**0148**

**Enhancing our understanding of professional development: a new conceptual model and analytical framework**

Linda Evans
*University of Leeds, Leeds, United Kingdom*

**Background**

In a recent issue of Educational Researcher an American academic proposed a conceptual framework that represents the extrapolation of five core features of effective professional development (Desimone, 2009). Whilst she presents this conceptualisation and its related 'path model' as something of a breakthrough, Desimone nevertheless calls for more work on defining professional development and for 'better conceptualizations' of it (Desimone, 2009, p. 181). It is a call that I echo, for whilst I agree with Desimone that the research community has made much progress in this area, there is still much to uncover. Yet conceptualisations of professional development available in the literature – including that underpinning Desimone's framework – generally fail to incorporate the depth of analysis needed for a level of elucidation that significantly advances the field. Her model fails to tell us anything more than that if teachers participate in professional development activities incorporating the identified core features (content focus; active learning; coherence; duration; and collective participation), they end up knowing more, increasing their skills, and changing their attitudes and beliefs, which is then likely to change how they teach. But we need to understand what it is about such 'core features' of professional development that makes them potentially effective. The bases of their efficacy and potency need to be examined.

There is a conceptualisation deficit that undermines the value of our knowledge and understanding. In order to understand what makes it effective we must clarify what we mean by effective professional development, yet very few stipulative definitions of it are to be found. The substance of professional development, or its quiddity (i.e. its 'whatness': what it is), remain unexamined. If more work on conceptualising professional development is, indeed, needed it must incorporate greater depth of analysis than has hitherto been evident.

**Research Questions**

This paper will present my original conceptual analysis of professional development. It will address the question: What is professional development? However, there can be no one definitive answer to this question since conceptualisations are subjectively determined and therefore unanimity or consensus are no more achievable than they are desirable. My paper is intended as a contribution towards deepening the level of conceptual analysis that is evident within the field; it will make explicit and address the need for analytical depth, conceptual clarity and definitional precision in the field of professional development or professional learning. It will present my conceptual model, as it currently stands, as propositional knowledge.

By placing it in the public domain I invite others to critique my model and to join me in refining it, thus moving forward the dialogue on what makes for effective professional development by debating its nature, form and substance. To this end, I shall present, for comment, my own concerns about the soundness of the model's current componential structure, which potentially influences its validity as a conceptual representation and its efficacy as an analytical tool.

**Methods**

This will be a predominantly theoretical paper that draws upon the findings of an empirical study conducted several years ago only for the purposes of illustrating the conceptual model as an analytical framework.

The paper incorporates examination of a wide range of literature that, over the last two decades or so, constituted and helped to delineate the sub-field of what was initially labelled in the UK as 'teacher development' and which has more recently taken on the more expansive label of 'professional development'. It builds on my own earlier conceptual analysis of teacher development, published several years ago in the Oxford Review of Education. It expands and reconstructs extensively my earlier model and, following the example of others who have used this earlier model in their work, presents the model in diagram form in order to demonstrate better the componential structure that it explains.

**Frame**

This is an 'ideas' paper; it presents my own original thinking that underpins my conceptualisation of professional development. My starting point was a list of prompt questions about what professionalism is. My conceptualisation of professional development incorporates and makes explicit a relationality between professional development and professionalism and professionality (Hoyle, 1975). I argue that professional development involves the enhancement of individuals' professionalism and/or professionality – which involves a necessary foray into their quiddity and substance. My stipulative definitions of professional development and professionalism were formulated alongside my emergent conceptualizations and associated theorizing.

Since it has as its basis my considering, inter alia, (in order to uncover the essence of professionalism) what practitioners do, think, believe, know and understand, and how they conduct themselves, my model is, arguably, socio-cultural and cultural-psychological in origin and located within a realist social theoretical perspective – at least in relation to an Archerian morphogenetic interpretation of the synergetic interaction between structure and agency (Archer 1995). This, however, is a post hoc interpretation; I applied no a priori consideration of my epistemological stance. Any theoretical allegiance to have emerged has done so without my conscious effort and intention.

**Research findings**

My contribution to the knowledge base is a theoretical model that effectively deconstructs professional development into what I currently present as two, hierarchically arranged, tiers of what I propose as its components or dimensions. (The online conference submission format will not allow me to present the diagram of my model, which will be included in the paper). At the higher tier I trifurcate professional development into 'behavioural', 'attitudinal' and 'intellectual' development, each of which I define stipulatively. For each of these I present and explain several second tier sub-components – eleven in total – which I call foci of change. These are: 'processual', 'procedural', 'productive', 'competential', 'perceptual', 'evaluative', 'motivational', 'epistemological', 'rationalistic', 'comprehensive' and 'analytical' foci or dimensions of change.

My model does not merely contribute to the theoretical knowledge base; it also has practical use. Used as a conceptual and analytical framework it has the capacity to unpick (by deconstructing it to uncover its dimensions or components) the very nature of professional development that is shown to be effective and to offer more explanation about the basis of its effectiveness.