

Professional development:



*the challenging complexity
of ‘Leading Teachers’
Learning’*

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Overview

- Positioning myself: researcher/academic, teacher educator, facilitator of professional development
- 4 Parts:
 1. PD, what's in a name? Definition and taking a stance
 2. Towards a conceptual framework of PD
 3. Towards a pedagogy of professional development: rules of thumb, conditions, promises and pitfalls
 4. The potential of “good examples of practice”

Part 1: PD, what's in a name?

- Multiple definitions exist → choosing one = taking a stance

- Definition:

***Professional development (PD) =
lifelong process of learning and development
resulting from teachers' meaningful interactions
with their professional contexts.***

Unpacking the definition

1. Process of learning and development

- Ongoing, conscious (learning)/unconscious (development)

2. Lifelong process:

- Biography → “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 1975)
- Importance and limit of initial teacher education → need INSET
- Different position in career → different needs, interests, ... for PD
 - “horizontal promotion” (Nias, 1989)/Teacher leadership

3. Meaningful → teachers are sense-making professionals

- Sense-making is central (individual and collective)
- Assumes reflection (skill and attitude)

4. Starting assumption: teachers are professionals

- **Teacher professionalism:**
 - Expertise: knowledge, attitudes, skills
 - Commitment and motivation
 - Judgment: courage and skill to judge and act upon judgment
 - Responsibility (≠ accountability!!)
 - Radical dismissal of the “remedial view”!
 - (PD not to be seen as remedy, compensation for professional insufficiency)
- **PD must start from and contribute to teachers’ professionalism**
 - Not teachers as executors’ of the decisions by others
 - No “blue-print approach”

5. PD descriptive or prescriptive concept?
 - Descriptive: what happens during PD process?
 - Prescriptive: what should/could be done to create/support PD?

6. PD definition encompasses formal and informal learning
 - Formal: conference, workshop, training and full programs
 - Informal: daily practice or operating of school contains multiple opportunities for PD → but they need to be recognized as such (by teachers and leaders)

7. PD can take place both on-site and off-site
 - Both are relevant and important
 - Impact and conditions for PD differ

Summing up:

Aspects of professional development

1. Process of learning and development
2. Lifelong/Careerlong
3. Sense-making central in professionals' learning
4. Teachers are professionals
5. Descriptive and prescriptive
6. Formal and informal
7. On-site and off-site

Intermezzo: Introducing the illustrative case

- PD-project, funded by Ministry of Education to support development of “local policies for broader educational care and attention to special needs education in primary schools”
 - Participation is free
 - Public tender
- 1 - year project in 2 groups of 4 core teams
- Goal: designing PD based on principles from research; documenting and analyzing the process; contributing to “pedagogy of PD”

Key elements in our approach:

- a. Condition for participation: only “core teams” (principal + two teachers)
- b. Intake interview → commitment; adjusting mutual expectations
- c. School-based innovative project as part of developing local policy
- d. 5 off-site meetings & 1 evaluation session
- d. Follow-up and supervision on-site during process
- e. Reflective log and systematic documentation by university facilitators
- f. Input from participants (experience) and facilitators (theory; process) → aimed at “zipping”

Part 2: Towards a conceptual framework

→ 5 parts:

