Chapter 9
Continuing Professional Development and the Triadic Conception of Lifelong Learning

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Introduction

The discourse on lifelong learning has emerged in a wide range of contexts and debates, including interventions around social exclusion, urban and rural policy formations, public health issues, discussions of multiculturalism, concerns about environmental conservation and programmes focused on economic growth as well as in the area of concern in this chapter, namely professional development.

Professional development is increasingly seen as involving lifelong professional learning. Chris Day, for example, explores a lifelong conception of professional development in his influential book – *Developing Teachers: The Challenges of Lifelong Learning* (Day 1999). And in a forthcoming collection of chapters, Lesley Scanlon links 'the iterative concept of "becoming" to lifelong professional learning' (Scanlon 2011).

This chapter also explores and links 'professional development' and 'lifelong learning' and though the link is (as indicated above) far from new, I have found it illuminating to explore the wider conceptions of each in the light of the other. From such explorations, the following four implications have emerged and will be discussed.

- Despite decades without a satisfactory definition of profession (Friedson 1985), the link provides a useful way of identifying professional learning and professionals.
- The link helps us to reconcile non-foundationalist conceptions of knowledge with the worthwhileness of lifelong learning.

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D.N. Aspin et al. (eds.), *Second International Handbook of Lifelong Learning*,
Springer International Handbooks of Education 26, DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-2360-3_9,

- In a professional, occupational context of continuing professional development, we find a convincing example of a conception of lifelong learning that goes beyond the vocational.
- The link provides a sensible way to organise confusingly disparate aspects of professional development (In particular, the professional development of teachers is considered.)

In what follows I explicate and advocate a (wide) triadic conception of lifelong learning and go on to explore professional development as a species of triadic lifelong learning. I then return to the four implications (or insights) cited above.

'Lifelong' Learning and the Learning Society

In the last decade, a discourse of lifelong learning has become increasingly prominent in the education literature and has significantly influenced policy and research. It has particularly dominated discussion of post compulsory education and training across an extraordinary range of organisations and nations. Since the early 1990s, influential international organisations have published reports on the subject. These include reports from the OECD (organisation for economic co-operation and development), European commission, the G8 group of governments (from the eight largest economies) as well as from UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation).

It is notable that while the idea of lifelong learning has most frequently emerged from discussions about adult education and vocational training (or increasingly for career education in secondary schools) the 'cradle to grave' understanding of lifelong learning has also been pervasive, consonant with the political and liberal dimensions of post school education. Many argue that this conception of lifelong learning has re-conceptualised the whole area of adult education to the extent that adult education can no longer be seen as remedial catching up of lost schooling – a second chance. Rather, in presenting education as lifelong, the focus is on the different phases and stages of learning – all of which provide particular learning needs and opportunities and which therefore have their own, albeit interconnecting, distinctiveness. At the school level, the focus has been to teach children how to learn, so that they become lifelong learners. However, we have seen that 'lifelong learning' is a slippery term with multiple meanings and conceptions. Indeed, its international usage relies on its remarkable potential to mean different things to different people. It is generally taken to be a good thing, involving worthwhile learning, but there are often quite different perceptions of what the worthwhile content of lifelong learning should be. In this regard, Jane Thompson has, for example, argued that the term lifelong learning masks considerable ideological disagreements in practice (Thompson 2000).

Societies everywhere have been concerned to develop a literate and skilled flexible workforce, as well as to widen participation in education at all levels and for people of all ages in every social group. It is at this societal level that the term is

often applied and in analysing lifelong learning, Aspin and Chapman (2007) looked at the needs of modern democratic societies and noted three main needs:

- For economic progress and development
- For personal development and fulfilment
- For social inclusiveness and democratic understanding and participation

Thus, from the perspective of the pragmatic needs of modern learning societies, a triadic notion of lifelong learning has developed. Lifelong learning thus includes vocational/economic aspects, liberal personal development aspects and political and social democratic inclusiveness aspects. In other words, lifelong learning includes vocational education, liberal education and political education. Importantly, these three elements cannot be separated and interact with and cross fertilise each other.

