



REVIEW

Theoretical approach to professional development: A review of the pedagogical process

Acercamiento teórico a la superación profesional: Una revisión del proceso pedagógico

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses professional development as a continuous pedagogical process based on theoretical and methodological foundations derived from research in the educational context. It focuses on the relationship of professional development with other categories such as instruction, education, preparation, training and performance. The paper stresses the importance of the aspired education to be integral, with several dimensions to be developed. An integral professional must be able to think, feel, value, believe and act, which is reflected in his or her performance in educational practice. Education should prepare individuals both for life in general and for their insertion into the world of work, which is the very essence of the educational process. Professional development, as a pedagogical process, is organized and consciously directed towards a single objective: the integral formation of the personality to develop effectively in its various contexts of action. This process includes various organizational forms, such as continuing education and postgraduate courses, workshops, seminars and conferences, among others. The paper emphasizes that in order to achieve this process successfully, it is essential to previously identify the needs and demands for improvement through an initial diagnosis. This diagnosis serves as a starting point for the planning of pedagogical actions, their implementation, evaluation and control of the results obtained, which should be manifested in the educational environment.

Key words: Professional Development; Pedagogical Process; Professional Performance.

RESUMEN

Este artículo aborda la superación profesional como un proceso pedagógico continuo basado en los fundamentos teórico-metodológicos derivados de la investigación en el contexto educativo. Se enfoca en la relación de la superación profesional con otras categorías como instrucción, educación, preparación, capacitación y desempeño. El artículo subraya la importancia de que la educación a la que se aspira sea integral, con diversas dimensiones que deben ser desarrolladas. Un profesional integral debe ser capaz de pensar, sentir, valorar, creer y actuar, lo cual se refleja en su desempeño en la práctica educativa. La educación debe preparar a los individuos tanto para la vida en general como para su inserción en el mundo laboral, que constituye la esencia misma del proceso formativo. La superación profesional, como proceso pedagógico, es organizada y dirigida conscientemente hacia un objetivo único: la formación integral de la personalidad para desenvolverse eficazmente en sus diversos contextos de actuación. Este proceso incluye diversas formas organizativas, como cursos de superación y posgrado, talleres, seminarios y conferencias, entre otros. El artículo resalta que para lograr este proceso con éxito, es esencial identificar previamente las necesidades y demandas de superación a través de un diagnóstico inicial. Este diagnóstico sirve como punto de partida para la planificación de acciones pedagógicas, su implementación, la evaluación y el control de

los resultados obtenidos, los cuales deben manifestarse en el ámbito educativo.

Palabras clave: Superación Profesional; Proceso Pedagógico; Desempeño Profesional.

INTRODUCTION

The information and knowledge society have ushered in a paradigm shift, a consequence of the exponential growth of information, the rapid development of information and communication technologies, and the integration of the diverse media and formats containing the results achieved through science and technology. Furthermore, the various pathways and forms of access to generated knowledge impose on humanity at large, and professionals, in particular, the need for constant preparation and updating to navigate an ever-changing world.

Institutions and professionals bear the primary responsibility for seeking alternatives and strategies that enable them to acquire the knowledge and know-how necessary to achieve professional performance aligned with scientific and technological development.

In this context, the importance of professional development as a pedagogical process regains value, as it stands out as a primary avenue for updating and acquiring new knowledge to be applied in practice. In the particular case of professionals fulfilling their roles in educational settings, professional development becomes an indispensable necessity aiming to make learning a tangible reality throughout life.

DEVELOPMENT

The concept of professional development has been thoroughly examined in the educational sphere. The educational community is increasingly recognizing the imperative to delve into this category to enhance one's own practice.⁽¹⁾

The continuous improvement of university graduates underscores collective learning, integration into networks, and the development of research, technology, culture, and art in pursuit of high professional and innovative competence. To fulfill this diverse range of functions, it is structured into two subsystems: professional development and academic training.⁽²⁾

Professional development is guided by the categories of Pedagogy, specifically aimed at instruction. This presupposes a certain level of individual preparation for participation in various spheres of social activity. Teaching, as an integral process of organizing cognitive activity and facilitating the assimilation of knowledge, plays a crucial role in fostering the development of skills and capacities, contributing significantly to education.⁽³⁾

Training, as a pedagogical category, is interpreted as the foundation of development, and as a consequence of it; it is understood as the guidance of development towards the achievement of educational aims.⁽⁴⁾ The unity between categories becomes one of the fundamental principles of pedagogy, implying the assurance of a comprehensive pedagogical process: the unity of knowledge, the development of capacities, and the formation of convictions, attitudes, and moral and character traits.

Professional development, as an organizational form of postgraduate education, aims to contribute to lifelong education and the systematic updating of university graduates. It strives to improve the performance of professional and academic activities, as well as enrich the professionals' cultural heritage.⁽⁵⁾

When referring to professional development, it alludes to actions aimed at labor resources with the purpose of updating and improving current and/or prospective professional performance. Unlike the system of scientific degrees, it is directed at all graduates, as at any given moment, for any of them, it is possible to enhance their knowledge or skills to improve their current work or to cover new responsibilities. It is also seen as "a set of teaching-learning processes (...) for better performance of their job responsibilities and functions".^(6,7)

According to Valiente (2001), professional development is a process of continuous, prolonged, and permanent nature that takes place during the performance of teaching or managerial functions. He also refers that it is aimed at both professional and human improvement.⁽⁸⁾

