The Career Ladder and Lattice: 
A New Look at the Teaching Career

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Recent concern over the quality of teachers staffing the nation’s schools has prompted widespread development of educational reform packages designed to improve the teaching profession. Stemming from this effort has been the notion that a teaching career must be structured as a career ladder, progressing from informal elementary instructional tasks to full-time responsibilities in the gymnasium. In this paper we discuss some of the assumptions underlying career ladders in order to highlight their strengths and, more particularly, their weaknesses. We suggest that career ladders address not the true needs of teachers but rather the evaluation needs of administrators. As such, career ladders are not a good means of promoting teacher development. We offer the notion of the career lattice as an alternative means of meeting the motivational needs of teachers.

Educational reformers have highlighted a number of factors as being of concern in the drive to improve public education. One factor has been quality of teachers staffing the nation’s schools. It is widely believed that we can improve the quality of education by improving the quality of teachers. The issue has been to find ways of recruiting and then retaining capable teachers. Such concerns have prompted two major questions: What can be done to change the teaching profession so that more bright graduates will be attracted to it? What can be done to motivate talented teachers to remain in teaching? The concept of the career ladder has been widely acclaimed as a means to improve teaching by motivating teachers through a clearly delineated set of career steps. The notion of the career ladder has gained support at both local and state levels across the country during the past 5 years. At present, at least 27 states are pursuing some type of teacher-related reform that involves a career ladder (Program Planners, Inc., 1985).

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What is a Career Ladder?

Teacher-related reform programs are known by a variety of names, such as differentiated staffing and performance-based compensation. Typically, career ladder programs are characterized by some form of differential staffing, for example, by ranking teachers as apprentice, associate, or master teachers. These rankings depend on experience, education and, most significantly, performance evaluation. Although there are variations from locale to locale, the typical career ladder has four rungs (stages, steps, or levels), depending on the terminology employed (Association of Teacher Educators, 1985). (See Figure 1.)

The entry level position is that of teacher. At this level the novice educator typically only instructs students and has no additional professional responsibilities. To ease the process of induction into teaching, Level I or entry level teachers are assisted in various ways by teachers at Levels II, III, and IV.

The Level II teacher is sometimes referred to as an associate teacher. In addition to full instructional demands, associates are assigned other professional

![Career ladder concept](image-url)
responsibilities such as supervising student teachers or serving as mentors to novice teacher colleagues.

Level III, or senior teachers, although responsible for instruction, spend less time with students and more time on in-service education, curriculum development, and similar professional duties. Level IV, or master teachers, spend no more than 50% of their time instructing students. They are responsible for planning and organizing activities ranging from developing curriculum materials and preservice teacher education to evaluating teachers below them on the ladder to participating in research projects. Many career ladder systems mandate transition years between levels so that teachers have time to learn new skills and roles before being evaluated for advancement.

What are the real strengths of career ladders, in terms of the teaching profession in general and physical educators in particular? The greatest benefit of a career ladder is that it gives some degree of “career-staging” to a formerly career-less career (Lortie, 1975). It offers a succession of hierarchically related jobs, with increasing prestige, recognition, and material benefits. Some of the assumptions underlying the notion of career ladder relative to teacher development include these (Association of Teacher Educators, 1985):

1. Rewarding outstanding teachers improves schools and teacher morale.
2. A career ladder helps identify levels of competence in teaching and enables a school to use its staff most effectively.
3. A career ladder provides incentives throughout a teaching career. From a teacher preparation viewpoint, there are two additional assumptions:
4. A career ladder encourages a better pattern of initial teacher preparation and improves the process of induction into teaching, while giving focus to ongoing staff development.
5. A career ladder sharpens the role of teacher education institutions in both initial preparation and continuing professional development.

Career ladders have several aims with regard to teacher retention. They offer motivation for teachers to improve their skills in order to advance to higher levels, and reward them for doing so. They also facilitate the identification of exemplary teachers for the purpose of acting as mentors to student interns, student teachers, and probationary-year teachers. (A related benefit of career ladders is their potential to improve the transition from student to teacher, as well as to bridge the gulf that often separates these two roles.)

Career ladders can provide regular “cooling-out” points for disillusioned, burned-out, or dissatisfied teachers, thus making room for new recruits. Finally, career ladders should increase teacher accountability and encourage more adequate and equitable methods of teacher evaluation.

The issue of evaluation is an important one. Although the rationale behind career ladders has been one of fostering teacher development, the major drive for such ladders has come not from teachers but from governors such as Lamar Alexander of Tennessee and state legislatures like Florida’s. This leads us to ask in whose interests career ladders are being implemented and begs the question Cui bono: Who benefits?