Perhaps because lifelong learning is often discussed at a societal level, it has been linked with the notion of a learning society. It refers to a society organised in ways that provide maximum learning opportunities for all of its members across their life spans and which values a broad range of learning. It is thus not surprising that a notion that emphasises planned, purposeful, systematic and worthwhile learning across the life span has become so embedded in educational discourse and so strongly connects with the notion of continuous professional development. Chapman and Aspin note that while a learning society will in all probability meet the triadic needs (namely economic, liberal and social), the very notion of lifelong learning requires a mindset where there is no fixed body of knowledge which can be attained or mastered at a particular point (say the end of initial schooling) in one's life.

'Learning', 'Professional Development' and the 'Professional Development' of Teachers

Three of the concepts currently used in discussions about professional development are education, training and learning. Traditionally, 'education' is seen as involving a broader and deeper knowledge and understanding than 'training'. Education, as philosopher RS Peters put it, has a 'wide cognitive perspective' (Peters 1966). 'Training' on the other hand often suggests mainly vocational or more narrowly focused mechanical skills. In the context of professional development, it refers to the skills associated with professional practice, and such practice includes knowledge and understanding of an educative kind. Thus, when we use the term skill in relation to professional development, we are not referring to the narrow mechanical skills often associated with the term training. The demands of professional development require a wide cognitive perspective.

Similarly, there has traditionally been a distinction between 'education' and 'learning'. Education, but not learning, was said to imply worthwhile knowledge and understanding. Education was therefore described as a normative concept (Peters 1966). Learning by contrast was viewed as value – neutral in the sense that while some learning was worthwhile, some was trivial or even reprehensible

(You could learn to be a pickpocket.) However, in some contexts and certainly in the context of professional development, the term 'learning' like 'education' carries normative value-laden implications. This, as we have noted, is also true of the concept of lifelong learning. Thus, in modern educational discourse, the terms education, training and learning, though they can be distinguished in various ways in different contexts, blur into each other more often than has traditionally been the case. The learning and the training involved in professional development are processes which are seen to be valuable and educative processes and lead to an increase in worthwhile knowledge and understanding.

The concept of professional development itself brings together two concepts, profession and development. The concept of development implies growth towards the fulfilment of potential. In some contexts, this growth to a more advanced state would not require training or learning but only maturations. An example of this would be the development (growth) of a plant. However, in the context of professional development, a more deliberate process of learning is implied. We actively bring about the advance and the fulfilment of potential through successive stages to a higher or more complex level of skill and understanding. Skill and understanding in relation to the professional development of teachers carry normative implications. The competent teacher will have skill and understanding in a range of tasks, roles and jobs that have ethical aspects. Training/learning is needed for such progress to take place. Thus, professional development is ongoing. In practicing his/her skills (practice makes perfect), his/her standards can continuously be improved. Moreover, the notion of practicing a profession recognises that a professional has skills, knowledge and understanding which constitute a shared 'practice'. Members of the professions not only have shared skills, knowledge and understanding, they also share values and standards of conduct.

Not only does the concept of professional development imply this ongoing character at the conceptual level, the real world also provides plenty of reasons for regarding professional development as necessarily continuing. The rapid rate of change in the modern world requires professionals to update their own skills on a regular basis. Thus, the need for learning will never stop. Professionals need to participate in a variety of forms of professional development in order to enhance existing knowledge and keep it up to date, to improve their career prospects and to add to their formal qualifications. The Professional Association of Research Networks (PARN) defines continuing 'professional development' as:

> Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is the means by which members of professional associations maintain, improve and broaden their knowledge and skills and develop professional qualities required in their professional lives. (PARN 2000).

As has been said, this necessarily ongoing nature of professional development is also emphasised by Scanlon, who rejects 'novice to expert' explanations of being professional since 'expert' implies having reached a required end point. He accepts, instead, 'the ongoing-ness of developing a professional self and all that this implies'.

