelligent young recruits to get the hang of teaching, quickly. Districts are hiring TFA teachers with limited experience and not only paying them but paying *for* them."[68] Particularly in light of the excessive costs, Vasquez Heilig recommends that schools turn to TFA teachers only when the hiring pool is inadequate.[69]

In her 1994 critique, Darling-Hammond found that TFA candidates were not well-trained and knowledgeable in learning theory, child development, or pedagogical skills,

particularly in subject matter such as reading—leading her to wonder "how society could sanction programs that deliberately deny teachers access to the knowledge they need to be successful."[70] She found a lack of concern for the students served by TFA recruits, with students and their communities blamed for TFA's lack of success. TFA, she wrote, took a "missionary" approach, with corps members going into underserved communities to "fix" the students, then feeling good about themselves as they left the community and students to do their "real" work, all while reaping the monetary benefits through incentives offered through TFA.[71] "TFA's shortcomings are serious," she concluded, "and they ultimately hurt many schools and the children in them."[72] Sixteen years later, Veltri found the same problems persisted: TFA, Veltri wrote, raises "larger issues surround what constitutes quality education for 'other people's kids.' TFA's rescuer role in high-poverty urban and rural communities is of concern."[73] In these ways, TFA and similar alternative, fast-track routes into teaching move teaching away from professional status.

Another way that fast-track programs such as TFA may contribute to the de-professionalization of teaching is the amount of time its recruits are expected to remain in teaching. According to the TFA website, "We recruit a diverse group of leaders with a record of achievement who work to expand educational opportunity, starting by *teaching for two years* in a low-income community [emphasis added]."[74] This is diametrically opposed to practices in other professional fields. It is inconceivable that there could be a program recruiting individuals into medicine or law with the expectation that they would remain for only two years.

## Summary

Alternative, fast-track routes that recruit the "best and the brightest" into teaching contribute to the image of teaching and move it closer to professional status. Further, the types of elite and prestigious from which teachers are recruited can contribute to the professional status of teaching. Few would argue against the idea that true professions need to recruit smart people, or against recruiting teachers from high-quality institutions of higher education.

At the same time, however, alternative and fast-track routes into teaching also move the field further from professionalization, contributing to a belief that teaching is not complex or difficult work because most alternative routes do not require a degree in teaching. Moreover, unlike fields such as law or medicine in which people are expected to remain in the field to build their knowledge and skill, fast-track teaching route programs often encourage their members to teach for only a few years—even though research suggests that it takes several years in the classroom to build teachers' instructional knowledge, dispositions, abilities, and skillsets.[75] Moreover, the short amount of time required to gain certification and credentialing through fast-track programs moves the field further away from professional status. Research to date cautions policy makers to closely examine the short and long-term implications for educational quality and equity before expanding

these initiatives. Table 2 summarizes their conflicting professionalizing and de-professionalizing influences.

**Table 2: Professionalizing and De-professionalizing Aspects of Alternative, Fast-Track Teacher Preparation**

| Fast Track | |
|---|---|
| Professionalize | De-professionalize |
| **Recruitment of smart corps members**<br><br>**Recruitment from the "best" institutions of higher education** | **Amount of time for prep**<br><br>**Variation in what teachers are expected to know**<br><br>**Lack of pedagogical training**<br><br>**Amount of time teachers are expected to remain in teaching**<br><br>**Hiring under-qualified fast track teachers to work in the most challenging schools** |

## Scripted, Narrowed Curricula

Scripted curriculum is a pre-developed tool that directs teachers on what to say during instruction and when to say it. Given the variation in teacher training and in teachers' ability and skillsets to actually teach, scripted curricula may seem necessary to help teachers know what to teach, when to teach it, and how to teach it. While one view is that teachers should be able to rely on their own professional judgment to construct and implement curriculum, teachers newer to the field as well as those who experience fast-track teacher training may actually benefit from a scripted curriculum. Whether students benefit from this type of curriculum is inconclusive. At the heart of the debate over the appropriateness and usefulness of scripted, narrowed curricula is the question of what knowledge and skills teachers must have to develop and effectively implement a rigorous curriculum for student learning.

### Towards Professionalization

One argument in favor of scripted curricula is that they can increase equity. Common Core standards are scripted curricula in that the content and standards are predetermined and

must be uniformly implemented across different environments. The idea of Common Core[76] standards is to ensure that all students are exposed to the same curriculum regardless of where they live. Working from a standardized curriculum likely moves teaching closer to professional status by providing commonality and transparency for those inside and outside the field. Due to the complex nature of teaching, however, a standardized curriculum is difficult to conceptualize and enact.

