Conceptual Framework of Teacher Prestige and Well-Being: Regional Aspects

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents a comparative analysis of sociological data concerning teachers working in the Sverdlovsk region (Russian Federation). The data were collected in 1989, 2016, and 2021. The surveys investigated social ideas and stereotypes reflecting public attitudes towards teachers in Russia and teaching communities. The research is based on a hybrid multi-paradigm methodology comprising systemic, structural, functional, generalized, temporal, and procedural descriptions. We used the data obtained from questionnaires surveying teachers in 1989 (n = 1183 participants), 2016 (n = 529 participants), 2021 (n = 412 participants). Data processing was carried out with the help of the VORTEX software application.

The comparative data analysis demonstrated that, while the proportion of female teachers and teachers of older age groups has increased over three decades, this has been accompanied by an increase in the education level. It is significant that the motivation for selecting the teaching profession and overall levels of satisfaction remained the same. However, at the same time, assessments of the possibility to advance through a teaching career and professional well-being have noticeably deteriorated. Among key factors affecting

teachers' satisfaction are physical conditions, low wages, lack of time for private life and the stress of endless school reforms. All of this has led to a decline in the prestige of the teaching profession along with the formation of a negative image. The paper describes efforts required to ensure the enhancement of the teaching profession in the Russian Federation.

KEYWORDS
social representations, teacher, career, professional and social well-being, secondary education, status

Introduction

Recent changes in Russian education practices relate directly to the transformation of all aspects of life in the country. Changes in the economic, political, and legal spheres, as well as the wider culture, have radically affected Russian schools. Under more traditional social conditions, school education was the main—sometimes the only—channel for the transmission of knowledge about the world, its traditions and customs, as well as a means of reinforcing codes of conduct. Self-evidently, the education system was responsible for all the information that a young person needed for a problem-free life during this specific period. Today, however, the role of mass media and especially the Internet has significantly increased, including the direction of educational and leisure practices. Although school remains an important factor in the primary socialization of children under contemporary conditions during the transition to a post-industrial society, it is no longer by any means the only one. Since official authorities must take such ongoing changes into account, the Russian school system has been in a state of continuous reform for several decades already.

Russian society also imposes an increasing number of new requirements for education in connection with the ongoing scientific and technological innovations. However, the main educational challenge consists in achieving potential social development. Since the educational system is expected to play a leading role in delivering these requirements, it becomes necessary to adapt schools to the new conditions. Thus, as comprising a social and professional community, teachers are viewed as the primary agents of this ambitious goal.

The role of the teacher in the contemporary world is changing. No longer can a teacher be expected to be the only source of information, the bearer of the highest wisdom or someone whose ideas are not subject to criticism. Along with the widespread availability of information, the ability to check facts in electronic media and the development of consumer society, teachers around the world find themselves working in a credibility-crisis environment. Moreover, since teachers do not have ready-made recipes for self-enrichment, their role as social drivers of development has diminished.

In addition to the credibility crisis, the modern teaching profession faces additional challenges in terms of job satisfaction, professional well-being, and

career development. By successfully overcoming such challenges, professional instructional functions can be more effectively performed. In demonstrating the global character of these contradictions, Chinese researchers Qu and Shao assume that the living space and choice space of teachers as special professionals are in transition (Qu & Shao, 2020). Their systematic study provided ample evidence that teaching is an emotional profession in which it is becoming harder to achieve a sense of job satisfaction. This idea may be explained by the fact that emotional jobs require several factors to be united in order to reach a desirable level of satisfaction. In their influential study, the American social experts Maslach and Jackson (1981) found that younger teachers are more inclined to have higher expectations and suffer from concomitant burnout than their senior colleagues. Consequently, problems facing teachers relate directly to individual features of instructors, including their age group. A year later, Schwab and Iwanicki (1982) presented a portrait of the typical burned-out teacher. Their major finding demonstrates that low teaching performance is a complex factor, since each case is unique and must be carefully examined according to the criteria of teachers' individual backgrounds (education), individual personality (age, sex, the number of children in teacher's own family), and organizational factors (work environment, workload). Friedman and Farber (1992) explained teachers' fatigue in terms of class sizes and the high number of challenging adolescents.

