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Francisco, Susanne ; Olin Almqvist, Anette; Salo, Petri

Published in:
Professional Development in Education

DOI:
[10.1080/19415257.2024.2339664](https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2024.2339664)

Published: 14/05/2024

Document Version
Final published version

[Link to publication](#)

Please cite the original version:
Francisco, S., Olin Almqvist, A., & Salo, P. (2024). Editorial: professional learning for praxis development. *Professional Development in Education*, 50(3), 439-443. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2024.2339664>

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Professional Development in Education

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rjie20

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Susanne Francisco, Anette Olin Almqvist & Petri Salo

To cite this article: Susanne Francisco, Anette Olin Almqvist & Petri Salo (2024) Editorial: professional learning for praxis development, *Professional Development in Education*, 50:3, 439-443, DOI: [10.1080/19415257.2024.2339664](https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2024.2339664)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2024.2339664>



Published online: 14 May 2024.



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Editorial: professional learning for praxis development

This Special Issue began taking shape in the editors' minds during a presentation by the editors of *Professional Development in Education* at the 2019 European Conference for Educational Research (ECER). The presentation made the argument that too much of what was written about in relation to professional learning (PL) or professional development (PD) was related to 'what happens' in particular instances of PL/PD. They called for more work to be done on theorising PL/PD and using theory to analyse and better understand PL/PD. We see this Special Issue as responding to that call.

The call for a comprehensive and theory-grounded configuration of prerequisites for, contexts and dimensions of the interrelated concepts and the practices they aim to cover was timely for us editors of this special issue. We had recently finished a manuscript mapping and exploring the research on professional learning and professional development of teachers, principals, and other educators (Olin *et al.* 2020), conducted within the international research network Pedagogy, Education, and Praxis (PEP International), a network we have been involved in and collaborating in for more than fifteen years. In the overview of the research, we identified broader themes related to PL and PD, noted how PL and PD were handled in various stages of a teacher's career, implemented in various educational practices and realised within specific educational sites. This quite delimited exploration, guided by the research question 'How, in different national contexts, is good professional development (praxis development) being understood and experienced by teachers?' resulted in identifying the relational aspects and the collaborative and collective practices as paramount for purposive and sustainable professional learning. We also constructed an overall tentative framework for consolidating the various perspectives on and dimensions of professional learning, with a focus on professional learning for praxis development (Ibid. 157).

Pedagogy education praxis international research network

The authors of the articles in this Special Issue are part of an international research network: PEP International, which has been active since 2006. The PEP International network addresses an overarching research question: *What, for our times, does it mean to live well in a world worth living in?* Three other broad research questions come underneath this overarching one: *What constitutes educational praxis? How are educational practices being differently enabled and constrained in our different national contexts?* and *How, in our times and in our different national, regional and local settings, is education changing in response to differing conditions that are shaping our societies and our world?* The PEP International research network has a focus of transforming education to support people to live well in a world worth living in (Reimer *et al.* 2023).

The theory of practice architectures and the ideal of *praxis* have been guiding the international research collaboration within the PEP-network throughout the years (see Kemmis *et al.* 2014, Mahon *et al.* 2020b). With members from the Nordic countries and Australia, the collaboration has built on a dialogue between intellectual traditions and historically, culturally and socially formed understandings of educational phenomena and related concepts. As Mahon *et al.* (2020) note, the idea of educational praxis is a complex

one (p. 16). We editors, and the authors of the articles in this Special Issue, are from Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Australia, and have been examining our own and each others' understandings of the terms praxis and practice for some time. We are aware that in our various countries there are different understandings of the terms praxis and practice, with the terms being understood as interchangeable in some places (Mahon et al., 2020). In the PEP International network we do not use these terms interchangeably, and one of our key areas of focus is the development of an expanded understanding of praxis. In the development of this concept we draw on Aristotelian and Marxian perspectives. From the Aristotelian perspective, we highlight the concept of morally informed action, and from the Marxian perspective we take the notion of history-making action (Mahon et al. 2020b). We largely adopt the following understanding of educational praxis as defined by Mahon et al. (2020b): 'educational praxis is practice that takes many forms, but it is, generally speaking, morally-politically informed and oriented, reflective, agentic, context-specific, and transformative; it involves taking a moral stand in educational work, and working towards positive change' (p. 17). Such an understanding of praxis has implications for our understanding of professional learning for praxis development.

