

# *Professional development:*



*the challenging complexity  
of ‘Leading Teachers’  
Learning’*

*Geert Kelchtermans*

*EUNEC Conference*

*“Leading teachers’ learning”*

*Dublin, 21-22 September 2015*

# Overview

- Positioning myself: researcher/academic, teacher educator, facilitator of professional development
- 4 Parts:
  1. PD, what's in a name? Definition and taking a stance
  2. Towards a conceptual framework of PD
  3. Towards a pedagogy of professional development: rules of thumb, conditions, promises and pitfalls
  4. The potential of “good examples of practice”

# Part 1: PD, what's in a name?

- Multiple definitions exist → choosing one = taking a stance

- Definition:

***Professional development (PD) =  
lifelong process of learning and development  
resulting from teachers' meaningful interactions  
with their professional contexts.***

# Unpacking the definition

## 1. Process of learning and development

- Ongoing, conscious (learning)/unconscious (development)

## 2. Lifelong process:

- Biography → “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 1975)
- Importance and limit of initial teacher education → need INSET
- Different position in career → different needs, interests, ... for PD
  - “horizontal promotion” (Nias, 1989)/Teacher leadership

## 3. Meaningful → teachers are sense-making professionals

- Sense-making is central (individual and collective)
- Assumes reflection (skill and attitude)

## 4. Starting assumption: teachers are professionals

- **Teacher professionalism:**
  - Expertise: knowledge, attitudes, skills
  - Commitment and motivation
  - Judgment: courage and skill to judge and act upon judgment
  - Responsibility (≠ accountability!!)
  - Radical dismissal of the “remedial view”!
    - (PD not to be seen as remedy, compensation for professional insufficiency )
- **PD must start from and contribute to teachers’ professionalism**
  - Not teachers as executors’ of the decisions by others
  - No “blue-print approach”

5. PD descriptive or prescriptive concept?
  - Descriptive: what happens during PD process?
  - Prescriptive: what should/could be done to create/support PD?
  
6. PD definition encompasses formal and informal learning
  - Formal: conference, workshop, training and full programs
  - Informal: daily practice or operating of school contains multiple opportunities for PD → but they need to be recognized as such (by teachers and leaders)
  
7. PD can take place both on-site and off-site
  - Both are relevant and important
  - Impact and conditions for PD differ

# Summing up:

## Aspects of professional development

1. Process of learning and development
2. Lifelong/Careerlong
3. Sense-making central in professionals' learning
4. Teachers are professionals
5. Descriptive and prescriptive
6. Formal and informal
7. On-site and off-site

# Intermezzo: Introducing the illustrative case

- PD-project, funded by Ministry of Education to support development of “local policies for broader educational care and attention to special needs education in primary schools”
  - Participation is free
  - Public tender
- 1 - year project in 2 groups of 4 core teams
- Goal: designing PD based on principles from research; documenting and analyzing the process; contributing to “pedagogy of PD”

# Key elements in our approach:

- a. Condition for participation: only “core teams” (principal + two teachers)
- b. Intake interview → commitment; adjusting mutual expectations
- c. School-based innovative project as part of developing local policy
- d. 5 off-site meetings & 1 evaluation session
- d. Follow-up and supervision on-site during process
- e. Reflective log and systematic documentation by university facilitators
- f. Input from participants (experience) and facilitators (theory; process) → aimed at “zipping”

# Part 2: Towards a conceptual framework

→ 5 parts:

2.1. Individual professional development

2.2. Inevitable contextualisation

2.3. Transfer as the central challenge

2.4. On-site or off-site? Reflections

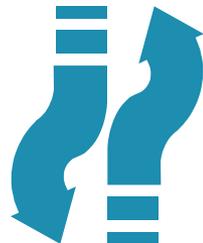
2.5. Effectiveness: an underestimated issue