Among the contradictions identified by professional researchers, the following should be noted: the growing contradiction between the creative nature of teaching and the ever-increasing regulation of the teacher's actions; the need to improve professionalism and competence levels given a lack of time resources; the gap between declarations of a high purpose of teaching and low social status; the increased contradiction within the teaching community between highly motivated professional teachers and those who only go through the motions of fulfilling their duties. In addition, there are contradictions between the measures required by the state and the possibilities for their implementation, as well as the readiness or otherwise of the professional community to implement them. All these contradictions undoubtedly affect the prestige of the profession and the social well-being of teaching, ultimately leading to a decrease in the effectiveness of instructional work.

Teachers as a community comprise a generalized figure endowed with a certain set of characteristics that are more or less adequate to the existing reality. In professional literature, this generalized figure appears as an image or representation that symbolizes the particular professional community. Each of these concepts reflects the most significant features of the community from a certain angle by focusing on certain properties and qualities. Consequently, while accepting the limits of the terms *vision* and *image* to analyze the perceived characteristics of the professional teaching community, it is more expedient to use the term *representation*, which includes the object-matter of *vision* and *image*. Obviously, if a study of a community's characteristics focuses on the social nature of representations, then social influence on the understanding of the figure of the teacher will be seen as more significant. Such an emphasis includes certain distortions, deformations in consciousness, artificially created characteristics and traits. Social ideas

include historical facts representing the memory of certain events and processes. All these factors are determined by their ideological interpretation, as well as the characteristics of the national mentality and culture.

Social representations as a specific way of understanding and comprehending the surrounding reality is based on Emile Durkheim's concept of collective representations (Durkheim, 1982) and the works by Serge Moskovici, in which social representations act as a certain set of various statements generated in the process of communication representing a kind of everyday knowledge based on "common sense", with this knowledge existing independently of the subject as a kind of objective property inherent in one or another object (Moscovici, 1988/1993). Representations are one of the forms of mass consciousness, often appearing as metaphors and associations that form a flexible combination of images that change over time. Thus, the source of representations consists in the everyday individual human experience including experience of other people, which is accepted by the individual in the course of interpersonal interactions (Bovina, 2010). In considering the perceived positions of other people, social representations manifest themselves in assessments and opinions about certain events, people, professions, and communities. In combining elements of social and individual cognition, scientific and everyday thinking, such representations thereby serve as a reference point in the surrounding reality.

Through social ideas, the surrounding reality can be interpreted in the space of standardizing associations, which comprise mental constructs that arise in the process of human interaction. Proceeding from the concept of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman set out in the work *Social Construction of Reality*, the social structure as a whole, as well as the structures of its various communities, represents a set of standardizing and routine models of behavior (Berger & Luckman, 1966/1991, p. 323). According to the concept of social representations, the professional teaching community appears as a set of the most typical patterns of interaction between teachers and other people, in particular students and their parents, as well as a set of typical features that generalize the personality of the teacher. The weight of scientific evidence produces a specific set of the characteristic features of teachers, combining the most significant qualities, both personal and professional. Data from several studies suggest that the pivotal role of stereotypes in the perception of communities is formed primarily by educational and special theoretical literature. Teachers are also responsible for public perceptions of their actual professional role as children's instructors, who act in a particular situation (Kuzmenkova, 2005).

Internationally, the public images of teachers are relatively consistent. Concerning the Chinese experience, Lijun and Xiangshu point out: "In both traditional and modern Chinese politics, the portrayal of teachers and their roles as spiritual guiders have been both nourished and restricted, according to a broader political agenda" (Lijun & Xiangshu, 2020, p. 179). Developing the concept of an ideal teacher, the researchers state: "The ideal teacher is someone who helps children to grow not only academically but also personally. Their ideal teacher is responsible, selfless, and particularly happy. If a teacher is not happy in the classroom, their students will not be happy, and they will not want to or be able to learn from that teacher. The ideal

teacher is also kind, caring, encouraging, supportive and patient" (p. 191). Wang Chen's study further supported the idea that teachers are traditionally viewed as selfless social workers, susceptible to continuous burnout, which negatively affects their job performance (Wang, 2020, p. 126).

