

Jerome, L., Evers, G. & Suthern, A. (2022) 'Professional Development' in N. McGuinn, N. Ikeno, I. Davies and E. Sant (Eds.) *International Perspectives on Drama and Citizenship Education: Acting Globally*, pp.191-197. Abingdon: Routledge.

Chapter 19 Professional Development

Lee Jerome, Gareth Evers & Alex Suthern

Department of Education, Middlesex University

Abstract

Policy and practice around the world are so diverse that they afford very different opportunities (or present varied obstacles) to professional development for those working in drama and citizenship education. This chapter starts therefore from the perspective of teachers and considers the kinds of activities they can pursue to contribute to their own professional development. Dedicating one's life to a career in politics and arts education is often bound up with one's identity and sense of belonging, and professional development can arise from life experiences beyond the confines of formal training or accreditation. This chapter considers how meaningful professional development incorporates an affective dimension and reinforces teachers' sense of vocation and identity. The chapter emphasises that, regardless of organisational and policy frameworks, teachers can exercise a form of situated agency over their own professional development. The chapter discusses how professional learning emerges from a range of experiences, which are subjected to critical reflection, and are often located in networks of practitioners. By addressing issues of identity, purpose, reflective inquiry and collaboration the chapter articulates a view of professional development which develops the drama and citizenship teacher as an agent of change.

Key words

Professional development, professional learning, experiential learning, reflective learning.

Introduction

It would not be possible in this chapter to discuss the variety of formal courses or professional development opportunities available to educators, as these will be as varied as the education and arts policies and systems around the world. Therefore we take the perspective of the individual teacher and share some thoughts about the types of experiences that teachers can undertake, regardless of the formal opportunities available to them. Because our starting point is how individuals make decisions for themselves and benefit from experience, we start with three vignettes drawn from our own professional experience. Our starting point for this chapter was to share stories of significant learning in our own careers, and from discussing these examples, we tease out some abiding principles that might guide readers in thinking about sources of meaningful professional development.

Vignette 1: Learning about drama as a way in to challenging local issues (Alex)

Chickenshed was founded in 1974 and has firmly established its place as a leading innovator of inclusive Theatre in Education in the UK and more recently in the US. As I entered the room to a buzz that comes from actors getting ready to perform, the crowded audience once again gave away the popularity of this type of 'show'. My working community has many strands, and the partnership with local schools is at the heart of everything we do in initial teacher education (ITE). This performance had been commissioned by the local council and was to address the gang culture that has taken hold in some parts of London. The number of young people being recruited into gangs at school gates is on the increase.

The show focused its narrative on the transition from Primary to Secondary school and the vulnerability this brings. What struck me most was the transparency of the content. The actors had created the piece of drama from transcripts of interviews with pupils in a range of schools, so everything about it felt real. They beautifully contextualised the reality of what was happening locally and I could not help but relate these experiences to the schools where I observe lessons on a daily basis as a teacher educator.

After considering the performance, I realised that the essence of working with community theatre lies in the fact that these scripts mirror the images that society projects. Honest theatre is not always comfortable and it forces teachers to face and challenge 'sensitive' topics, thus opening doors for vulnerable young people. The show reminded me to focus on the most skilled part of being a drama teacher, the ability to let pupils find the solutions to the challenges they face by making deeper links with lived experiences. I understood that through culturally responsive teaching, pupils could establish profound connections between broader social issues and their own lives. Even more importantly, they often rely on this model of teaching to feel and express emotions they would otherwise suppress.

Vignette 2: Learning about the power of emotions in public speaking (Gareth)

In 2003, the Iraq War began. In the United Kingdom parliament, the government won a majority for its decision. Nevertheless a fierce debate raged on this highly controversial declaration, both in the UK and around the world. By contrast, in my predominantly white comprehensive school in Cheshire, there appeared to be no debate, fierce or otherwise.

In response the citizenship department organised a staff debate on the Iraq invasion to be held at lunch time where students were encouraged to attend. The teachers wanted to extend students' world-view and appreciation of the global impact of political decisions. As an English and drama teacher, I was approached to be on the panel. I was immediately interested in the opportunity to further my own citizenship knowledge and pedagogy, as well as hone my debate skills. The drama curriculum I taught often incorporated citizenship education so this was a perfect vehicle. Undoubtedly, I too had a shared, narrow viewpoint on the world and to become an 'agent of change,' I needed to re-examine what difference I was truly trying to make when I decided to go in to teaching (Fullan 1993).

The citizenship department wanted to demonstrate how agonistic political argument could be conducted in an open and safe space. I was to take the side of military intervention, a point of view I did not endorse, which gave me a valuable insight into how students often experience classroom debates.

What was fascinating about the debate was the students' engagement. Perceptive questions were asked and followed up, not allowing us to issue a stock answer. Students interrogated us both, demonstrating a deeper and more critical understanding of the crisis than we first thought. As the debate developed, the points I had drawn up seemed less important; it became clear that rhetoric became more significant than the content of the speeches themselves. Similar to the infamous first televised debate between Nixon and Kennedy in 1960, performance was all important; the actual facts were lost. At its conclusion, I won the debate comfortably. As pleasing as it was to win, I had an uneasy feeling about the outcome.