No one can predict all the future developmental needs of newly qualified professionals. Significant personal, political and school-based events bring new

learning needs. Professional development must therefore be career long and involve ongoing reflexive reflections on the professional's own practice in ever changing contexts. In short, just as the notion of lifelong learning requires a mind set where there is no fixed body of knowledge which can be mastered by a particular point in one's life (say by the end of initial schooling), similarly with professional development there is no fixed body of knowledge which can be mastered by a particular point in one's life (say by the end of initial professional development programmes). The idea of lifelong learning overlaps with this conception of continuous professional development.

The National Commission on Education in England (1993) implicitly recognised this overlap between lifelong learning and continuous professional development. Within the goals that they set out goal number four notes that

> everyone must be entitled to learn throughout life and be encouraged in practice to do so – learning does not stop at sixteen, eighteen, at twenty one or at any other age. Everyone must have the entitlement to go on learning whether for employment purposes or to fulfil other personal goals. There must be real opportunity to use the entitlement and incentive and encouragement to do so. (NCEE p. 45).

To sum up, I hope that the foregoing conceptual explorations have (albeit succinctly) endorsed a wide conception of lifelong learning and a wide conception of professional development. A wider conception of lifelong learning contrasts with a narrower vocational conception to encompass personal and political learning and contrasts with a front-ended conception of education and learning as contiguous with initial schooling. A wider conception of professional development contrasts with a narrower, skill-based conception and contracts with a front ended concept of professional development as contiguous with professional formal training which is completed on certification. We have seen that the wider conception of lifelong learning and the wider conception of professional development overlap. Professional development involve career long (even lifelong) learning of a broader kind, going beyond vocational skills.

Four Significant Implications

Defining Profession and Professional Learning

The term profession has been used to mark out a non-manual occupation seen as having social status by virtue of such things as long training, accredited degree and post-degree qualifications, a requisite high standard in relevant complex competencies, the holding of shared values and standards of conduct, a mastery of a relevant worthwhile and esoteric body of knowledge. For a long time, and in an extensive literature, these claims have been debated and contested. There is no agreed definition. Dingwell goes so far to claim that 'a profession is nothing more or less than what some sociologists say it is' (Dingwell 2008). The disputants have ranged

from those who see the professions as those whose members are concerned to serve others, working for unselfish, non-mercenary motives, to ends beneficial both to society and to individuals, to those who see the professions as elitist groupings and their professionals as ultimately self-interested and self-serving.

In modern times, claims to professional status have widened and increased. As Scanlon points out,

> google 'professional' and the result is over five hundred million hits and includes a wide variety of organisations representing a range of professionals such as doctors, real estate agents, teachers, and individuals such as wedding planners, fitness experts and flower arrangers.

Any worker whose occupational identity encompasses notions of a particular competency and standards of workmanship may well conceive of him or herself as 'professional'. Perhaps, this enlargement of the scope of 'profession' has arisen, at least in part, from a blurring of the distinction between craftspeople and professionals, and this may have been fuelled by the snobbish and unwarranted social undervaluing of skill. Be that as it may, I want to suggest that we can recapture a meaningful (useful) sense of 'profession' and 'professional' in seeing professional development as necessarily intrinsically lifelong. Those whose occupation requires that they become lifelong learners are members of a profession. They do not have a set of skills which can be mastered at a given point. Rather, they engage with an ongoing dynamic search for understanding and have a commitment to improved reflexive and reflective practice. As has been said of being educated – there is no end point to professional learning.

This notion that professional learning is intrinsically ongoing also connects with epistemological questions to which we now turn.

Lifelong Learning, Professional Development and the Nature of Knowledge

Modern times have seen a significant epistemological shift. Human knowledge is conceptualised not as the attainment of immutable, absolute truths about a given reality. Rather, it is partly determined (constructed) in line with our human (and dynamic) needs and interests. It is local rather than universal, dynamic rather than fixed and relative to a context. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore these complex epistemological questions at length but some key points must be made.