Regarding Russian social reality, the role of the teacher can be seen to change with the advent of the classical education system (class-lesson), while maintaining its central position in the education process. The development of novel information technologies in the 20th–21st centuries led to fundamental changes in the role of the teacher in children's education and upbringing. Unfortunately, the prestige of the teaching profession and professional community has begun to decline noticeably in the present context. The general view of education as a sphere of service provision has become more and more widespread. Such changes have not only affected the social status of teachers but also their well-being.

There is a growing body of literature featuring the problems concerning the social and professional well-being of Russian teachers at the end of the 20th century. Important research includes the works carried out by the Institute for Philosophy and Law of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Ural Branch) in the 1990s (Bodnar et al., 1990), the Ural sociologist L. Rubina (1996), and the Moscow sociologist L. Orlova (1998). The main challenges of the teaching profession include dissatisfaction with various aspects of professional life, including endless reforms and the attitude of society towards education. In research on well-being, two main underlying paradigms can be identified: sociological and psychological. However, medical and economic perspectives are also seen to make significant contributions.

The psychological approach is based on the understanding of well-being as a generalizing indicator of the emotional-value state of a person, depending on the impact of social factors and responding to changes in the living conditions of an individual (Rusalinova, 1994). Here, the main emphasis is on subjective activity. Well-being becomes in itself a factor influencing other aspects of human life. The psychological approach also features the concept of social well-being, which is based on Western European and North American traditions. Although the term *well-being* has become widespread in psychological research, it seems to us that it cannot fully reflect all the diversity of relationships and interactions that arise in mass consciousness. In addition, in the Russian culture *well-being* implies among other things success, prosperity, and security, which contributes to a one-sided view of this social phenomenon.

The sociological approach to the study of social well-being is expressed in an understanding of the emotional and value attitudes of the population, social groups and communities to social reality. This approach reflects the degree of social stability reflected in terms of a state of satisfaction with various aspects of social life and the individual in it. The sociological approach has become more widespread since the publication of Zh. Toshchenko and S. Kharchenko's book *Sotsial'noe nastroenie* [Social Mood], in which social well-being is defined as the main and initial component of the social mood (Toshchenko & Kharchenko, 1996, p. 195). Here, social well-being functions on two levels: on the one hand, it is the result, outcome or consequence of

certain transformations or reforms, while on the other, it comprises the starting point, factor, and criterion for assessing social changes.

Having both dynamic and static characteristics, well-being is characterized by the accumulation or concentration of certain states of consciousness on the part of communities, socio-demographic groups or society as a whole. In addition, individual concepts of well-being are of particular importance. Whether comprising a socio-demographic group or a professional community, each group or community has its own well-being paradigm. Along with the conditions for its implementation and the totality of knowledge and changes, general activity creates a specific attitude towards a professional community (Gang, 2021). Such an attitude has a more or less pronounced emotional and evaluative coloring, for example, that which characterizes a profession. That is, professional well-being is formed as a kind of derivative that can be considered both as a consequence and justification for certain actions (Green et al., 2016).

Professional well-being can be considered as a concretization of the well-being of a social community that is based on the typical characteristics of a particular profession. Therefore, we can consider *successful* professional communities, which are in great demand under specific socio-economic conditions and *surviving* professional communities, which only maintain their existence with some difficulty. For the sake of greater differentiation, it is worth highlighting an intermediate option, i.e., *adapted*, and the most extreme option, i.e., *vanishing*. In our opinion, based on various studies, the professional community of Russian teachers should be attributed to the axis with the extreme points stretching between *adapted* and *surviving*.

As already mentioned, the first studies of professional well-being can be traced to the 1990s. There is still interest in this issue at the moment (Szentes et al., 2020). The attention of researchers to issues of teachers' well-being has significantly increased in the past decade. This should include various monitoring studies (carried out in Russian cities such as Moscow, Yekaterinburg, Tyumen, Surgut, etc.), as well as episodic measurements of teachers' social attitudes in other regions of the country. F. Ziyatdinova reported on a decline in the prestige of the profession alongside a deterioration in the financial situation of teachers and a decline in the quality of education. The problem of the unpopularity of this profession among the children of teachers was formulated (Ziyatdinova, 2010). A study among Moscow teachers showed that the decrease in professional well-being is associated with the introduction of the Unified State Exam (EGE), the financing of schools according to the number of students, which involves a noticeable increase in the teaching load, as well as with a deterioration in the material situation of teachers (Gasparishvili et al., 2013).