Following the debate experience, my drama teaching changed. It became clear the power of a felt, lived experience meant more to these students and that making controversial topics explicit drew out their criticality and empathy. For example, when teaching about bias and prejudice through drama, I orchestrated a pre-planned disagreement between a student and myself. When the

students shared their observations, the outcomes clearly exposed the possible bias and how a shared experience can be viewed differently by people.

Vignette 3: Learning about role play as a powerful training tool for active citizenship (Lee)

I have always been sceptical about role play as it caused me personal anxiety about 'performing' in public (odd perhaps for a teacher used to performing in front of 30 children every day) and because it seemed to set up a false equivalence between the classroom and the real-life situation we were simulating. How could I, or a twelve year old, really think and act like a Prime Minister, general, serf etc?

My partial conversion happened shortly after I became a member of the London Citizens community organizing network. They had started a local chapter and were recruiting organisational partners (including local schools) interested in tackling poverty and promoting social justice. As part of our membership, London Citizens trained us all, university staff, student teachers, school students and parents to be community leaders and to understand the principles of community organizing. The 'just-in-time' training prepared us for roles and activities that were due to happen for real. For example, we were trained in how to run a listening campaign, just before we ran one in our institution. We were trained in how to negotiate with powerful office-holders, just before we had meetings for real. In these examples, the workshops included role-play.

I was aware of feeling nervous and fearful of losing face through sounding foolish or appearing ill-informed. Embracing the affective dimension meant I was able to visualise what the actual meeting would be like (what it would feel like), and start to consciously plan with others how we would deal with those risks, and what kind of practical strategies we could adopt to prepare for the meeting and support one another so that we, collectively, achieved our goal.

Reflecting on the experience I have come to realise that there were several factors that made this powerful professional learning. It was a simulation, but it felt real because it was part of a real strategy. In that situation I was re-positioned as a citizen-learner, not a professional educator. I also had to entirely embrace the feeling of vulnerability of such a public performance. This helped me to re-think how, when and why I might use role-play. It also helped me to appreciate what it means to think of politics as a kind of performative process. The political meeting is a negotiation, and there are roles established, a variety of cultural scripts already in play, and a set of norms about how to speak, listen and respond. If community groups are to build their capacity and to achieve their goals, they have to learn from experiences, distil powerful lessons for the future, and manage those public civic performances increasingly effectively (Choudry 2015).

Thinking about some principles for professional learning

What struck us when we shared these three stories was that none of them had been framed as 'professional development' opportunities. Alex recalled how she learned through working with a partner; Gareth learned through a collaboration with a colleague; and Lee remembered an experience outside of the education system entirely. There is also a common thread about learning 'for real' what we already knew 'in theory'. For Alex, one of the powerful elements to the experience was hearing back students' own voices, recognising how important it was for educators to really deeply engage with their experiences. Whilst the principles of 'student voice' or 'culturally responsive teaching' had been learned and adopted, this experience made it more urgent and real. For Gareth, the experience of being in the centre of a debate reinforced how powerful rhetoric can be in generating emotional connection, and led him to deal with this more overtly in his teaching. It also showed him that many young people are more engaged (or at least more ready to be engaged) than adults sometimes assume. For Lee, a new pedagogic strategy (role play) was opened up because he had directly experienced it and felt it to be useful. He also felt the experience had

generated an insight into the performative and affective dimensions to political action, which he had hitherto only understood theoretically.

Reflecting on these experiences we offer the following insights that characterise our professional development and suggest some implications for colleagues.

1. Experiential learning through politics and the arts

Professional development undoubtedly occurs through formal programmes, workshops and qualifications. Indeed, it would be strange for teachers and teacher educators not to recognise the value in such deliberately planned opportunities for learning. However, we also need to remember that meaningful learning can be derived from a huge range of experiences, both in and outside of the classroom and school. Many people have written about experiential learning, but the most significant step that transforms experience into learning is reflection. Being busy with new activities does not mean you will learn more, unless you develop the habits of reflection and thinking critically about those experiences. We would contend that citizenship and drama specialists can continue to develop through engaging with politics and the arts. That may be in school or in the community; within formal education or beyond it. In our examples, these experiences were real and not contrived, they engaged us in new experiences but connected directly to our teaching. It seems important to keep developing our understanding of those areas of life so that our knowledge becomes both deeper and wider. Dewey describes this as 'growth' and sees it as a key aim of education (Pring 2007). On this view, learning from experience changes us, by enabling us to transform our sense of the world (and our place in it), and thus transform our ability to engage in subsequent experiences. That means the only experience that can be considered 'miseducative' is one that stops us from seeking further experience. For the drama and / or citizenship teacher we suggest a constant commitment to engaging in and reflecting on politics and the arts hold out the possibility of perpetual personal and professional growth.