Smagorinsky, Lakly and Johnson found that scripted curriculum materials were "unappealing"[77] to students and that the flow and organization of the expected curriculum was incoherent and unresponsive to the particular idiosyncrasies of students and social contexts. So while scripted, narrowed curricula and Common Core standards may provide teaching with a level of professionalization on a broad level, they may be problematic on the classroom level.

Assuming the Common Core reflects broad teacher input, the narrowing of the curriculum likely contributes to the perception that teaching as a field is capable of deciding what is essential for students to learn through the curriculum—in much the same way that physicians, for instance, use their professional training and judgment to diagnose patients and determine treatments. However, while a scripted curriculum may sound ideal, especially in populations of students who have been traditionally underserved, Ede writes that "the diverse ethnic and cultural makeup of today's classrooms makes it unlikely that one single curriculum will meet the needs and interests of all students."[78]

King and Zucker maintain that the impetus to narrow the curriculum was shaped in part by the need for teachers to focus on aspects of the curriculum that would be most likely tested in any given year.[79] The over-emphasis on reading and math to the exclusion of other subject areas narrows the scope of what students are exposed to and have the opportunity to learn. A report published by the Center on Education Policy found:

> Many educators reported that their efforts to align curriculum to standards and focus on tested material in reading and mathematics have diminished the class time available for social studies, science, and other subjects or activities. Our observations of the use of classroom time supported this point.[80]

Similarly, Jerald concluded:

> Some schools might well need to expand instructional time in reading to enable students to become fluent readers. But educators should be made aware that cutting too deeply into social studies, science, and the arts imposes significant long-term costs on students, hampers reading comprehension and thinking skills, increases inequity, and makes the job of secondary level teachers that much harder. Only when teachers and administrators are fully aware of the tradeoffs can they make good decisions about whether, how, and for whom to narrow the curriculum—one educational strategy that should *never* be considered lightly [emphasis in the original].[81]

Cawelti, likewise, questioned the lack of emphasis on the curriculum and learning opportunities that students will miss when the narrowing of the curriculum forces teachers to focus only on math and language arts/reading in the hopes of focusing students on what will be covered on standardized examinations.[82]

Although scripted and narrowed curricula give rise to numerous concerns, the fact that as a field teaching/education has made the decision to streamline curricular opportunities likely moves teaching closer to professional status. However, not allowing teachers the autonomy to develop and implement their own curriculum can leave the public and teachers feeling that teachers are incapable of accomplishing this goal. Additionally, scripted curricula can de-skill teachers[83] and thus move teaching further from professional status.

## Towards De-professionalization

In a classroom where teachers are expected to rely not on their own professional judgment but on predetermined curriculum materials to shape their instructional practices, the use of scripted and narrowed curricula moves teaching away from professionalization. In this view, teachers are to act as automatons rather than as professionals solving the complex problems of teaching and learning. Teaching is seen as technical and mindless, as work that does not require the cognitive ability to be responsive to learners because curriculum decisions have been predetermined by others for them.[84]

The interest in scripted curricula may be directly connected to the push for such alternative routes into teaching such as TFA. The promotion of alternative routes reflects a belief that knowledge of subject matter in a discipline trumps pedagogical knowledge and skill development.[85] TFA corps members have earned degrees in particular disciplines, but typically have no teacher-education training and acquire little, if any, pedagogical knowledge beyond what they may garner informally at some point in their lives; they may need a scripted curriculum. .Once again, though, the idea that people can become teachers possessing knowledge in a particular domain such as science or history without developing the knowledge and skill to teach that subject contributes to the de-professionalization of teaching by creating the perception that teaching knowledge and skill development simply happens along the way.

Especially in schools where resources are scarce, scripted, standardized curricula make it difficult for teachers to understand and respond to the sociological composition of the classroom.[86] In other professions, professionals are expected to be able to learn from the particulars of their working conditions and use their professional judgment in responding to problems they encounter. Scripted curriculum makes that difficult. Examining the Language Arts curriculum in a school district, Smagorinsky, Lakly and Johnson found that the district officials expected teachers across the diverse district to use the same curriculum materials, in the same order, and even at the exact same time of day.[87] The researchers explained that

> [Curriculum] uniformity meant that all students, whether living in an affluent suburb, in the inner city, or on a farm on the fringe of the county would receive the same [curriculum] at the same time…The curriculum [was] further tied to standardized county-wide tests that assessed students after each unit, further pressuring teachers to follow the curriculum guide faithfully.[88]

Scripted curriculum as well as other bureaucratic controls make it difficult or even impossible for teachers to respond to the context and realities of their work. What is necessary for success in a suburban district might look qualitatively different from what is required in a rural or urban environment. By demonstrating a lack of fidelity and trust in teachers' ability to develop their curriculum and to make judgments about when and how it should be applied, a scripted curriculum seems to move teaching further away from professionalization.