Various surveys carried out over the past decade confirm that salaries are the main reason for the deteriorating professional health of teachers. The changes in wages did not improve the situation: a 2015 survey of 457 teachers in Vologda region showed that only every third respondent was financially incentivized to work efficiently, while 64.5% answered this question negatively (Solovieva, 2016). Similar figures (63% of teachers dissatisfied with the salary) were received by sociologists in the Tyumen region (Shafranov-Kutsev, 2016). Questionnaire data of a study carried out almost annually over the last three decades by a group headed by V. Sobkin and

D. Adamchuk (2016) to analyze the well-being of Moscow teachers shows an increase in positive assessments of creativity in teachers' work, its intellectual satisfaction and the presence of conditions for the development of professional abilities. Satisfaction with work and conditions of communication remained at comparable levels along with assessments related to labor content and professional complexity. Researchers also recorded retained dissatisfaction with wages and career opportunities (Sobkin & Adamchuk, 2016). An interesting study was conducted on the professional well-being and prestige of teachers from public and private educational institutions by a group of researchers from Kaliningrad and Nizhny Novgorod (Fedorov et al., 2020).

As analysis shows, all these factors contribute to three most obvious consequences: the first consisting in a decrease in the effectiveness of the educational process itself, the second—in the growth of protest moods and social discontent, while the third leads to professional burnout, increased fatigue and morbidity. However, despite the sense of negative social well-being, teachers as a community are not ready for collective action taking forms of social protest. According to the questionnaire surveys, which were conducted almost annually, the number of positive assessments of the creative potential, intellectual satisfaction, and the conditions for developing one's abilities in teaching jobs have increased in the last 30 years. Assessments of job satisfaction with work and professional communication conditions remained at the same level, along with those related to the job content and professional complexity. The surveys were conducted in different regions of the Russian Federation.

Drawing upon the critical issues stated above, the present study attempts to identify the changes that have occurred in the professional teaching community related to a significant period of more than 30 years in the Middle Urals region. The following research objectives emerged:

    A. To identify the attitudes of teachers, students and parents of students towards the teaching profession in the Russian Federation.
    B. To demonstrate prevailing ideas about the teaching community in the Russian Federation.
    C. To identify factors that affect the well-being of teachers and their status in the Russian Federation.

Research Methodology and Methods

The theoretical and methodological basis of the study comprised systemic, structural-functional and activity approaches, as well as an analysis of social facts from the standpoint of community and spatial perspectives. Empirical data were collected during a questionnaire survey. In 1989 and 2016, we generated a handout questionnaire (paper and pencil). However, in 2021, we conducted an online survey (using the Google Forms application). The questionnaire presented a large number of questions (from 77 to 85 in different versions), mostly in closed form, with the possibility of choosing one or more answers. The questions were structured into sections which are as follows: (a) opinions about the prospects of the teaching profession; (b) social and professional well-being of teachers; (c) ideas about teachers and their prestige (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Three-point Analysis Model of Teachers' Social Representation
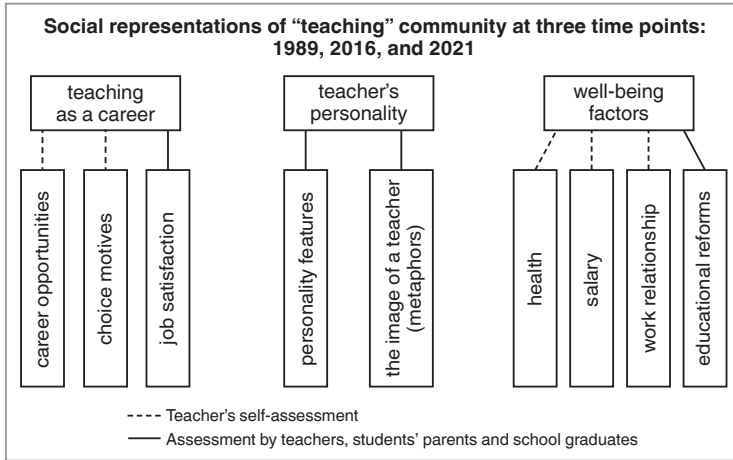
The processing of the obtained information was carried out using IBM SPSS and VORTEX software, including the calculation of frequencies and percentages, correlation coefficients for nominal and ordinal variables (Chi-square, Cramer's V, Goodman and Kruskal's Gamma). The processing of psychological methods was carried out according to their keys. The study was based on a questionnaire survey of teachers carried out in the Sverdlovsk region in 1989. The survey was conducted by the Institute for Philosophy and Law of the Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences (n = 1183 people). The survey was presented under the title *Sotsial'no-psikhologicheskoe Samochuvstvie Uchitelia: Vremia Peremen* [Socio-Psychological Well-being of the Teacher: Time for Change] (1990). This allowed a comparative analysis of the answers received on coinciding questions to be carried out with a sufficient time lag.

