THE PERSONALIZED CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING OF TEACHERS
A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Orit Avidov-Ungar
Taking a personalized and global approach, this timely volume links theory with application in the context of continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers, exploring current scholarship on teachers’ CPD and charting the shift towards continuing professional learning (CPL).

Chapters look at concepts such as motivation, expertise, career trajectory, life story and empowerment, as well as their influences and respective roles in the personalization of teachers’ professional growth during their career. Presenting the principles of personalization and their significance for teachers’ CPL, this book provides a global perspective and model that clarifies the practical implications of the move towards teachers’ personalized CPL, including the necessary changes in both teachers’ attitudes and teacher education frameworks.

Offering a unique and innovative multidimensional ‘template’ model that works as a tool for teachers interested in structuring their professional learning, this book will be useful to practitioners and researchers involved with teachers’ professional development, school leadership, school management, as well as international and comparative education research more broadly.

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A Global Perspective

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1 **Professional development** – a process in which a teacher’s professional identity is formed, and their implicit knowledge becomes explicit throughout their personal and professional empowerment in the professional context.

2 **Adult learning** – a mission-oriented independent learning process involving real-life problems and tasks.

3 **Personalized learning** – instruction in which the pace of learning and the instructional approach are optimized for the needs of the learner.

4 **Continuous professional learning (CPL)** – the continuity of teachers’ professional growth throughout their careers beyond formal training, to meet their individual professional needs.

5 **Empowerment** – a process in which the ability to act is increased, thus shifting the individual stance from passive, and even helpless, to active and in control as an individual and as a professional.

6 **Career stages** – five stages in teachers’ professional growth after the initial training phase: Novice teachers; advanced teachers; competent practitioner (a level obtained after 5–7 years); proficient practitioner; and expert.

7 **Profession** – methodical and binding training based on unique technology that is service-oriented and grounded in a code of ethics (Starr, 1982).

8 **Role** – the expected behavior of a position holder within their defined responsibilities.

9 **Organizational role** – the expected behavior of a position holder within their defined responsibilities in relation to a specific organization.

10 **Professional learning communities** – a group of professionals who meet regularly to collaboratively deal with shared tasks and goals based on a shared vision and mutual support.
Education means development and growth, where the teacher supports every step chosen by the learner, rather than taking steps for them. The teacher should know the children and educate them according to their nature, temperament, and character – thus helping them form their own unique identity, or self. This process continues throughout life. This idea is the basis for the personalization of students’ learning, from which we can draw inferences regarding adult learning, and specifically teacher learning.

In light of this, the key questions that every teacher should ask themselves at certain points in time are – what professional position do I currently hold? What professional position do I aspire to reach in my career? What actions should I take to advance those professional aspirations?

The main question addressed in this book is how professional learning can be effectively and meaningfully maintained throughout the teaching career so that every teacher can navigate their learning and professional growth according to their wishes, needs, character, and area of expertise.

To answer this question, we take a global perspective (Zhu & Bonk, 2022), reviewing the issue in four parts: The first introduces the theories and concepts of professional learning and development; the second explains personalized continuing professional learning; the third deals with four important aspects of personalized continuing professional learning; and the fourth suggests theoretical and practical implications.
Part 1: Fundamentals, definitions, and characteristics of professional development

Part 1 contains three chapters. The first offers a brief introduction to the realm of professional development. The second presents the characteristics of effective professional learning that collectively advance and promote educator growth. The third examines the characteristics of adult learning and the existing ecology of professional development in teacher learning in a challenging and innovative environment, in which the teacher must act as a member of a profession.

Chapter 1 presents a literature review and general definitions of and different approaches to professional development (PD) and professional learning, linking it to the general worldwide trend of lifelong learning for everyone. The dynamic teachers’ role in an era of tremendous changes calls for appropriate training and PD (Avidov-Ungar, 2016a, 2016b). The traditional approach perceives PD as the continuous development of teachers’ professional knowledge and skills (Avidov-Ungar et al., 2023; Bolam, 2002). Another approach views professional training as the ongoing formation of the teachers’ professional identity, including accountability and commitment (Hargreaves, 2005), all of which should both maximize the development of the teachers themselves and translate into both better teaching and enhanced student outcomes.

Chapter 2 discusses effective PD. Despite the broad consensus regarding its importance for teachers, researchers are still searching for the ideal combination of characteristics to ensure its effectiveness (Avidov-Ungar, 2016a). Various frameworks representing traditional and current approaches, including the guidelines of Israel’s Ministry of Education for teachers’ PD are reviewed. It is claimed that in this matter, “one size fits all” will not suffice: Each teacher has their individual characteristics, wants, and needs, and therefore, adopting a personalized approach to professional learning is key for it to be truly effective (e.g., Rodman, 2019). This notion is emphasized by the continuing professional learning (CPL) approach, viewing teachers as learners throughout their entire career: It can be easily seen when considering novice teachers, who have very different professional development needs to veteran teachers.