2.1. Individual professional development

2.2. Inevitable contextualisation

2.3. Transfer as the central challenge

2.4. On-site or off-site? Reflections

2.5. Effectiveness: an underestimated issue

2.1. Individual professional development

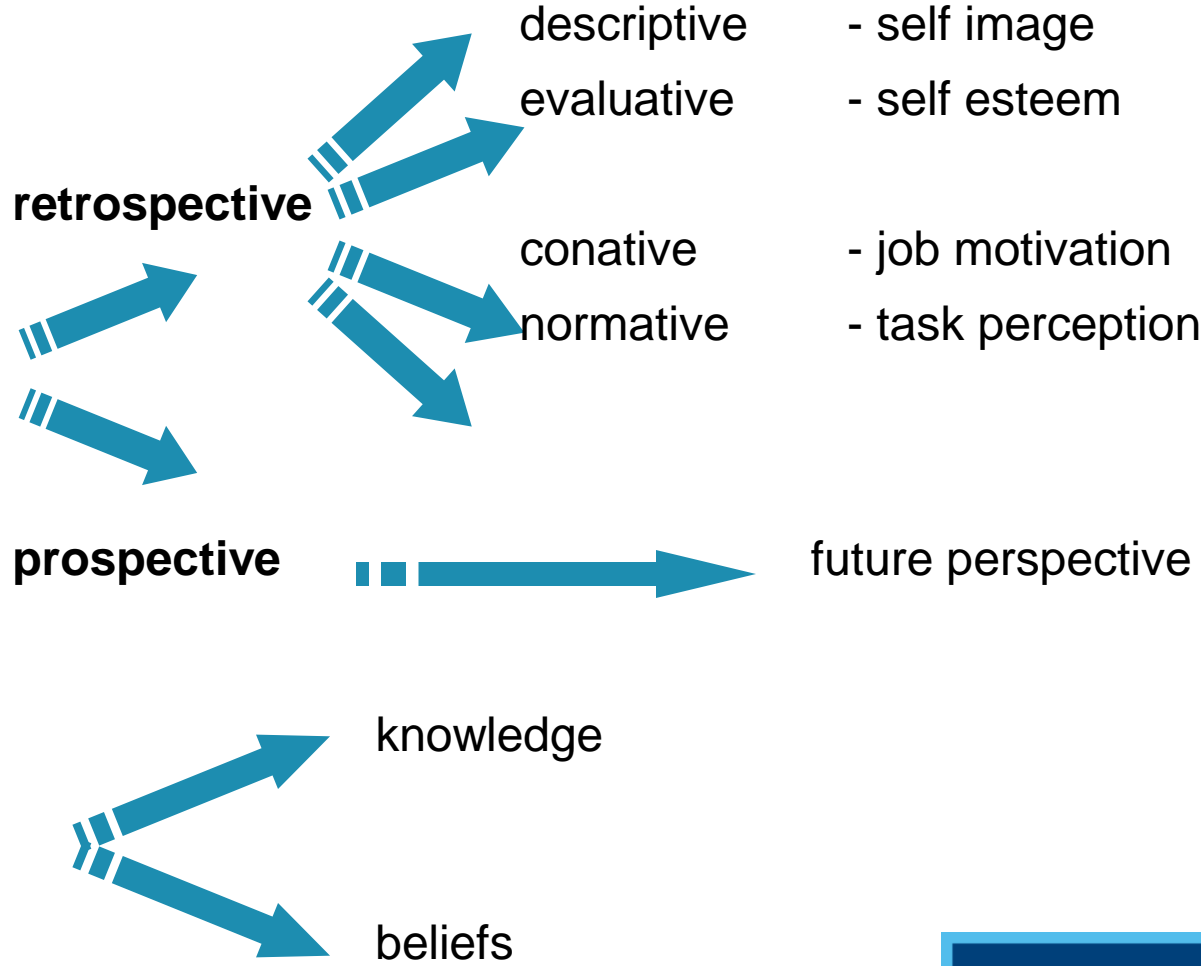
- Learning results in **qualitative changes in both actions and “thinking”**
 - Action: broader repertoire of skills to enact professional practice
 - Thinking → more valid “personal interpretative framework”
 - = Lens to perceive, make sense of and react on situations
 - Metaphor of “glasses”

