

**Sexton, Michael, 2005, *Teaching as a Profession. A Study of how Irish Second-level Teachers View Themselves as Professionals.***

## **ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION**

This study examines how Irish second-level teachers view themselves as professionals. As such, it is essentially concerned with exploring the twin concepts of *professionalisation* and *professionalism* as they relate to the work that teachers do. Two research questions are posed: the first asks whether these teachers consider themselves to be professionalised by reference to the attributes of the classical professions or rather by reference to the internal attributes of teaching (this brings the study into the area of teacher professionalism); the second asks what they consider the essential attributes of teacher professionalism to be.

The review of the related literature examines the concepts of profession from a historical perspective, and the concepts of professionalisation and professionalism from sociological and ideological perspectives. The traditional attribute-based approach to the examination of professionalisation is reviewed, followed by an examination of such issues as the nature of the teaching knowledge base and the moral basis of teaching as they relate to teacher professionalism.

To answer the research questions, this study sets about evaluating how teachers view themselves as professionals relative to the concepts of professionalisation (Approach 1) and professionalism (Approach 2). Data relating to the first approach are gathered by means of a questionnaire, while a limited series of interviews and a second questionnaire are used to obtain data relating to the second approach. The questionnaires are largely quantitative in nature, though a limited qualitative element is included. The survey involved 119 teachers and was carried out in five schools of various types and in a variety of locations, both urban and rural.

The central finding in relation to the first research question is that Irish second-level teachers do to a significant extent consider themselves to be professionalised by reference to the attributes of the classical professions — though limitations are recognised in relation to such issues as the nature of the knowledge base and the quality of training received. Primarily however, they view themselves as professionalised by reference to the internal qualities of teaching (that is to say teacher professionalism) — though this professionalism is seen largely in pragmatic, school-based terms rather than in moral or philosophical terms. With reference to the second research question, the essential attributes of this professionalism are listed.