Representatives of both the National Education Association (Gary Watts) and the American Federation of Teachers (Albert Shanker) have been lukewarm
at best about many career ladder proposals (Pipho, 1984). We believe that such responses are best understood in terms of Herzberg's (1959, 1966, 1976) Motivation-Hygiene theory of management (see Figure 2).

Herzberg noted that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are not polar opposites but instead are different concepts. What makes a person happy about a job is the work itself, achievement, and responsibility—all factors that lead to psychological growth. These are the equivalent of the very important psychic rewards in teaching. Promoting such growth requires a human relations approach by management. Herzberg related job dissatisfaction to working conditions, salary, and how workers (in this case teachers) are treated. These problems could be improved through scientific management techniques (Callahan, 1962). In Herzberg's terms, the former are motivation needs, the latter are hygiene factors. Meeting hygiene needs only averts dissatisfaction; it does not institute motivation.

Based on this theory, career ladders address the needs of the system but not the true development of teachers. In effect, only the hygiene needs of teachers are being met, but not their motivation needs. In other words, administrators are fostering a scientific management approach, similar to that outlined by F.W. Taylor at the turn of the century, by stressing incentives and rewards (which, in Herzberg's terms, counter job dissatisfaction) rather than a human relations approach. By stressing human relations, motivation comes from psychic rewards, psychological growth and professional autonomy. These are the motivation needs that, according to Herzberg, bring job satisfaction.

Another criticism of career ladders is that they will be nothing more than job ladders, thereby further undermining the status of teaching as a profession. The career ladder may become an evaluation-driven mechanism, peopled mainly by administrators, because of the political pressure for states to implement career ladders to increase teacher accountability. We believe this is a likely though perhaps unintended outcome of a career ladder system. For in implementing what F.W. Taylor would refer to as “quality control” (Callahan, 1962), the tendency is to encourage competence through standardization rather than excellence through motivation. This, we believe, would be disastrous.

**Evaluation and a “One Best System” of Pedagogy**

We fear that career ladders may encourage a “one best system” of pedagogical practice in which teachers learn only those skills necessary to “pass the test” and move from one rung on the job ladder to the next. A physical educator who truly wanted to move from a Level I instructor to a Level II physical educator may be tempted to adopt the “party line.” Because of this pressure, we might discourage and lose rather than retain innovative, creative physical educators. An unintended consequence of the career ladder program could be as damaging as its intended outcome is strengthening.

Although a career ladder system of evaluation may lead to identification of competence levels in teaching to improve classroom practice, the question is, identification by whom? We worry that in a push for teachers to focus on more easily evaluated, objective, measurable, behavioral outcomes, the art or craft of teaching physical education may become subservient to rather than an equal partner with the “science” of teaching. This issue is being faced and even overcome, as evidenced by the efforts of Phillip Schlechty and his colleagues in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools of North Carolina (Schlechty, 1985). To resolve the issues of evaluation satisfactorily, however, teachers must have as much input as administrators and legislators in devising evaluation instruments and processes. Teachers must have a say in the standards demanded of their own profession. Furthermore, there should be no quotas for the numbers of people eligible for each rank/rung/level. If this happens, then the career ladder becomes a puppet of the budget rather than a tool of teacher development.

In stressing the danger of evaluation driving the system, we have implied that administrators and legislators will wield more power in the gymnasium than they already do. In fact, the majority of career ladder plans call for a system of evaluation in which a broad range of interested parties participate. Although this may be perceived as making the evaluation system fairer, we believe it will also make it very unwieldly. There may be a temptation to focus primarily on student learning measures such as mastering-learning, with their accompanying limitations as objective measures, rather than trying to find new systems that don’t merely settle for the efficient competence of the quality control mentality but actually promote excellence. We hope the evaluation unit does not become a self-serving enterprise, rewarding those who were mentored through one system at the expense of those who didn’t go to the “right” school. (This type of networking exists to a limited degree in the state of New York with the selection of question-writers for the Regent’s exams [Fleury, 1985]. A dangerous precedent would be set if this is allowed to happen.)
An Emphasis on Instruction

As if the problems of evaluation did not provide enough concern, we foresee a far more damaging potential consequence in instruction resulting from a career ladder system. One of the attractions of teaching has traditionally been the high degree of autonomy and responsibility afforded the teacher from the first day he or she enters the classroom or gymnasium. This is one of the most appealing aspects of teaching's "subjective warrant" (Lortie, 1975). A state-mandated, evaluation-driven ladder system can only limit a teacher's autonomy. This will negatively affect the subjective warrant of teaching in general, and thus of teaching physical education in particular.