## 2.1. Individual professional development

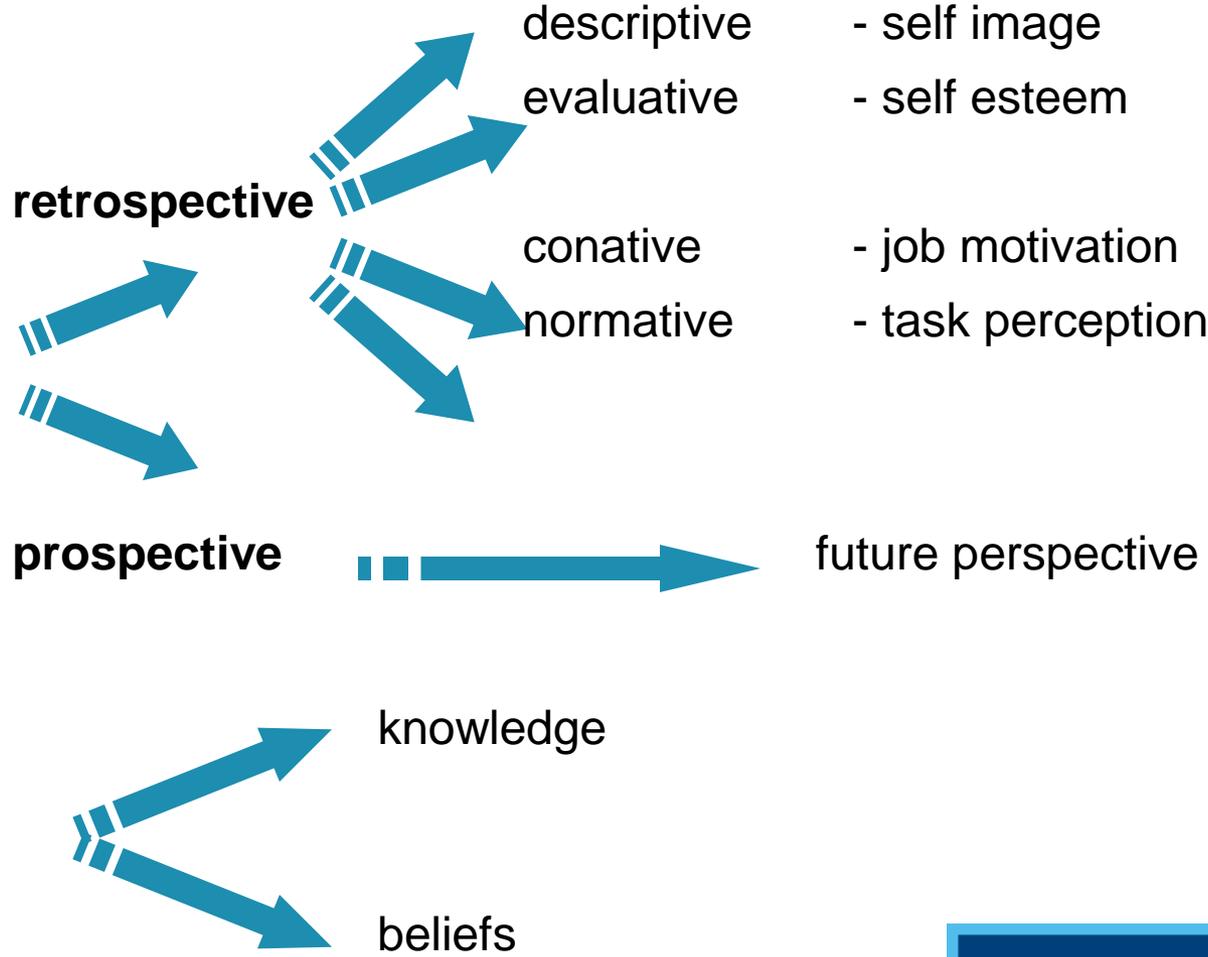
- Learning results in **qualitative changes in both actions and “thinking”**
  - Action: broader repertoire of skills to enact professional practice
  - Thinking → more valid “personal interpretative framework”
    - = Lens to perceive, make sense of and react on situations
    - Metaphor of “glasses”