In 2016 and 2021, questionnaires' surveys were conducted among teachers in two cities of the Sverdlovsk region: the regional center of Yekaterinburg and Novouralsk (2016: n = 529 people; 2021: n = 412 people). When compiling the samples, we considered territorial division, type of school, subjects taught, and socio-demographic characteristics. Given the degree of urbanization in the area, the urban community of teachers was the dominant group of respondents. If the number of respondents in a territorial entity was less than 1,000, a continuous sample was taken.

When characterizing the respondents, the indicators that served as the basis for organizing the sample were as follows: gender, age, work experience, education, type of school, level of education of students, the subject taught, marital status, wages, and living conditions.

According to the website *Geogoroda.ru*, there are 47 cities in the Sverdlovsk region, where more than 80% of the region's population lives (Sverdlovskaia oblast'. Spisok gorodov, n.d.).

In the Sverdlovsk region in the 1987–1988 academic year, 31,700 teachers worked in the education system, of which more than 70% were in cities (Bodnar et al., 1990, p. 5)

According to the Ministry of General and Vocational Education of the Sverdlovsk Region (the Ministry of Education and Youth Policy of the Sverdlovsk Region since May 20, 2019) in 2016, there were 68,147 teachers in the Sverdlovsk region, most of whom worked in the general education system (60.7%). 29,367 people worked as teachers, 98.5% with vocational education. 23.5% were under the age of 35, 79% had work experience of more than 10 years, while 22.4% had already reached retirement age. Over 90% of teachers were women (Ministerstvo obshchego i professional'nogo obrazovaniia Sverdlovskoi oblasti, 2017).

The Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation provides the following information: in the 2021–2022 academic year, 36,380 staff worked in the general education system of the Sverdlovsk Region, of which 30,922 were teachers. (Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation, 2021).

Results and Discussion

As the subject of comparative analysis of teaching in 1989–2021, the following criteria were selected: the socio-demographic portrait of the teacher, attitudes to the profession, professional well-being and psychological state, the image of the teacher in the perception of the professional community and public opinion, as well as the system of dominant values. In addition, we compared the attitude of teachers to the reforms carried out in the general education system based on the survey results in 2016 and 2021.

The socio-demographic portrait of the respondents is characterized by the significant predominance of women (1989—94%; 2016—91%; 2021—89%), as well as an increase in the proportion of people over 55 years old (1990—6.5%; 2016—16%; 2021—23%). The length of service in the general education system has also increased. For example, the percentages of teachers who had worked in school over 19 years were as follows: in 1989—41%; in 2016—57%; in 2021—68%. The level of education increased over the period covered by the study (74% with higher education in 1989; 94% in 2016; 91% in 2021); overall, more than 70 percent of the respondents had graduated from the Teachers' Training University.

An improvement in housing conditions was noted: in 1989, 60% lived in separate comfortable apartments; in 2016—77%; in 2021—93%. The number of single teachers has increased. The percentage of married teachers declined from 70% in 1989 to 57% in 2016, increasingly slightly to 60% in 2021.

Opinions about the Prospects of the Teaching Profession

The motivation for choosing the teaching profession over the past three decades has not changed: firstly, a passion for the subject that is being taught; secondly, the vocation of a teacher itself, i.e., to constitute an example of a beloved teacher. These reasons for choosing the profession were indicated by more than a third of the respondents in each survey. Out of a total of 9 offered options, the distribution of answers by year is almost identical. Moreover, few significant changes in satisfaction with the profession were

noted. The number of teachers satisfied with the profession is stable, i.e., fluctuating between 85% and 86% respectively. However, when answering the question "Would you like any of your children to become a teacher?", teachers revealed a certain trend: the number of those wishing their offspring to continue the family tradition has decreased over the years (1989—30.7%; 2016—18.1%; 2021—17.2%).