Furthermore, because of the emphasis on instruction at the lower levels of the career ladder, teachers at the entry level, and to a lesser degree at Level II, will be responsible only for the execution of skills and not for their conception. We will be encouraging the isolated execution of someone else's plans—the ultimate in scientific management! To use Apple's notion (1982), we will be "de-skilling" our teachers in the interests of efficiency and productivity rather than re-skilling them in the interests of their own development and thus their job satisfaction and motivation. We may therefore have the unintended consequence of cooling out, in the very early stages of their careers, talented inductees who want more from being educators than becoming instructional technicians. For a beginning physical educator to be told what to teach, when, to whom, and how to teach it in order to best satisfy the evaluation unit seems to be a worse scenario than that already faced by beginning teachers.

We do believe that good things can come from career ladders for teachers and students, however, but only if they are used primarily as a tool for teacher development and not for summative evaluation.

Career Ladders and Teacher Education

Career ladders, effectively designed and implemented, can have positive consequences in terms of teacher preparation:

1. The student teaching experience will become less haphazard. Exemplary teachers will be identified by a district or state system, and cooperating teachers will be properly remunerated for their efforts with students, because their involvement would be counted as part of their teaching load.

2. The end of student teaching will not be a point of closure. Career ladders promote the fact that learning to teach well is a lifelong process; teacher preparation institutions can persuade their students, and themselves, that the production of seasoned professionals is not their goal. If properly articulated, the transition from student teaching in physical education to teaching students physical education should become much smoother and aid in the retention of first-year teachers.

3. Ladders will further encourage in-service and continuing education of teachers at all levels. Learning to teach requires practice and reflection. Teacher preparation institutions could offer summer workshops or seminar series for graduates as an ongoing program once they are initially certified at Level I. These institutions need to help ensure that graduates have both feet securely planted on the first rung of the career ladder.
All of the above are based on the assumption that the relationship between public schools and teacher preparation institutions is well articulated. Where this is not the case, we in teacher preparation institutions should be striving toward it. What are the possible outcomes if this articulation is poor or if a performance-based career ladder system starts to drive the teacher preparation system?

If articulation is poor, it seems likely that little will change in terms of teacher preparation. First-year teachers will have to rely on the safety net of the career ladder's Level I to help them through the induction process. This may be preferable to the present system, which offers little organized help for beginning teachers, but it would be best if the teacher preparation institution offered its graduates ongoing support.

If a performance-based career ladder system begins to drive the teacher preparation system, we foresee serious problems. Perhaps the most serious is that teacher preparation institutions might narrow their focus to preparing students for success in gaining permanent Level I status. That is, their aim would be solely to produce good instructors with the skills to move from Level I to Level II, rather than concentrating on preparing flexible, reflective, well-rounded, informed educators. This would be particularly serious if institutional accreditation were to be evaluated in any way on the basis of graduates' success as Level I instructors. Teacher preparation institutions would then become party to "de-skilling" teaching; and in a performance-based evaluation driven system in which quality control and scientific management techniques were king, this would surely be a possibility.

Concerning physical education, such de-skilling would be particularly serious, because we are already accused by some of knowing only the how-to with little understanding of the why of teaching. Physical educators as well as art and music teachers need more than ever to be able to justify their presence in schools at a time when teaching problem-solving skills, higher-order thinking skills, and computer literacy is the order of the day. We must be able to persuade our colleagues and our clientele that being physically "literate" is also of primary importance for tomorrow's citizens.

We have suggested that career ladders focus primarily on the hygiene elements in Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory. Although the rewards and incentives of career ladders may limit the potential job dissatisfaction of teachers, they do little to alter the career possibilities for teachers; thus they do not promote greater job satisfaction in Herzberg's terms.

As presently conceived, career ladders limit autonomy at the lower levels and thus may negatively affect both the retention levels of young physical education teachers and the subjective warrant for teaching physical education. Physical education already attracts recruits with low GPAs and low scores on national aptitude tests (Templin, Woodford, & Mulling, 1982). If the physical education profession already attracts people with the specific disposition of, and interest in being, physical activity instructors, we may do further damage in terms of our subjective warrant by de-skilling our future physical educators and further jeopardizing the quality of the teaching/learning process in physical education.

**Alternative Career Perspectives**

The underlying assumption of those who stress career ladders as a means of promoting teacher development and career advancement is that teachers see,
or want to see, their lives in objective, even materialistic, terms. We do not believe that teachers necessarily see themselves as individual agents competing for personal advancement and promotion. One problem with structuring teaching careers as ladders is that we are further bureaucratizing the existing system—a system in which any movement is either up, down, or off the ladder. Our career analysis then is seen only in materialistic terms wherein individuals compete for personal advancement. We dehumanize teaching if we view it in this way. Evaluation becomes the equivalent of quality control and is in the hands of the evaluation unit or its business equivalent, the senior management team. Before we know it, teacher preparation institutions will have to offer warranties on their products!