First, it has been recognised that the form of knowledge that we call science is no exception to this modern conception of the nature of knowledge. Kuhn in his seminal work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* has argued, very convincingly, that even scientific 'truth' is relative to a particular scientific 'paradigm' – a particular set of concepts and assumptions etc. Second, this kind of epistemological position need not lead to the incoherence of a full bloodied relativism. As Harré and Krausz (1996) show in their influential work, there are, indeed, varieties of relativism – some of which are not self contradictory. The world exists and therefore places

constraints upon fruitful conceptualisations and truth claims. Pragmatically, we know we have conceptualised and theorised badly if our aeroplanes will not fly, for example, and less badly when they will. Moreover, the inner world of our primitive reactions (Wittgenstein 1963) also imposes limits on our possible conceptual construction and agreements. However, because we construct the conceptual schemes through which we experience and understand the world, there is a degree of flexibility and variability. There may be alternative possible and fruitful schemes and therefore cultural differences and conceptual change. Small wonder, then, that we find both universal concepts, values, truth criteria etc., and some more local ones – local ones which may, in some cases, influence the forms of the universals. We have objectivity – but in terms of possible intersubjective agreements, not by reference to an unmediated world.

Such a postmodernist epistemological position is, I have suggested (Leicester 2000) consonant with the current movement towards lifelong learning, a movement in which we have seen the blurring of boundaries – school/post school, education/work, education/leisure, leisure/work, liberal/vocational and education/learning. The very notion of lifelong learning encourages the idea that there is no fixed body of knowledge which can be attained or mastered by a particular point in one's life. Given that knowledge is dynamic, the quest to achieve it is necessarily ongoing. An intellectual engagement with a quest for knowledge and understanding must be lifelong. Similarly, any occupation that is involved with aspects of such human knowledge and understanding (as distinct from more mechanistic skill acquisition) must, necessarily, involve this kind of worthwhile lifelong learning.

The Professional Development of Teachers

Christopher Day has been researching teachers' professional development for nearly 20 years. He places teachers at the heart of the educational process and explores their continuing professional development in the context of the challenges and constraints which affect their ability to sustain this development. He defines professional development in the following way:

> professional development consists of all natural learning experiences and of those conscious and planned activities which are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group or school and which contribute, through these, to the quality of education in the classroom. It is the process by which, alone and with others, teacher's review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purposes of teaching; and by which they acquire and develop critically, the knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence essential to good professional thinking, planning and practice with children, young people and colleagues through each phase of their teaching lives. (Day 1999).

He sees teaching as a vital and moral enterprise because teachers seek to initiate worthwhile learning in their pupils. The professional development of teachers is essential to maintaining quality teachers in quality schools. It is unsurprising that Day's definition of professional development has considerable breadth and depth.

Indeed, according to Day, all learning experiences contribute to educational quality in the classroom and are part of the professional development of teachers. Teachers are agents of change charged with the responsibility of bringing about the moral purposes of teaching. They are critically reflective agents in their own ongoing development throughout their teaching careers.

As RS Peters has convincingly argued, and as most liberal educators in modern democratic societies would agree, education is a normative concept. It is concerned with the development of worthwhile knowledge and understanding. The role of teachers therefore, is indeed to be engaged in a normative enterprise – engaged, that is, in the moral purposes of teaching. Clearly, this wide conception of the role of teachers will require a corresponding breadth in our conception of professional development. The problem is that, although we might endorse the wide conception of professional development suggested by Day and others, to include 'all natural learning and experiences' as part of professional development risks rendering the concept vacuous. Richard Bagnall has pointed out this problem in connection with the conception of lifelong education as education from the whole of life's experiences. This robs lifelong education of any discriminatory power.

When the term professional development or, indeed, the term lifelong learning become so all embracing, not only do they risk loss of meaning, they also invite a plethora of interpretations – a never ending and inconclusive definitional debate. It was partly because of this that Aspin and Chapman (2007) developed their 'pragmatic approach'.