# COMPONENTS OF THE PERSONAL INTERPRETATIVE FRAMEWORK (PIF)

**professional self-understanding**



**subjective educational theory**



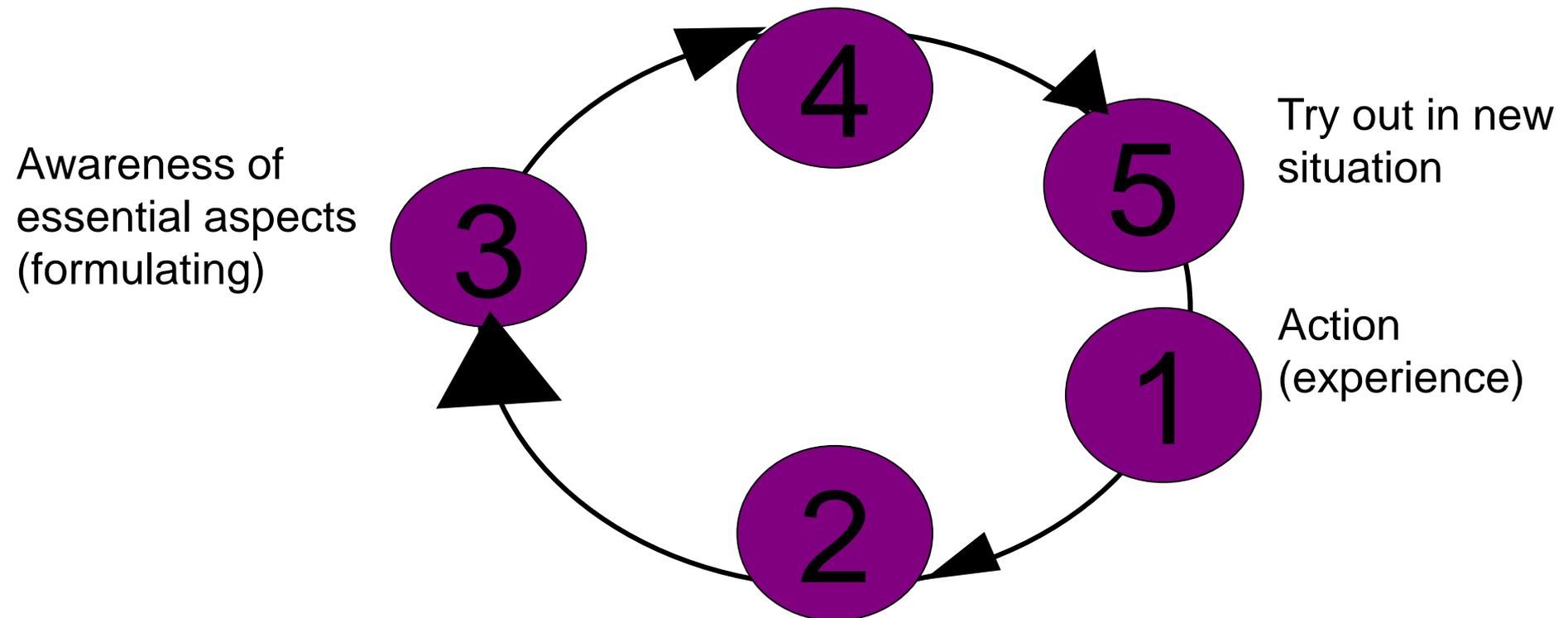
- **Learning** by professionals : “**zipper**”-metaphor
  - Zipping experience/content PD/... and PIF
  - The learner wants/needs to do the zipping him/herself
  - If the zipper gets stuck → reflection, analysis

# Reflection as condition for learning

- Old image of the “reflective practitioner” (Schön, 1983) still holds true as guiding idea
  - Reflection as skill and attitude
  - Link with researcher’s attitude (action research)
- stimulating/supporting reflection
  - Essential condition: modelling by the facilitators!!
    - Being reflective
    - Demonstrating reflectiveness
- Reflection: both form and content

# FORM of reflection: ALAACT-model (Korthagen, 1984)

Alternative actions: identify/develop/choose



Looking back on the action

# CONTENT of reflection: broad and deep

## **BROAD reflection**

- Technical dimension: what and how?  
(problem solving)
- The moral dimension: why?  
(ethical justification)
- The emotional dimension: what do I feel  
(emotional involvement)
- The political dimension: in who's interest?  
(power, influence)

## DEEP Reflection: beyond the level of action

- Questioning the personal interpretative framework (PIF) → essential for deep and sustainable learning
- Critical reflection
- Comment: broad and deep reflection = necessary conditions for PD to be professionalizing!!