Certainly there is a need to offer hope for improved instruction to parents and for a structured sequence of posts to teachers who see their career in those objective terms. There also is a need to stress the subjective aspect so that teachers can define their careers in their own terms. Hughes (1937) described this approach as "'the moving perspective' in which people see their lives 'as a whole' and through which they interpret the meaning of their various attributes, actions, and the things which happen to them" (p. 27). Although a career ladder can aid and abet the process of improving the quality of instruction in physical education, it needs to be embedded within a broader framework that improves the educational experience for teachers as well as for students.

It is in identifying this need to benefit teachers and their development that the notion of a career lattice has been broached as a means of increasing the options available to teachers in career paths and patterns. The lattice offers teachers the opportunity to extend themselves, do the things they are best at, and to concentrate on tasks in which they can contribute most. A career lattice would benefit students by promoting greater motivation and job satisfaction for teachers and would bring greater efficiency for school systems through the improved utilization of their human resources.

The career lattice would combine the career ladder idea of growing into progressively more responsible positions with the notion of variety in terms of roles adopted and activities performed. In effect, the lattice is an attempt to offer lateral movement within education as well as the traditional up and down options available with the ladder concept. The lattice implies a network of relationships (California Round Table on Educational Opportunity, 1984). It more fully reflects the subjective career experiences desired by many teachers (Ball & Goodson, 1985) and thus, we believe, would both improve the subjective warrant of teaching and increase the motivation to remain in the profession.

Physical educators have been employing a nascent form of the career lattice for many years by taking on the major roles of both teacher and coach. However, the present teaching structure has only brought role conflict to this effort. Many physical educators are specifically employed to perform both roles in their school. Conflict between the two roles arises because schools and their reward systems, remuneration and consideration, are not structured accordingly. Kneer (1987) has suggested that the two major causes of teacher/coach conflict are time (in terms of teaching load) and values. She offers a number of viable solutions to the problem, two of which involve separating teaching from coaching.

Yet if interscholastic competition is to maintain its scholastic base and educational value, then the solution to the problem of role conflict is not to be found by separating those roles. Rather, the solution would be better conceived as being contained within the lattice concept. Reducing the teaching load of physical
educators who have coaching responsibilities would decrease the level of job satisfaction (hygiene) caused by the role conflict. It would increase job satisfaction (motivation) in that qualified physical educators could use their talents in both areas fully and could gain recognition and achievement for their efforts without suffering the dissatisfaction and guilt associated with role conflict.

If the lattice concept were extended beyond the simple teacher/coach roles, then physical educators at all levels could be more involved in such activities as performance measurement, discipline, tutoring, counseling, administration, curriculum development, program evaluation, and research. The advantages of the lattice, which incorporates the ladder, over the ladder alone include the following:

1. Career diversity for educators;
2. Differentiated roles;
3. Opportunities for advancement without leaving the gymnasium;
4. An increased sense of profession;
5. A cadre or community of educators, rather than subject matter specialists, administrators, and so forth;
6. Opportunities for staff to utilize their skills and interests to maximum effect;
7. Reskilling of physical educators by combining the elements of conception and execution in the educational process (California Round Table, 1984).

The lattice concept would force institutions involved in teacher preparation to rethink and restructure their programs. Questions of subject matter knowledge, professional education, and pedagogical skills must all be addressed so as to clarify the focus (although not necessarily unify the vision) in teacher preparation for the future. If the education of our children and the professional lives of teachers are to be improved and enriched, then we must restructure teaching in terms of a lattice. We should not go on trying to improve a system that can only meet the hygiene needs and not the far more important motivation needs of teachers. This is not teacher development. Only a new structure such as that suggested by the lattice concept can truly address the issue of teacher development.

Talk is cheap, and talk of lattices is no exception. States and local districts have found that adopting ladder programs can be extremely expensive. Lattice programs will undoubtedly be even more so. But career development is a vital issue in recruiting and retaining talented teachers. If we are to re-form education, merely strengthening the rungs of a ladder that already exists will not suffice. A reshaping of the structure is necessary. We believe the career lattice has the potential to achieve this and would more fully reflect the subjective career experiences desired by many teachers.

At present the lattice is little more than a dream. Further conceptualization and research can determine whether it is a dream worth pursuing, but we believe it bears promise. Improvement of the quality of life for teachers, and thus improved education, would be better broached through truly stressing teacher development. This would involve addressing the problems of (a) recruitment of teachers, including physical education teachers, by improving teaching's subjective warrant; (b) retaining more talented teachers through better career staging
and the use of the lattice system; and (c) seeing teaching in human relations terms—as a problem of motivating teachers rather than trying to improve schools by addressing only hygiene needs (thereby further imposing on teachers the techniques of scientific management drawn from business and the technical rationality that that implies).

References