Chapter 3 presents the ecological perception of adult learning (Barnett & Jackson, 2019), and specifically, teacher professional learning. This approach views the education system and its administrative and institutional agencies as ecosystems in which spiritual, social, organizational, natural, and technological facets are combined into a single organism. Accordingly, it is important to examine the ecology of teachers’ PD. In this respect, several PD formats are explored as part of this ecosystem involving the teachers’
learning, the impact on the school as an organization, and ultimately on the students, via the development of school learning communities and professional learning communities.

Part 2: Personalized continuing professional learning

In the second part of the book, we deepen our examination of personalized professional learning as an ongoing, career-long process. It focuses on the features of adult learning and addresses the transition from traditional, usually top-down, professional development toward the concept of continuing professional learning and its personalization. Also presented are several theories and approaches to achieving effective personalization of continuing professional learning.

Chapter 4 asks what is the relationship between andragogy – teaching adults – and pedagogy – teaching children? What are the similarities and differences between the two? It then reviews various theories of adult learning, and presents six principles: The learner as an autonomous entity; life experience and learners’ knowledge; readiness for learning; immediacy of implementation; and learner’s motivating personal needs. These principles are also linked to the concept of lifelong learning and highlight the fact that effective teachers’ andragogy should be self-directed and problem-centered, even though today, most teacher’s PD is still imposed top-down, with no regard for teachers’ needs and aspirations.

Chapter 5 discusses the transition of approach from traditional PD to personalized continuing professional learning (CPL), presenting models with limited teacher input as well as models with more significant teacher input, including peer learning. This is followed by discussion of the meaning of CPL. Desimone’s (2009) characteristics of effective PD are examined in light of personalized CPL: Content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation. Similarly presented are Schifter’s (2016) four principles regarding time to assimilate, support for teachers, school level intra-organizational communication, and structural changes within the schools. All of the above characteristics must work in conjunction with each other.

Chapter 6 explores the best practices of personalized CPL, dividing a range of theories and approaches into four realms of best practice that focus on teachers, on implementation, on content, and on outcomes. A summative review is presented of each of the different models and theories of these best practices for personalized CPL, such as the Diffusion of Innovations Model, Mentor/Coach Models, Self-Efficacy Theory, and Online Teachers Professional Development. This range of theories and approaches to potential andragogy for teachers clearly demonstrates that there already exist several formats within which to develop teachers’ personalized CPL.
Part 3: Aspects of teachers’ personalized continuing professional learning

The third part addresses four highly important aspects of personalized CPL: Motivation, career stage, personal narrative, and sense of empowerment – the components of the Personalized Continuing Professional Learning – Motivation-Career-Story-Empowerment (PCPL-MCSE) model. One of the goals for individual development is to increase the professional level of teachers, thereby raising the level of teaching, which directly affects student achievement. Despite the wide recognition of the importance of high-quality PD, it is yet to be regarded as a high priority in the 21st century. In his review of the field of personalized professional development, Hanson (2017) asserts that numerous PD courses and learning opportunities on offer do not align with teachers’ needs and wants. The best professionalization is the one chosen personally by the teacher: Therefore, the most effective PD is designed with their individual needs and wants as the guide: Customized professional learning.

Chapter 7 presents the first component of the PCPL-MCSE model – motivation. It provides a review of the issues of teacher motivation for professional learning, asserting that teacher motivation is a prerequisite for truly effective professional learning. Understanding motivation is critical for providing teachers with effective professional development (Avidov-Ungar & Oshrat-Fink, 2016). This section proposes a typology of teacher motivation to engage in CPL, based on two related continua: Motives and aspirations for either lateral growth as a professional or vertical growth within the system. Also discussed are other key facets affecting teachers’ motivation to engage in professional learning throughout their careers.

Chapter 8 presents the second component of the PCPL-MCSE model – the aspect of career stages (Näykki et al., 2021). Each stage in the teaching career is characterized by different aims, needs, and behaviors (Avidov-Ungar, 2023; Eshchar-Netz et al., 2022). The stages do not necessarily progress linearly or at a unified pace, and therefore, it is important to know how to identify the teacher’s career stage. This chapter presents and explains steps in teachers’ career development and reviews and compares relevant models. It also relates to the shift, some decades ago, toward teaching as a reflective practice and the effects of this in terms of teachers’ growth and development.

