PROFESSIONALISM AND THE ROAD TO BECOMING A PROFESSION

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Definitions

Two Broad Categories of Professional Regulation:

> 1. Private Credentialing
>   a) registration
>   b) certification
>
> 2. Public Credentialing
>   a) registration
>   b) certification
>   c) licensing (can only be done by the public sector)

Registration
> "...a listing or registry of persons identifying themselves with (an) occupational activity… A private association issuing such a register does not have police powers… The unregistered practitioner does not draw penalties... for engaging in the occupation unless the practitioner claims to be registered. Registration provides few restrictions on the practitioner, but does provide the client or consumer with a listing of vendors who have met certain standards" (Hardcastle, 1984, p.828).

"Public" registration means that there exists some legislated or legal control of title, but police powers are limited to penalties for misuse of title, i.e., the state is merely performing the same function as the private association.

Certification
> "...involves the issuance of credentials when the professional association attests that a person has obtained a specific level of knowledge and skill… Similar to registration, certification does not prohibit uncertified practitioners from engaging in the occupational activity, but it does prevent their use of the term 'certified'… (however) it lists vendors according to the certification criteria and makes a more finite Judgment as to the practitioner's competency… (and) provides the public with an a priori Judgment of the competency of certified practitioners… the certifying group cannot enforce its definition of competency over all who work in the occupation; it can only enforce the definition over practitioners choosing to be certified" (Hardcastle, 1983, p.828).

In a sense, it is only a trademark. "Public" certification means that there exists some legislated or legal control of title, but police powers are limited to penalties for misuse of title, i.e., the state is merely performing the same function as the private association.

Licensing
> "...represents a quantum leap over registration and certification… it prevents the unlicensed practitioner from engaging in the occupational activity. Licensing, in effect, grants the profession a monopoly over the occupational activity… (and) it is a 'process by which an agency of government grants permission to an individual to engage in a given occupation upon finding that the applicant has attained the minimal degree of competency required to ensure that the public

health, safety, and welfare will be reasonably protected* (Shimberg and Roederer)" (Hardcastle,1983, p. 830).

Licensing controls not only title, but practice. It is a mechanism by which "the state decrees that persons may not engage in particular economic activities and behaviour, except within the specific conditions set forth by the authority of the state and under its regulatory power" (Proposed Social Work and Social Services Personnel Act, Discussion Draft Number 2, April 1980, p. 1. "Licensing states explicitly the requirements for knowledge and skills, describes how these are to be obtained and demonstrated, and uses the state's regulatory or police powers to enforce the definition of standards and behaviours" (Hardcastle, 1983, p. 830).

Licensing as a Profession and Licensing as an Occupation Differ; Professions Must:
1. "Perform a relatively specific, socially necessary function upon the regular performance of which the practitioner depends for livelihood and social status
2. Require competence in special techniques based on a body of generalized knowledge requiring theoretical study
3. Possess a generally accepted ethic that subordinates private interests to performance
4. Have formal professional associations that foster ethics and standards of competency"
(Hardcastle, 1983, p. 831, citing the Council of State Governments, 1952)

David A. Hardcastle, "Certification, Licensure, and Other Forms of Regulation", Handbook of Clinical Social Work, Aaron Rosenblatt and Diana Waldfogel, General Editors. San Francisco: Jossy-Bass, 1983.

Identifying Characteristics of Professions
Various authors have overlapping definitions concerning what separates professions from occupations:

1. A long and arduous formal education followed by stiff examinations for entry into a profession
2. Community approval of members reflected in formal individual licensure and, where appropriate, certification of specialty competence
3. A code of ethics governing the conduct of members
4. A well-recognized body of systematic knowledge and technical skills
5. Self-regulation and a great deal of autonomy with the authority to discipline members who do not comply with the rules

Douglas C. Cameron (then President, R.C.P.S.C.), "Certification of Professional Competence", Annals. Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada: January 1980

Professions Must Possess
1. Theory
2. Authority
3. Community sanction
4. Ethical codes
5. A culture of their own

Ernest Greenwood, "Attributes of a Profession", Emergence of Social Welfare and Social Work, N. Gilbert and H. Specht, Editors. Itasca, Illinois: Peacock Publishers, 1976, pp. 302-318.