2. Embracing problems as the motivation for transformative learning

It is also useful to remember that experiential learning often derives directly from the personal motivations of the learner. There has to be some incentive at work, as Piaget noted, 'a person won't ever solve a problem if the problem doesn't interest him (sic.)' (quoted in Illeris 2007: 79). This interest can arise from our own evolving passions, or it can emerge from problems or disruptions that emerge in our professional lives. When our teaching goes smoothly and there are no major disruptions we may think of our learning as 'accumulative', as our experience deepens and enriches the teacher's craft knowledge. However, our learning might be more conscious when a problem arises, e.g. a tried and tested method fails to work for a class, students become intrigued by something unexpected, or the syllabus changes. Such events stop us in our tracks, require a solution, and compel us to become more conscious and deliberate in our planning, experimentation and reflection (Jarvis 2009). Here Illeris contends the learning can require a deeper shift in our understanding as we move beyond accumulative learning and start to 'adapt' or 'transform' existing schemas. This suggests that teachers should be attentive to the very situations where they feel there are new demands being placed upon them, or new challenges confronting them, as these also afford us the opportunity to develop and direct powerful professional learning.

3. Finding your communities of practice

Whilst our learning can be described individually, it is also worth remembering that the experiences through which we learn, and the activities through which we reflect, are often collaborative. This is a key component of Fullan's (1993) description of the teacher as change agent. This is not a person who takes it on themselves to change practice or pursue certain outcomes, rather such people come together through collaborative networks which both sustain them and enable them to affect change. In Gareth's vignette the opportunity arose from planning in another department, he simply had to

accept the challenge and step into a new role. Other collaborations might emerge from joint planning, for example, the rise of action research / collaborative inquiry teams as a means for collaborative professional development within schools (Nixon et al. 2012). We can also look beyond the school and consider the value of subject associations, unions and other networks of shared interest. These networks offer individuals resources, but they also offer teachers the chance to share interests, develop a professional camaraderie, and combat the isolation that often occurs when the classroom door is closed.

4. Identity, learning and becoming

The notions of growth, motivation and collaboration connect to our own personal and professional identity as teachers of drama and / or citizenship. This might appeal to notions of teaching as a vocation, but it also reminds us that the arts and politics are also often seen as vocations rather than merely jobs. The content of what we learn, the incentives that drive us to learn, and the people with whom we learn all inform who we are and who we may become as practitioners (and more holistically as people). But it also works the other way round, and what we choose to learn and who we learn with are also influenced by our sense of identity. We develop our professional identity within a 'landscape of practice' (Wenger-Trayner et al. 2014) and we come to define ourselves through a complex set of professional judgements and interactions – what kind of institution do we choose to work in, what pedagogic traditions do we favour, who do we see as our allies, and what values drive us? Professional development on this view is not about simply becoming more adept at fulfilling some technical specification for the good citizenship or drama teacher. Rather it is about finding experiences that help us to become the kind of professional we aspire to be. Identity is central to this process.

Conclusion

Our reflections have led us to suggest some useful ways to think about professional development. In conclusion we simply suggest that teachers ask themselves the following questions to help them direct their efforts.

1. What challenges do you need to overcome, what problems require a solution?
2. What interests you and what area of expertise do you want to nurture?
3. Who do you want to learn with / from?
4. What networks, associations and community organisations can support you (and can you support)?
5. What opportunities are there for you to experience something new?
6. What kind of a teacher do you want to be (and avoid becoming)? And what will help you work towards that aim?

We have been inspired by Peter Jarvis who concludes his own account of lifelong learning with the following words:

As a result of learning, we become changed persons and so only in being can we become and in learning we experience the process of becoming. Indeed I am changed and so, therefore, is the situation in which I interact. (Jarvis 2009: 29)

Professional development means finding ways to develop into the kind of professional we aspire to be. On this account, the worst thing is to think you no longer require any further development. As Dewey might put it, our choice is growth or stagnation, but only we know what will nurture us and in what direction we can flourish.

References

- Choudry, A. 2015. *Learning Activism: The Intellectual Life of Contemporary Social Movements*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

- Fullan, M. 1993. "Why Teachers Must Become Change Agents." *Educational Leadership* 50 (6): 12-17. www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/mar93/vol50/num06/Why-Teachers-Must-Become-Change-Agents.aspx
- Illeris, K. 2007. *How We Learn: Learning and non-learning in school and beyond*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Jarvis, P. 2009. "Learning to be a person in society: Learning to be me." In *Contemporary Theories of Learning: Learning theorists... in their own words*, edited by K. Illeris, 21-34. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Nixon, H., Comber, B., Grant, H. & Wells, M. 2012. "Collaborative inquiries into literacy, place and identity in changing policy contexts: Implications for teacher development." In *The Routledge International Handbook of Teacher and School Development*, edited by C. Day, 175-184. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Pring, R. 2007. *John Dewey*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Wenger-Trayner, E., Fenton-O'Creevy, M., Hutchinson, S., Kubiak, C. & Wenger-Trayner, B. ed. 2014. *Learning in Landscapes of Practice: Boundaries, identity, and knowledgeability in practice-based learning*. Abingdon: Routledge.