## 2.2. Inevitable contextualisation

- Sustained professional learning (enactment in practice) demands **individual and school development go hand-in-hand** → PD always takes place IN CONTEXT
  - Context-independent claims on relevant/effective conditions for PD are problematic (see a.o. Timperley)
  - Participants in PD always bring their context with them
    - Participant is “me in my working context”
    - “learning needs” always situated in/motivated from actual context
    - Learning results need to be transferred to that context
- *Example in case:*
  - *innovative project*
  - *Aiming at structural supportive conditions (core team)*

## 2.3. Transfer as the central challenge

- Moving changes in thinking/action from PD- setting to one's working context and “put them to practice”
  - Individual practice
- Collective/collaborative practice → demands changing practices and thinking of others
  - Negotiation → “micropolitical skills”
  - Chicken or egg?-problem (beliefs or actions?)
- In a sustainable way
  - Parallel to phases in literature on educational innovation: adoption – implementation- institutionalisation (i.e. Fullan, 1982)
  - Designing PD → envisage structural “anchorage”
  - “professional learning community” PLC (e.g. Stoll et al., 2007)

## 2.4. On- or off-site? Some reflections

### 2.4.1. On-site

- Facilitator can experience (observe, analyze) the context (collegial interactions; enactment of leadership; organisational culture)
- Facilitator can thematize the obvious (being the “relative outsider”)
- Having colleagues engage in work on/discussion about issue in itself may already contribute to PD
  - The PD-setting: re-positions them → opens up space for development and learning
- Lower threshold for “the unwilling”
- Facilitator as scapegoat!
- Again: PLC as guiding principle

## 2.4.2. Off-site

- More radical repositioning: wordly and metaphorically “taking a distance”
  - “traffic island”
  - Being “out” (of balance, of normal position, ...)
- Motivation for participation
  - Can differ widely → different interests may be in play (i.e. finding audience/public recognition which is denied ‘at home’)
  - Exploring learning needs as start often misses the point
- Paradox: opening up in discussion about practice (and underlying beliefs) is often easier to “strangers”
- Pitfall: losing touch with colleagues/team → too well professionalized

## 2.5. Effectiveness: an underestimated issue

- Not easy to evaluate!
  - Complexity of individual-collective and contextualised sense-making
  - Differences of individuals/schools
  - Criterium to judge far from evident!
  - Effects take time
  - Effects are always over-determined: not by easily identifiable decontextualised variables
- “there is always happening both more and less than what was planned for”
  - Advice 1: document, interpret, judge and conclude
  - Advice 2: refuse simplistic effect measurements (invalid!)

# 3. Pedagogies, promises and pitfalls...

- **Theory is cool!!** (and most practical!)
  - helping professionals to master theoretical frames to better question, read and judge their practice is most practical
- **The beauty of the unintended side-effects**
  - Expect the unexpected!! → ‘see them’
  - Examples:
    - car pooling as a powerful learning environment
    - Authenticity around the coffee machine
- Facilitators need to take **researcher’s attitude**
  - Cfr. “inquiry as a stance” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999)

## 4. The potential of good examples of practice

- Importance of making results of PD public as part of school development
  - As part of professional responsibility (instead of accountability)
- The problem of “examples of good practice”
  - Invalid assumptions about
    - Possibility of best practices (→ denying normative character of criteria)
    - Importance of contextualisation
  - Treating the audience as the ignorants who need to be told what to do (= de-professionalising)

# Good examples of practice

- ‘Good’ refers to the **form and content** of the presentation:
  - Descriptive: how are things happening (representing, describing)
  - Explaining: why are things happening the way they do? (conceptually unpacking, critically analysing, grounding)
- Authors take:
  - Normative stance (justification) → making criterium explicit
  - User is treated as competent partner in an ongoing dialogue (acknowledgement of professionalism)
- Developing publicly shared and critically grounded professional knowledge base on practice

## A good example of practice works

- **Revealing:**
  - Showing, making visible, demonstrating
- **Problematising:**
  - Questioning the obvious and taken for granted
- **Inspiring:**
  - Appealing, inviting, calling on professional commitment

# Reading more?

- Kelchtermans, G. (2004). CPD for professional renewal: moving beyond knowledge for practice. In C. Day & J. Sachs (Eds.), *International Handbook on the Continuing Professional Development of Teachers* (pp. 217-237). Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Kelchtermans, G. (2009). Who I am in how I teach is the message. Self-understanding, vulnerability and reflection. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 15, 257-272
- Kelchtermans, G. (2015) Learning from 'good examples of practice'. *Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice*, 21, 361-365. (DOI: 10.1080/13540602.2014.969103).
- Vanassche, E. & Kelchtermans, G. (2015). Facilitating self-study of teacher education practices: toward a pedagogy of teacher educator professional development. *Professional Development in Education*, DOI: 10.1080/19415257.2014.986813