In order to explain their dissatisfaction 45.8% of the respondents in 2021 used the following terms: lack of personal life, disrespect for the teacher's work, insecurity, high responsibility, low salaries, etc. Here is one of the complete answers:

> Today the school does not have enough time for children, there are continuous checks, the teacher has to accept a heavy workload in order to survive; this workload load represents a conveyor belt offering little creativity and a lack of communication with children. For me, being a teacher is a creative profession, which creativity I cannot realize at the moment. Again, teachers are assessed according to the results of the Unified State Exam (EGE) and the Basic State Exam (OGE). Since textbooks do not contain tasks for preparation, you have to train, not teach. A contemporary school does not resemble the school I wanted to work in when I was choosing the profession. The teacher today is a defenseless hostage, sandwiched between uneducated parents, impudent children and insatiable school administration" (female physics teacher at a gymnasium with 38 years of teaching experience).

A change, albeit not very noticeable, in attitudes towards the profession was also recorded in response to the question of readiness to change jobs in the immediate future: a desire to change the field of professional activity was expressed by 7% in 1989; in 2016—by 12%; in 2021—19%.

There is much evidence that the assessment of opportunities offered by the teaching profession may be sufficient to explain the emerging trend. Interestingly, the assessment of the profession's pluses and minuses in all the surveys was similar, e.g., pluses included (a) the rich variety of professional situations; (b) the demonstration of competencies, creativity; (c) the ability to communicate with interesting people. However, the quantitative expression was surprisingly different, especially in the assessment of minuses (see Table 1).

Table 1

Options Decline in Teachers' Professional Field in Comparison
with Other Professions (% of respondents by year; ± sampling error)

Options	Year		
	1989 (n* = 1183)	2016 (n = 529)	2021 (n = 412)
Free time	88 ± 3	72 ± 4	70 ± 4
Personal life	48 ± 1	62 ± 3	57 ± 3
Financial security	46 ± 1	69 ± 3	44 ± 2
Service promotion, career-building	57 ± 2	37 ± 2	36 ± 2
Opportunity to be upwardly mobile in society	35 ± 1	22 ± 1	20 ± 1

Note. * n is a number of respondents.

It is now understood that career dissatisfaction plays an important role in the emerging trend. Dissatisfaction with the possibilities of the profession found its expression in the teachers' answers to a hypothetical situation, i.e., what kind of job they would prefer to choose. The number of those wishing to choose a profession that allows them to earn more has tripled, while half as many stated the desire to find a job where no one orders they around, they decide everything themselves, success depends only on them (1989—17%; 2016—49%; 2021—43%).

While paying much attention and respect to all these alarming signals, it would be fair to assume that career dissatisfaction is not a uniquely Russian trend. In his study, the Australian scholar Dorman (2003) maintained that continuous stress on teachers in his country makes educators less tolerant of their students, resulting in their reduced commitment to work, e.g., failure to prepare for classes. Cheek et al. (2003) showed that most teachers suffer from frustration in teaching at some point in their professional development.

Teachers' Social and Professional Well-being

As already noted, the respondents rated the teaching profession very poorly regarding financial opportunities, arrangement of personal life, etc. This concern found its expression in the issues of greatest importance to the respondents. Closer inspection of the data shows that the most prominently cited factor of physical condition is not directly related to the teaching profession (the importance of health factors mentioned in the surveys was as follows: 1989—42%; 2016—48%; 2021—65%). However, if we analyze the socio-demographic portrait of teachers regarding age parameters, a noticeable aging of teaching staff over the years becomes evident. Among the factors directly related to work, financial difficulties came out on top (1989—19%, 2016—47%, 2021—46%). Thus, financial factors are significantly determining of professional well-being and relationships affecting the educational process.

When analyzing the respondents' assessments of existing relationships, interactions with students' parents and school administration are stated by teachers to be the most problematic. Here, a significant outcome can be noted: over the past years, the assessment has improved (see Table 2). We used a 4-point scale where 4 represents complete mutual understanding, while 1 denotes misunderstanding or alienation.