COMPONENTS OF THE PERSONAL INTERPRETATIVE FRAMEWORK (PIF)

professional self-understanding



subjective educational theory



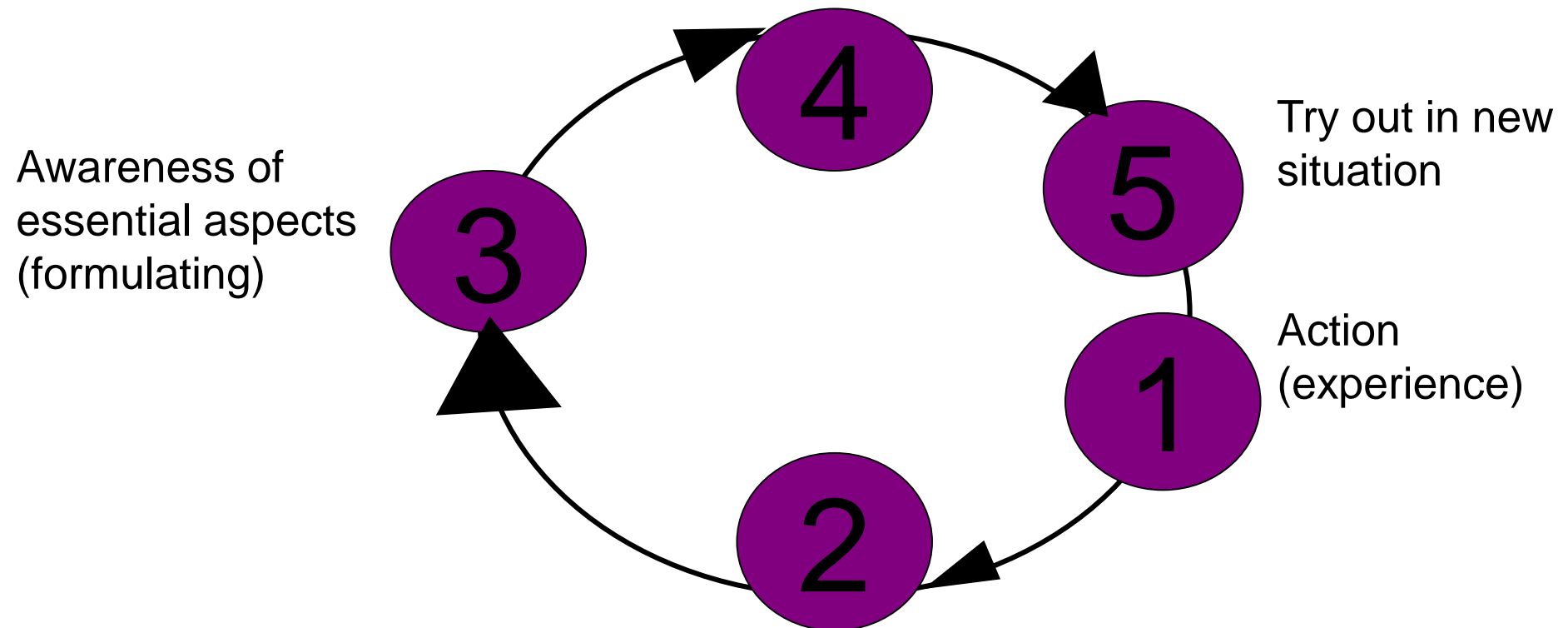
- **Learning** by professionals : “**zipper**”-metaphor
 - Zipping experience/content PD/... and PIF
 - The learner wants/needs to do the zipping him/herself
 - If the zipper gets stuck → reflection, analysis

Reflection as condition for learning

- Old image of the “reflective practitioner” (Schön, 1983) still holds true as guiding idea
 - Reflection as skill and attitude
 - Link with researcher’s attitude (action research)
- stimulating/supporting reflection
 - Essential condition: modelling by the facilitators!!
 - Being reflective
 - Demonstrating reflectiveness
- Reflection: both form and content

FORM of reflection: ALAACT-model (Korthagen, 1984)

Alternative actions: identify/develop/choose



Looking back on the action

CONTENT of reflection: broad and deep

BROAD reflection

- Technical dimension: what and how?
(problem solving)
- The moral dimension: why?
(ethical justification)
- The emotional dimension: what do I feel
(emotional involvement)
- The political dimension: in who's interest?
(power, influence)

DEEP Reflection: beyond the level of action

- Questioning the personal interpretative framework (PIF) → essential for deep and sustainable learning
- Critical reflection
- Comment: broad and deep reflection = necessary conditions for PD to be professionalizing!!