In our conceptualisation, *Bildung*, as it has been understood and realised in certain traditions and practices of educational research in Nordic countries, complements praxis as described above. *Bildung* relates to and heeds, simultaneously, an ideal for human development and substantiates a lifelong process of becoming more human. Being and becoming a human being are intertwined and presuppose each other (here we focus on being and becoming an educator). *Bildung* includes and expresses a trust in, reliance on, and recognition of humans – our focus here is on educators in their professional settings – with regard to them having the will and ability to realise their potential in an orderly, social and sustainable manner. Realising human potential includes learning and developing professionally. The process of becoming human relies on and aims at fostering autonomous human beings capable of self-reflection and self-determination (Salo and Rönnerman 2023, p. 10). On these foundations, professional learning is understood as an integrative process of simultaneously *being* an educator and *becoming* an educator. Becoming more competent or knowledgeable within a professional practice is both a complex and multifaceted process of learning and an activity of human growth. The interconnected processes and activities of *being and becoming* interact "with histories and traditions (locally, nationally, and globally) and coincide with the cultural, social, and political features of the professional practice in question" (Olin et al. 2020, p. 156).

Professional learning for praxis development

In our previous work, it became clear that the definitions of PD and PL are contested, and also often used interchangeably (Olin et al. 2020). We chose to describe the concept of PD as identifying overarching processes of 'resourcing and structuring arrangements established to explicitly support the development of teachers' knowledge and competence related to their teaching task' (Ibid. 143). Our definition of PL comes closer to the views mirrored in the PEP literature, underpinned by perspectives of praxis and *Bildung* and referring to 'dynamic, organic and open-ended, individual, and collaborative learning processes, inspired and informed by the conditions characteristic to a certain educational site' (Ibid. 143). We concluded, in line with Opfer and Pedder (2011), that a process-product logic has limited explanatory power for processes of PD and PL. Consequently, we identified a need to expand the knowledge of how different elements of, and contextual prerequisites for, PD and PL interplay to mediate professional learning and change. Since our previous chapter focused on reviewing literature in the PEP community, we felt a need to dig deeper into the research field of PD and PL to be able to make a more thorough analyses of how to

understand the concepts based on already existing knowledge and research. This has been accomplished in the first conceptual article of this special issue, added with a review of the concept of everyday learning (Salo *et al.* 2024). The three concepts, PD, PL, and everyday learning are brought together to describe *learning in and for professional practice*, which is the definition of the framework that we offer in this article. Professional learning for praxis development is then defined in similar but slightly different ways in each of the following articles offering empirical examples to deepen and complement knowledge in the research field of PD and PL.

In keeping with the values and ideal of the PEP network, the creation of this Special Issue has been a truly collegial and collaborative process. The authors and editors met regularly online for more than two years. In the beginning of the process, the group formed an open, inclusive, dynamic, and organic research circle, within which the collective academic endeavour included proposing themes and perspectives related to professional learning and development in various contexts, and discussing, reflecting, and responding extensively both to individual and collective initiatives and understandings. During the second stage, when the individual authors had begun to work on their articles we gave feedback on each other's manuscripts and shared our learning throughout the process. In a sense, the process of creating the Special Issue was itself an expression of praxis and praxis development. The article *Understanding professional learning in and for practice* (Salo *et al.* 2024) identifies trust, solidarity/power with, agency, recognition, and time as important components of successful professional learning for praxis development, and these were all elements of the work that we did together to create this Special Issue.