Table 2

Relationships: Good, Complete Mutual Understanding
(% of respondents by year ± sampling error):

Relationship Type	Year		
	1989 (n* = 1183)	2016 (n = 529)	2021 (n = 412)
With students	28 ± 1	54 ± 3	62 ± 3
With students' parents	22 ± 1	33 ± 2	37 ± 2
With colleagues	41 ± 1	55 ± 3	68 ± 3
With school administrators	30 ± 1	43 ± 2	45 ± 2

Note. * n is a number of respondents.

The majority of the respondents assessed relationships in terms of a desire to achieve mutual understanding (3 points). One of the key findings is the opinion that the most difficult relationship type involves interaction with parents and school administration. The improving trend in assessments of these relationships over the years is very likely due to the extensive experience of interaction and dissemination of the ideology of tolerance and patience. As an example, let us note two poles representing positions taken by teachers: (a) tolerant, and (b) countering the maximalist views of students. According to the assessment of colleagues, tolerant teachers are significantly more successful. However, the professional well-being of teachers is negatively influenced by continuous reforms and the ongoing transformation of general education.

As the studies carried out in 2016 and 2021 show, the majority of teachers are inclined to the idea of a partial change in the content of the educational process (2016—74%; 2021—67%). Only the minority of teachers react positively to radical changes (2016—22%; 2021—32%). Among the factors that negatively affect the level of educational outcomes, respondents cited a weak interest on the part of parents in the quality of their children's education (66% of respondents for both 2016 and 2021), a low level of abilities or interest on the part of students (2016—56%, 2021—58%), ineffective management on the part of the educational system (33% and 34%, respectively).

Teachers have formed a negative attitude towards reporting requirements: in their opinion, it needs to be reduced. More than a half of the respondents reacted positively to proposals to limit the reporting requirement (2016—66%; 2021—54%). Teachers reacted differently to the introduction of the Unified State Exam (EGE) (6% of respondents in both samples fully support it; 2016—18%, 2021—12%). With respect to distance learning, while teachers believe that it is suitable for use in emergencies, 94% suppose that it necessarily results in decreased education quality. 33% of teachers in 2021 (the COVID-19 pandemic year) assessed the degree of self-organization of students at 3 points out of 10, while 24% put it at 1–2 points. The retention of educational materials was assessed similarly.

In considering financial aspects, we proceed to a description of teachers' wages. At the time of the study in 2016, the average monthly nominal accrued wages of teachers in schools in the city of Yekaterinburg amounted to 35,943 rubles, while the average salary in the city was 43,910 rubles. The wage gap is quite large (Iakob et al., 2017). At the same time, the average monthly wages of the respondents in 2016 was distributed as follows: up to 15,000 rubles—8%; 15,000–25,000 rubles—49%; 25,000–35,000 rubles—33%; over 35,000 rubles—10%.

Social Opinions about Teachers and Their Status

The final stage of the study comprised the description of social ideas about the role of teachers in terms of their social significance, prestige, and image. These variables were studied with the help of an associative test and a questionnaire. The respondents were asked to choose from 15 images of a teacher, which represented metaphors that would best express the profession of a teacher, i.e., carrying out a certain differentiation

and categorization (placing the image in one or another community). Surprisingly, the largest support in each survey (50% and 60%) was given to the image of the hamster in the spinning wheel, then—actor, friend, mentor. It should be noted that the teaching community thus highlighted the important features and functions of the teacher's personality, i.e., the necessity to assist, to save face in any circumstances, and a rather low coefficient of efficiency despite all the efforts being made.

The perception of the teacher's image via such metaphors was supplemented with assessments of qualities that hamper effective work. The largest number of votes for each group of respondents received the opinion that the teacher with a compliant character suffers most in school (1989—46%; 2016—53%; 2021—38%). Teachers who actively oppose maximalist, immature views of students, prefer to stay independent, self-motivated, proactive, as well as use well-established methods of work received an average percentage of 12%. These characteristics of the teacher's image are complemented by the respondents' assessments of how certain features of professional image are perceived by the teaching community and how a teacher appears in terms of public opinion from the point of view of the respondents.