2.2. Inevitable contextualisation

- Sustained professional learning (enactment in practice) demands **individual and school development go hand-in-hand** → PD always takes place IN CONTEXT
 - Context-independent claims on relevant/effective conditions for PD are problematic (see a.o. Timperley)
 - Participants in PD always bring their context with them
 - Participant is “me in my working context”
 - “learning needs” always situated in/motivated from actual context
 - Learning results need to be transferred to that context
- *Example in case:*
 - *innovative project*
 - *Aiming at structural supportive conditions (core team)*

2.3. Transfer as the central challenge

- Moving changes in thinking/action from PD- setting to one's working context and “put them to practice”
 - Individual practice
- Collective/collaborative practice → demands changing practices and thinking of others
 - Negotiation → “micropolitical skills”
 - Chicken or egg?-problem (beliefs or actions?)
- In a sustainable way
 - Parallel to phases in literature on educational innovation: adoption – implementation- institutionalisation (i.e. Fullan, 1982)
 - Designing PD → envisage structural “anchorage”
 - “professional learning community” PLC (e.g. Stoll et al., 2007)

2.4. On- or off-site? Some reflections

2.4.1. On-site

- Facilitator can experience (observe, analyze) the context (collegial interactions; enactment of leadership; organisational culture)
- Facilitator can thematize the obvious (being the “relative outsider”)
- Having colleagues engage in work on/discussion about issue in itself may already contribute to PD
 - The PD-setting: re-positions them → opens up space for development and learning
- Lower threshold for “the unwilling”
- Facilitator as scapegoat!
- Again: PLC as guiding principle

2.4.2. Off-site

- More radical repositioning: wordly and metaphorically “taking a distance”
 - “traffic island”
 - Being “out” (of balance, of normal position, ...)
- Motivation for participation
 - Can differ widely → different interests may be in play (i.e. finding audience/public recognition which is denied ‘at home’)
 - Exploring learning needs as start often misses the point
- Paradox: opening up in discussion about practice (and underlying beliefs) is often easier to “strangers”
- Pitfall: losing touch with colleagues/team → too well professionalized

2.5. Effectiveness: an underestimated issue

- Not easy to evaluate!
 - Complexity of individual-collective and contextualised sense-making
 - Differences of individuals/schools
 - Criterium to judge far from evident!
 - Effects take time
 - Effects are always over-determined: not by easily identifiable decontextualised variables
- “there is always happening both more and less than what was planned for”
 - Advice 1: document, interpret, judge and conclude
 - Advice 2: refuse simplistic effect measurements (invalid!)

3. Pedagogies, promises and pitfalls...

- **Theory is cool!!** (and most practical!)
 - helping professionals to master theoretical frames to better question, read and judge their practice is most practical
- **The beauty of the unintended side-effects**
 - Expect the unexpected!! → ‘see them’
 - Examples:
 - car pooling as a powerful learning environment
 - Authenticity around the coffee machine
- Facilitators need to take **researcher’s attitude**
 - Cfr. “inquiry as a stance” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999)

4. The potential of good examples of practice

- Importance of making results of PD public as part of school development
 - As part of professional responsibility (instead of accountability)
- The problem of “examples of good practice”
 - Invalid assumptions about
 - Possibility of best practices (→ denying normative character of criteria)
 - Importance of contextualisation
 - Treating the audience as the ignorants who need to be told what to do (= de-professionalising)

Good examples of practice

- ‘Good’ refers to the **form and content** of the presentation:
 - Descriptive: how are things happening (representing, describing)
 - Explaining: why are things happening the way they do? (conceptually unpacking, critically analysing, grounding)
- Authors take:
 - Normative stance (justification) → making criterium explicit
 - User is treated as competent partner in an ongoing dialogue (acknowledgement of professionalism)
- Developing publicly shared and critically grounded professional knowledge base on practice

A good example of practice works

- **Revealing:**
 - Showing, making visible, demonstrating
- **Problematising:**
 - Questioning the obvious and taken for granted
- **Inspiring:**
 - Appealing, inviting, calling on professional commitment

Reading more?

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