1. "Practice is founded upon a base of theoretical, esoteric knowledge."
2. "The acquisition of knowledge requires a long period of education and socialization."
3. "Practitioners are motivated by an ideal of altruistic service rather than the pursuit of material and economic gain."

4. "Careful control is exercised over recruitment, training, certification and standards of practice."
5. The colleague group is well organized and has disciplinary powers to enforce a code of ethical practice."

Gordon Rose, citing Leggett (1970), "Issues in Professionalism", <u>A Design for Social Work Practice</u>, F. D. Perlmutter. New York: Columbia University Press, 1974.

What It Means to Belong to a Profession
Entering a profession is often a conscious choice based on the status, intelligence, and power needs of an individual… but these, alone, will not sustain one long in a profession nor will these, alone, make one tolerable to one's colleagues or the general public.

There are some attributes of professions and professionals which are not enumerated in the objective lists of their characteristics, but they represent, I believe, why professions are attractive and, always, special. This, then, is the subjective and qualitative list, rather than the objective and quantitative one.

Professionals believe in their discipline and in their right to profess it, and they exercise, as well, a self-discipline of effort, attention, and commitment that lasts a lifetime. This takes courage, and it takes persistence...but you will also share most of your working life with those who approach life and work in the same fashion. While it is true that, as a professional, you will likely enjoy greater benefits in this society than the average person, you will learn (if you do not already know) that the price for a position of relative privilege is exacted in a higher standard of behaviour and service, both in your professional and in your personal life, and that this standard is legally enforceable. In short, because you are more, and have more, more is expected of you. With your greater freedom goes greater responsibility. If this statement sounds to you like a challenge that you greet eagerly, then you are right in pursuing professional status; if it sounds to you like a burden, you should make a "basic career decision".

Professionals are comfortable possessing a high degree of responsibility and, equally important, they are comfortable with the authority which accompanies it. They may well insist on their own authority and the authority of the past, the kind of expertise that is built-up, over time, in any profession. This is sometimes misperceived by the public as "professional arrogance".

Perhaps the most appealing facet of any profession is its sense of inter-generational continuity. Here, professions differ most dramatically from occupations. Any profession is always building, always adding to its knowledge base, and to its history. Only in a profession are one's ancestors and one's predecessors so valued as they grow in wisdom as they do in age. A profession is a good place to come of age and to grow old in America. As someone was a mentor to you, so you may become, to a new generation in your field… and all that you have learned, all that you have gained, is a bequest to them. This is a far cry from the kind of short-term thinking which emanates from many occupations, where competitiveness rules out collegial effort and life-long bonds with one's peers. Professions are an endeavour for generations of people, and each individual professional knows that he or she has a critical role to play in that effort, and feels it is a worthwhile venture. If this kind of discipline, self-possession, comfort with both authority and responsibility, and a sense of inter-generational commitment challenge rather than concern you, welcome to your profession. [Christopher Lasch. <u>The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations</u>. New York: Norton, 1979].

<u>The addition below was handwritten…</u>

On The Other Hand….

There are "Traits, Process, and Power" Models for Professions.

1. Traits:

"…list of fixed criteria…"
e.g. Abraham Flexner, "Is Social Work a Profession?" 1919.

2. Process:
Occupations span a continuum of professional attributes."
Caplowe & Wilensky's "life history" of occupations and "sequence of steps.

- "… becomes a full-time paid activity…"
- "… establishes university training…"
- "… forms a national organization…"
- "… redefines the core tasks so as to give 'dirty work' to subordinates…"
- "…experiences conflict between old-timers (qualified though experience) and new people (qualified through education)…"
- "… experiences conflict with neighbouring occupations…"
- "… begins to gain legal protection through political agitation…"
- "… develops a code of ethics…"
- Conclusion: "… professional is a process with many different occupations at many points in the continuum."

3. Power:
"… descriptions of a certain pattern of occupational control… a dominant position in a division of labor."

Source: Philip R. Popple. "The Social Work Profession: A Reconceptualization", <u>Social Service Review</u>, 59(4): 560-577, 1985.