Teachers characterize themselves primarily as people having a creative attitude to work (1989—44%; 2016—63%), possessing a sense of their own dignity (1989—36%; 2016—44%; 2021—64%), while the third position was given to a sense of defenselessness (1989—35%, 2016—40%). The teaching community considers the perceptions of the teacher's image in public opinion to be negative, i.e., dominant positions were given to such characteristics as "defenseless" (1989—18%; 2016—28%), "indifferent to children" (1989—28%; 2016—27%). Mass media representations support the formation of such an opinion (see Table 3).

Table 3

Role of the Media in Shaping the Influence of the Teacher
(% of respondents by year ± sampling error)

Meaning	Year		
	1989 (n * = 1183)	2016 (n = 529)	2021 (n = 412)
Actively promotes credibility of teachers	12 ± 0	10 ± 1	12 ± 1
Does not promote; moreover, discredits the activities of teachers	43 ± 1	72 ± 4	70 ± 4
Virtually does not influence the perception of teachers	46 ± 1	18 ± 1	19 ± 1

Note. * n is a number of respondents.

It is important to stress that negative media attitudes towards the teaching profession are not an entirely typical Russian feature. As the Saudi researcher Alghamdi (2021) demonstrated in his research, media everywhere tend to attribute negative connotations to teaching: "Findings affirm the imperative that teacher education programs intentionally sensitize to the benefits of critically deconstructing media images. This will help stave off negative connotations of teachers and make teaching become part of future teachers' professional identities".

More than a half of the respondents, i.e., 56–57% in the 21st century (in 1989 there were only 42%) think that the values structuring the world of Russian teachers have not changed significantly over the past decades. Priority is still given to family matters, i.e., love for one's children and partners, as well as a good education. An important finding is that the value accorded to life wisdom has also increased. The average age of the community of teachers has increased over the years, the number of respondents for whom this terminal value has become significant has also increased: 1989—13%; 2016—23%; 2021—24%. Among instrumental values, teachers particularly distinguish responsibility (1989—38%; 2016—59%; 2021—62%). More than half significantly prioritized good manners, closely followed by education, breadth of knowledge and high general culture.

Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to inspect the social image of teachers in Russia. The comparative analysis of survey results (1989, 2016, and 2021) showed a number of negative trends compared to the 1990s. In this regard, there is a need to deepen research on this issue, as well as to analyze the reasons that prevent the transformation of the teaching community into a more organized integral body, involving the formation of those qualities and properties that contribute to the successful activities of the socio-professional community. This change may lead to a higher level of development or already be part of a transition to a higher quality of education.

The analysis of the obtained statistical data and the results of the survey show that teachers in the Middle Urals region face similar problems to those of the professional community in the country as a whole, including the predominance of women in the profession and increasing number of older age groups. Along with their life strategies, the main trends in the development of the value world of teachers were identified on the basis of the study results. A significant decline in the prestige, status, and role of teaching in modern Russian society was shown both in the professional community and general public opinion. The decrease in the well-being of teachers is influenced by a deterioration of their financial situation, a perceived decline in the level of education and factors affecting quality of life. Changes in the system of values and priorities affecting the established system of relations between the teacher and schoolchildren, as well as with their parents, is also of key importance. With respect to the social well-being of teachers, the analysis showed that well-being and perceptions of the importance of the teaching profession are influenced by the continuous reform of the Russian education system. According to the analyzed data, only a small number of teachers actively support the reforms, while the majority prefer to take a wait-and-see attitude.

Another alarming trend identified by the study consisted in an increasing lack of interest in studying among school students, which is confirmed by teachers, parents, and school graduates. Their criticism is mainly aimed at the ineffective management of the education system, including organization of the educational process, as well

as its material and technical support. Significant dissatisfaction arises from the introduction of the Unified State Exam (EGE), the quality of distance learning, as well as the willingness of students to participate in distance learning.

The research revealed the prerequisite for new study methods aimed at describing the structure of communities. New types of community emerge from the interaction of teachers with other professional networks or social subjects. The applied methodology of active survey and interviews related to teachers showed the need to use a wider arsenal of methods, including qualitative data collection methods. Significance evidence supports the idea that it is only by identifying the most diverse methods and resolving existing contradictions that the efficiency of the professional teaching community may be improved.

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