Reliance on scripted curricula, and even federal mandates favoring them, move decision-making out of teachers' hands. Scripted-curriculum-development companies such as McGraw Hill, Houghton, and Pearson gross huge profits for curricular materials[89] and play a large role in determining what gets covered in the curriculum. In order to receive Title 1 funding from the federal government, schools must employ such corporately developed and marketed "scientifically-based" curricula.[90] While the voices of educators[91] should be at the forefront of deciding what goes into textbooks, textbook companies still make content decisions based on the economic interests of their companies. That reliance on textbook companies moves teaching further from professional status.

Just as with value-added assessment, determining the effect of scripted curricula on student test scores requires taking into account many complex and interrelated variables: the educational level of students prior to taking standardized exams, whether students have been enrolled in the same school or classroom for the entire academic year,[92] the level of educational assistance students get from their parents, and the kinds of resources available at school for tutoring, remediation, acceleration, and academic support.[93] Ede suggested "test-driven" approaches where "rote memorization" takes precedence over critical thinking for students were problematic.[94] In considering teachers' perceptions and the overall de-professionalization of teaching, Crocco and Costigan provided a compelling perspective:

> Under the curricular and pedagogical impositions of scripted lessons and mandated curriculum, patterns associated nationwide with high-stakes testing, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, and the phenomenon known as the "narrowing of curriculum," new teachers in New York City (NYC) find their personal and professional identity thwarted, creativity and autonomy undermined, and ability to forge relationships with students diminished—all critical factors in their expressed job satisfaction. These indirect consequences of accountability regimen as it operates in NYC may exacerbate new teacher attrition, especially from schools serving low-income students. The data reported here suggest a mixed picture of frustration and anger, alongside determination, resistance, and resilience in the face of these impositions.[95]

In short, while teachers demonstrate an admirable level of tenacity, scripted and narrowed curriculum reform may contribute to the de-professionalization of teaching and the de-skilling of teachers.

## Summary

The development and implementation of scripted curricula seems to have been to assist teachers in knowing what to teach and when to teach it, to support them and their students towards academic success in an equitable manner. For the education field as a whole, being able to identify what matters most and what should be covered seems to move teaching closer to a profession. On a classroom level, however, it appears that scripted, narrowed curricula moves teaching away from professionalization, with teachers expected to rely on predetermined curriculum materials to shape their instructional practices rather than on their own professional judgment. With adequate support, development, and training, teachers can develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions to make curricular and instructional decisions.[96] In classrooms using scripted curricula, though, professional expertise is overshadowed by curriculum manuals, pacing guides, and other materials intended to provide teachers with a scripted roadmap; teachers are to act as automatons rather than professionals. The use of high-stakes testing in conjunction with a scripted curriculum prevents the expansion of the curriculum into the broader purposes of education. Consequently, it is essential to decouple high-stakes consequences from test scores if the curriculum is to be broadened. These findings are summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3: Professionalizing and De-professionalizing Aspects of Scripted, Narrowed Curriculum**

| Scripted, Narrowed Curriculum | |
|---|---|
| Professionalize | De-professionalize |
| **Common, standard curriculum available across contexts**<br><br>**Macro-level professional judgment to streamline what gets taught and covered** | **Teaching is seen as technical work that anyone can do**<br><br>**Lack of teacher autonomy in curriculum decision-making**<br><br>**Emphasis on subject matter knowledge such as science or history rather than pedagogical knowledge** |

## Conclusions

The popular policy reforms explored in this brief— (1) value-added models, (2) fast-track teacher preparation and licensure, and (3) scripted, narrowed curricula—move teaching further away from professional status. Although components of the reforms do offer some features that help the professionalization of teachers and teaching, overall they do little to improve the scholarly and professional status or the public perception of teaching. Each of these reforms arises from a very similar ideology. Few would oppose the idea that teachers

*Although components of the reforms do offer some features that help the professionalization of teachers and teaching, overall they do little to improve its scholarly and professional status or the public perception.*

should be evaluated to determine their effectiveness. In fact, the practice of evaluation itself likely moves teaching closer to professional status. However, using value-added measures to determine teacher effectiveness without understanding and taking into consideration the range of factors that shape student test scores can make it difficult for consumers (the general public, parents, those inside teaching, parents, as well as those in other professions) to respect teachers and teaching when huge gains are not made.

