

Chapter 1

Theoretical Foundations of Teachers' Professional Development

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ABSTRACT

To be a professional teacher or teacher educator means to participate in an ongoing learning process. The main concern of teachers is to guide and help students to learn. This means that teaching is by its nature closely connected to personal attitudes and values. Accordingly teaching and teachers' professional development cannot merely be dictated by policy-makers. Ongoing learning and reflection concerning education has to be built on teachers' own participation. Recent research shows that teacher educators undergo the same kind of development as teachers do. Throughout this chapter the author argues for a close connection between teachers and teacher educators as a prerequisite for ongoing professional development in education. Possibilities to communicate through online learning communities have made reflective activities through action research between distant educational environments easier to organize and facilitate.

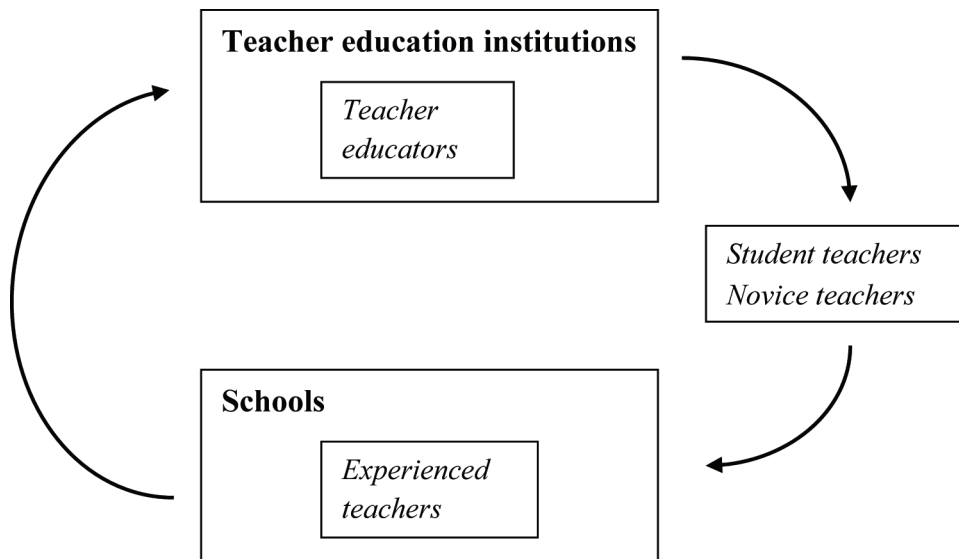
INTRODUCTION

As a young teacher I yearned for the day when I would know my craft so well, be so competent, so experienced, and so powerful, that I would walk into any classroom without feeling afraid. (P. J. Palmer, 1998, p. 57).

According to Hargreaves (2000) we are at a cross-road for teachers' professionalism and professional learning at the beginning of this century. One possible future road is that of teachers' diminished professionalism through regulations, another is to maintain and pursue professionalism based on teachers' own participation. Teaching is closely connected to the affective aspect of human minds, and being a teacher means to be emotionally involved. Education is deeply rooted in personal attitudes and values. The fact that teachers' lives are closely

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Figure 1. Continuous reflection through action research in learning communities



linked to emotions, means that teaching by its' nature is impossible to dictate. Consequently the idea of teachers' professional development should be built on the acknowledgement that teachers' concern is their pupils. Through the chapter I also want to draw attention to teacher educators' professional development, and the necessity of a close connection between teachers and teacher educators in an ongoing learning process. A significant amount of research claims that teachers' professional learning is closely connected to reflection. Research documents that reflection, through action research is a support for teachers' professional development. I intend to argue that teachers' professional development through action research is the bridge between teacher education and teaching in schools, and reflection seems to be the material to build the bridge. Isolated schools as well as teacher education institutions are unable to become learning communities. Professional development for student teachers' and novice teachers' is a common concern for teacher education and schools. The type of support they need is different from experienced teachers' and teacher educators' professional development. I

want to argue that if schools and teacher education institutions are to become learning communities experienced teachers and teacher educators, as well as student teachers and novice teachers need to participate in professional development by continuing reflection through action research, see figure 1.

BACKGROUND

Teachers' professional development is an elusive term. To some it may conjure images of short term courses and workshops. Others may associate it with ongoing learning and reflective practice. So, what does the term teachers' professional development actually mean? According to Darling-Hammond (1994) teachers' professional development is a process of enhancing teachers' status through increased awareness and an expanding knowledge base. Interpretation of teachers' professional development as an investigation of their practice is shared by other researchers. Linda Evans claims that in spite of the fact that many people write and talk about teachers' professional

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