Chapter 9 refers to the teachers’ narrative, or life story of their professional identity, the third component of the PCPL-MCSE model. One of the prominent dimensions by which teachers construct their professional identities is through professional development. Teachers’ professional learning must take into account personal aspects such as teachers’ perceptions of their profession and of themselves as having expertise within that profession (Avidov-Ungar & Herscu, 2020). The acknowledgement of teachers’ professional
development narratives offers a means of recognizing that teacher’s CPL plays an important role in their identity development. Thus, this chapter presents a literature review on teacher professional identity, showing how teacher narratives can demonstrate its development. Chapter 10 discusses the fourth and final component of the PCPL-MCSE model, that of the sense of empowerment. This is the shift from a more passive and helpless state to one of action and control. Empowered teachers feel a sense of efficacy, motivation, and commitment; they deal successfully with decision-making and handling professional problems that arise in the classroom and at school. The sense of empowerment is presented as relating to three axes – their own personal experience, the influence of others, and the events within the organization providing their work context. The sense of empowerment and personal and professional development are interlinked: Empowerment sustains development and encourages the individual to dare, initiate, take chances, and evolve (Avidov-Ungar & Hanin-Itzak, 2019).

Part 4: Theoretical and practical implications for personalized continuing professional learning

The fourth part of the book suggests theoretical and practical implications. Deriving from all that has been previously presented, it presents the key principles of the personalization of teachers’ CPL. It then presents potential pathways via which such personalization can be achieved. In particular, it explores the framework of the ever-more ubiquitous professional learning communities, showing how it allows teachers to actualize the principles of personalized learning. This is followed by the presentation of a unique and innovative multidimensional “template” model combining aspects of the profession with aspects of the job. This model constitutes a tool teachers can use when designing their professional learning at any particular stage in their career. Chapter 11 describes the principles of personalization of learning and the personalization of CPL from a theoretical perspective. It then presents pathways by which it is possible to promote the personalization of learning and the personalization of professional learning communities from a practical perspective. Among other things, the issues discussed include: Educating teachers and other stakeholders about the value and benefits of personalized CPL; the transfer of responsibility and accountability to the teachers, proper utilization of resources, the diversification of learning frameworks, fostering teachers’ self-directed learning, and empowering teachers’ leadership through knowledge construction. Chapter 12 offers an example of how one of the pathways suggested in the previous chapter might be used as part of a teacher’s professional learning plan – the framework of the professional learning communities (PLCs).
The chapter shows how this can be a model for effective personalized CPL (Avidov-Ungar, 2017, 2018, 2019; Avidov-Ungar et al., 2022). Recent studies on PLCs, and their investigation in schools and as part of teacher training are presented, demonstrating how principles of personalized CPL are easily addressed within the PLC framework. Indeed, the collaborative aspect of PLCs can be perceived as part of the global vision of continuing professional learning (Avidov Ungar, 2019; Shonfeld & Gibson, 2018).

Chapter 13 describes the definition and components of a profession, and specifically the components of teaching as a profession, as well as the organizational role of the teacher (Avidov-Ungar, 2016b). The chapter proposes a theoretical-practical framework for professional growth based on personalized CPL and the principles and definitions of the profession in relation to the organizational role of teachers. This two-axis framework aims to help teachers identify the characteristics of their role as a professional, which can then be used to plan personalized professional learning. It can also be used by policymakers and developers of in-service courses.

Chapter 14 discusses the issues involved in facilitating wider adoption of the personalized approach to teachers’ CPL. First, the need for this change is explicated. This is followed by identification of all stakeholders in the process – government policymakers, supervisors, teacher educators, principals, and, of course, the teachers themselves. For each group, the chapter offers principles for adoption and promotion, and how these principles might be implemented. It then recognizes and presents possible reasons for resistance to the change for each group, and how these obstacles might be overcome within each group. To this end, it clearly reiterates the benefits to be gained from adopting this new approach.

References


PART 1
Definitions and characteristics of professional development

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Introduction

This chapter presents a literature review and general definitions of and different approaches to professional development (PD) and professional learning, linking it to the general worldwide trend of lifelong learning for everyone. The dynamic teachers’ role in an era of tremendous changes calls for appropriate training and PD (Avidov-Ungar, 2016a, 2016b). The traditional approach perceives PD as the continuous development of teachers’ professional knowledge and skills (Avidov-Ungar et al., 2023; Bolam, 2002). Another approach views professional training as the ongoing formation of the teachers’ professional identity, including accountability and commitment (Hargreaves, 2005a), all of which should both maximize the development of the teachers themselves and translate into both better teaching and enhanced student outcomes.

Professional development among in-service teachers

In-service teachers are expected to develop professionally over time with respect to their experience, knowledge, and skills. There is a drive toward enabling lifelong professional development (PD) for in-service teachers (Day, 1999; Tovkanets, 2018). Thus, teachers’ PD is considered to continue until the teacher leaves teaching, for example, to undertake a largely administrative role within the education system (e.g., in district management) to pursue other interests (e.g., as a result of disillusionment with the teaching profession), or to retire as a veteran teacher.