Alternative, fast-track programs like TFA send the message that learning to teach is easy and happens quickly, without any serious consideration of the actual complexity of teacher preparation and pedagogy.[97] Because many of these programs do not require teachers to have a degree in education, programs like TFA suggest that teacher education is not necessary for student development, learning, and outcomes on tests. Additionally, the emphasis on recruiting potential teachers from the most "prestigious" institutions of higher education sends the message that teachers who did not earn their undergraduate or graduate degrees (regardless of the discipline) from "prestigious" colleges and universities are not sufficiently qualified. Moreover, fast-track teacher-training programs like TFA that promote the expectation that Corps members will only teach for two years send a troubling message that devalues teaching as a profession. This moves teaching further away from professional status.

Because scripted, narrowed curricula reduce teachers to minority participation in decisions about what goes into the curriculum and what is cut, it further seems to diminish teaching's professional status. Teachers' ability to make rational decisions based on their professional judgment is undermined by a narrowed, scripted curriculum, and those in the most under-served communities appear to be the most affected. Sadly, with the push towards students learning a static form of knowledge in order to score well on standardized examinations, the idea that education should be designed to help students develop the abilities to solve problems, think, analyze, and critique and construct knowledge, seems to be fading.

An important question is: what is being left out of the education of students in urban schools? For instance, when the curriculum is narrowed in elementary grades to just mathematics and reading, learning opportunities and experiences in subjects from social

studies to physical education are given short shrift. Banks has made it clear that social studies can be a critical subject matter area to develop students into social-justice-minded citizens who can solve complicated problems for their communities and beyond:

> [T]he world's greatest problems do not result from people being unable to read and write. They result from people in the world—from different cultures, races, religious and nations—being unable to get along and to work together to solve the world's intractable problems such as global warming, the AIDS epidemic, poverty, racism, sexism, and war.[98]

Yet narrowed-curriculum reforms tend to decrease social studies. Moreover, with decreased physical activity and with debilitating diseases such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol growing among youth, professional judgment might suggest that physical education should be increased rather than decreased in schools.

Taken together, these three policy reforms seem to overwhelmingly undermine teaching as a profession.

## Recommendations

When the positive and negative effects of these three reforms are weighed together, the scale indicates they are far more de-professionalizing than professionalizing. As the quality of education provided to the nation's children is dependent upon the professional competencies of teachers, policymakers are provided with the following recommendations:

- As test-based policies such as value-added teacher assessment are prone to excessive error and misclassification and do not validly measure the range of skills necessary for effective teaching, a moratorium should be placed on their use until a satisfactory level of accuracy can be achieved in teacher evaluation systems.

- Traditional teacher training programs should consider the extent to which they prepare teachers to make professional judgments, meet the full range of student needs, build positive working conditions, and negotiate and balance multiple layers of bureaucratic pressures. The same questions apply to alternative or fast-track teacher preparation programs. Policymakers should carefully consider the broader and long-range effectiveness of existing fast-track programs before expanding or creating new programs of this sort.

- Scripted, narrow curricula can serve a valuable role for novice and underqualified teachers and in locations where an articulated curriculum is not available. They do not represent the full range of necessary learning opportunities for all students in all locations, however. Thus, a broadening, not narrowing, of the curriculum is needed. This can only be accomplished by a partial or complete decoupling from test scores the sort of high-stakes consequences that compel the narrowed curriculum.

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At present, 45 states in the U.S. have formally adopted the Common Core Standards (http://www.corestandards.org/). According to the website, an important aim of the Common Core Standards Movement is to ensure that:

> The standards clearly communicate what is expected of students at each grade level. This will allow our teachers to be better equipped to know exactly what they need to help students learn and establish individualized benchmarks for them. The Common Core State Standards focus on core conceptual understandings and procedures starting in the early grades, thus enabling teachers to take the time needed to teach core concepts and procedures well—and to give students the opportunity to master them. (Retrieved February 27, 2013, from http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards.)

Few would argue against the idea of providing a conduit for more effective communication between parents and teachers. What is not well communicated and addressed in the Common Core Standards is how to assist teachers in interpreting "common" standards to address uncommon problems in schools. Because there is no empirical data available on the effectiveness of the standards, it is difficult to determine how teachers will address and implement them. Mathis reminded readers that an essential element to understand regarding the implementation of Common Core Standards will be how they are actually used and implemented through instruction in the classroom. See

Mathis, W. (2012). *Research-based options for education policymaking—Section 2: Common Core Standards*. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center. Retrieved February 27, 2013, from http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/options.

In this way, while Common Core Standards may provide broad and conceptual understandings about what will be taught, teachers will need to be educated to understand how to implement the standards in order to ensure that they are addressing the myriad needs students bring into the classroom.

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Shulman, L.S (1987). Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform. *Harvard Educational Review, 19*(2), 4-14.

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Also, see

Westheimer, J. (2011). No child left thinking: Democracy at-risk in American schools. *Colleagues*, *3*(2), 8;

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