Preparing and completing this Special Issue is a prime example of collaborative professional learning and collaborative praxis. As identified earlier with regard to the academic work within the PEP-network (Smith *et al.* 2010; Mahon *et al.* 2018, pp. 167–182), collective praxis is built on a culture of collegiality (building a sense of belonging, meaningfulness, and togetherness) and intentionality of purpose. The latter refers to the possibility of aligning one's personal aims and interest with those of the university or gaining legitimacy for one's professional interests beyond one's own university (Ibid 63–65). The goal-oriented, inclusive, trustful, and committed collaboration has formed an invisible international university for many of us. It could also be labelled as an invincible university, enabling us to come together, work together, join each others thoughts and company, and thereby enable us to survive and flourish (as academics and as people) within the harsh work environment universities nowadays form. We have taken time and given each other time, and at the same time we have developed a raised awareness of the many aspects and dimensions of time. This will be an area of further focus in our future research.

Inviting reflections from researchers with expertise in the area under investigation but not involved in the particular Special Issue or edited book has been part of PEP practice throughout the history of PEP International, and so the two reflective articles are in keeping with those practices. We invited two leaders in the areas under consideration to reflect on the articles that comprise the Special Issue. Stephen Kemmis is one of the original founders of the PEP International network, and one of the original developers of the theory of practice architectures. Nicole Mockler is highly regarded in the field of professional development and professional learning. Their reflective pieces bring their own unique perspectives to focus on the individual articles that make up the Special Issue, as well as consideration of the Special Issue as a whole.

Introduction to the articles in this special issue

The articles in this Special Issue deliberately explore professional learning across a range of education areas, four countries, various career stages, and various approaches to professional learning. Seven of the articles in this Special Issue have a focus on professional learning

related to schools. Articles variously consider the professional learning of academics in higher education, principals in primary and secondary schools, teachers in vocational education and training (VET) for adults, lead teachers in schools, development leaders in schools, and supervisors of engineer students undertaking internships. Various career stages are included in the articles: pre-service teachers, early career teachers, in-service teachers, senior teachers, lead teachers, and principals.

Almost all of the articles in this Special Issue use a practice theory framework, and in particular the theory of practice architectures, to inform at least some aspect of the associated research. Most of the articles have a focus on the relational – including relationships between teachers, with students, between principals and teachers, and between people with different role responsibilities. For a summary of each of the articles, see the reflection article by Kemmis (2024), *Professional learning for praxis development: Reflections*, in this Issue.

We live in critical times (Mahon *et al.* 2020a), change is an inherent component of education, and ongoing professional learning is crucial for educators. We need to continue to ask ‘professional learning for what?’. We argue that to transform education to support a socially just and sustainable society we need professional learning for praxis development. Such professional learning is multi-faceted and complex. Through identification of power and solidarity, trust, recognition, agency, and time as important elements of professional learning for praxis development, this Special Issue goes some way towards developing a better understanding of this complexity. It provides some examples of approaches for addressing these elements across a range of contexts and career levels. Each of the articles – explicitly and/or implicitly – addresses the relational aspects of professional learning.

Education forms a pivotal role in shaping our society for the future. However, educators cannot do the work of transforming education alone. As Langelotz and Beach (2024) argue, policymakers and decision makers need to prioritise and support professional learning for praxis development: such professional learning cannot be a ‘quick fix’, it takes time and it takes work. There is more work to be done in understanding and supporting professional learning for praxis development, and we authors of this Special Issue have an ongoing commitment to continue this important work.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Susanne Francisco

School of Education, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, Australia

 sfrancisco@csu.edu.au  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1963-5124>

Anette Olin Almqvist

*Department Pedagogical, Curricular and Professional Studies, University of Gothenburg,
Goteborg*

Petri Salo

Faculty of Education and Welfare studies, Åbo Akademi University, Vaasa, Finland