> Rather than participating in an exercise of interpretation, that might in the end prove self defeating or inconclusive, it might, in our view, be better to look, not so much at the various interpretations and accounts of lifelong education, but rather more at the circumstances with which the theories and policies of lifelong education have been articulated, developed and applied.
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> In other words, we are suggesting an objective referent may be found: it lies in the problems to the settlement of which lifelong education programmes are addressed.

The problems which lifelong learning may be said to address, Chapman and Aspin point out, are threefold: economic, political and personal. This pragmatic approach is thus the basis for their triadic conception of lifelong learning in which these three elements interact and cross fertilise each other.

I suggest that this pragmatism is consonant with the pragmatism at the heart of the constructivist conception of knowledge touched on above. I want to suggest that, just as this triadic notion of lifelong learning rescues wider conceptions from the danger of meaninglessness and provides a useful way forward for policy and programme makers, so, too, with a triadic notion of professional development. A triadic notion of professional development can retain the breadth of conceptions such as Day's, while avoiding vacuity or the paralysis of overwhelmingly many interpretations and preferences! Policy and programme makers, as well as individual reflective practitioners, can have a concern for all three aspects of their professional development.

- Professional development with regard to the need for individual student and social economic prosperity

- Professional development with regard to teacher and student personal fulfilment
- Professional development for student's social inclusiveness and democratic understandings and future activity

Consider the full range of skills and understandings required by a competent teacher. These include pedagogic skills, knowledge of child development, subject knowledge, interpersonal skills, personal qualities, study skills and understanding of wider social values and issues and of school and government policy. Clearly, there is a need for a way to organise the acquisition of all this. A triadic classification of learning may be a helpful way forward.

Non-vocationalised Professional Development

The wider triadic conception of lifelong learning encourages a similarly wider perception of professional development. It helps to move us from seeing professional development in terms of initial training which takes us to the point of expertise or full professional competence with any further professional learning seen as short courses to refresh or update the professional. (The knowledge gained in the initial period is able to bring the professional to mastery because it is able to be mastered i.e. it is static, finite, absolute etc.). By seeing lifelong learning as more than the acquisition of vocational skills, we can also see that professional development can involve more than 'once-and-for-all' set of vocational skills. Rather, it can involve ongoing, deepening and widening understandings.

One could say that a triadic conception of professional development, a conception that sees vocational, personal and political aspects of learning as contributing to such development, provides an enriched conception of professional development. In turn, this enriched perception of professional development provides a significant example of the triadic conception of lifelong learning.

Conclusion

Let me sum up the many and inter-related claims about lifelong learning and professional development that have been made in this chapter. First I have endorsed a wider conception of both lifelong learning and professional development, and I have been seeking to show the inadequacy of narrowly vocational and front ended conceptions of either. Second, I have tried to indicate some of the links and overlaps and have argued that continuing professional development is a species of lifelong learning.

I have espoused a constructivist epistemology and suggested that the pragmatism at the heart of such an epistemology is consonant with the pragmatism at the heart of the triadic conception of lifelong learning and, more importantly, that the quest for such knowledge and understanding is, inherently continuous and lifelong.

This inherent quality of learning or acquiring of knowledge and understanding also provides a way of understanding 'profession' and 'professional development'. This claim is made in the context of an extensive literature that has failed to produce an agreed definition.

Finally, I have suggested that the triadic conception of lifelong learning may help us to organise the many demands built in to a wider conception of the professional development of teachers. (It may also, of course, be relevant to other professions). Moreover, triadic conceptions of professional development may, as Aspin and Chapman argued in relation to lifelong learning, provide a pragmatic way forward; through the dangers arising from the sheer breadth and scope of continuing professional development. These dangers are first of conceptual vacuity and continuous and inconclusive definitional debate and second of the paralysis of overwhelming and disparate demands.

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