It is emphasized that as a process, geared towards fostering both professional and human progress, responding to the transformations required in the behavior of educators, encompassing changes in their general and specialized knowledge, essential and specific skills, habits, attitudes, values, as well as their responsibilities, job functions, and professional attributes.⁽⁹⁾

Professional development is characterized by its transformative role on the individual. It relies on the accumulated professional experience, considers the active participation of individual needs, and encourages group work and self-improvement.⁽¹⁰⁾

As described by Bernaza et al. (2018), professional development is directed at university graduates to meet their roles, justified by a need rather than a mere offering, its primary objective is to contribute to the lifelong

education of professionals. Its main functions include systematic updating, refining or reorienting professional performance, along with enriching cultural and personal heritage. Moreover, in the realm of postgraduate education, it is conceptualized as an element of training, that conceptually surpasses it.⁽¹¹⁾

It is a systemic process; it involves continuous transition; it is viewed as a hidden necessity rather than an offered product; it encompasses actions that prepare individuals for a particular job, reorienting and updating them. These aspects are crucial to consider in professional development, especially in educational contexts directed towards graduates of institutions of higher education.

Professional development is defined as a conscious, organized pedagogical process aimed at the formation of personality. It involves establishing active, reciprocal, and multilateral social relationships among the educator, learner, and group. The primary focus is on achieving objectives set by society, the institution, the group, and the individual.⁽¹²⁾ These traits strategically identify and distinguish it from spontaneity and improvisation.

Ongoing education extends beyond the teaching-learning process, encompassing other formative and developmental processes closely linked to current work activities. It represents a systematic succession of learning activities within a specific historical-cultural context, where the professional practice and experience of participants generally play a role. It is characterized by its transformative nature and contribution to the continuous and relevant improvement of professional performance and the achievement of authentic values.⁽¹³⁾

Theoretical and methodological approaches to professional development emphasize its primary objective, focusing on the development of the professional. From the perspective of advanced education theory, the improvement of both professional and human aspects is highlighted as a fundamental purpose.⁽¹⁴⁾ The objectives are directed toward expanding, refining, updating, and complementing knowledge, skills, and capabilities, consolidating values, and promoting the development and modes of professional action.

In the realm of medical education, professional development has consistently been a subject of study. It is considered a crucial pathway for the cultivation of knowledge, skills, and interests that empower professionals in medical sciences to elevate their proficiency in teaching and methodological functions. This, in turn, serves as fundamental pillars in the teaching-learning process. Furthermore, professional development should constitute an integral component of strategic educational management in the pursuit of excellence in the healthcare services provided.⁽¹⁵⁾

Therefore, in the design of professional development, it is crucial to consider the characteristics that distinguish the individuals to whom it is aimed: the functions they perform and the identified development needs resulting from a diagnosis encompassing the cognitive-conceptual, procedural, and motivational-affective-volitional spheres.

Professional development, for its projection and implementation, considers the diagnosis as well as the professional's needs to respond to the demands of the context.⁽¹⁶⁾ It pays attention to their multiple experiences and insights; the specific context where they carry out their work activity; the adequate combination of different organizational forms and the selected activities, and the enhancement of performance in their basic functions.

Reference is made to pedagogical professional development, also identified as a continuous education process aimed at improving the professional performance of teachers and the continuous refinement of the teaching-learning process.⁽¹⁷⁾

Viewed as the individual's ability to conduct actions, duties, and obligations typical of their position or professional functions required by a job post. This is manifested in the actual behavior or conduct of the worker in relation to the other tasks to be fulfilled during the exercise of their profession. It involves attitudes, knowledge, and a manner of interaction that have an impact on the overall quality of the task.⁽¹⁸⁾

In general terms, professional development is regarded as a consciously organized and intentional pedagogical process, aimed at the continuous preparation of professionals in the theoretical, methodological, and practical order. This aligns with the performance of their teaching, methodology, and scientific-investigative functions, with a unifying conception of knowledge and procedures in harmony with scientific and technical development and their context of professional action.

In a general sense, for its diagnosis and projection, aspects aimed at can be considered (table 1).

It is worth noting that for each educational context, these aspects vary according to their characteristics, purposes, and objectives. However, it is important to emphasize that their diagnosis and planning in a general manner should comprise three essential dimensions: knowledge, know-how, and know-how-to-be.

The results of this analysis enable the planning and organization of professional development actions that address the increasingly realistic learning needs and demands, assuming the recognized organizational forms for this purpose.

Table 1. Aspects to consider for the diagnosis and projection of professional development	
CONCEPTUAL (Theoretical Aspects)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mastery of their functions • Mastery of the theoretical-methodological foundations that support their main activity • Mastery of categories related to their main activity (teaching, methodological, and research) • Mastery of the theoretical-methodological aspects of the educational or training level in which they perform • Mastery of norms and procedures for the execution of functions
PROCEDURAL (Resources, Strategies, and Procedures for the Performance of their Functions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilization of resources and procedures for the planning, execution, control, and evaluation of teaching and learning strategies • Demonstrated professional independence • Elaboration of strategies in accordance with their action context • Results of professional performance • Professional development actions aimed at their preparation • Actions aimed at self-management of knowledge and self-preparation
ATTITUDINAL MOTIVATIONAL (Satisfaction, Commitment, in the Performance of their Functions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socialization of the results of their professional development • Satisfaction in the fulfillment of their functions • Motivation for the continuity of their professional development • Commitment to the principles and values of education

The primary organizational forms of professional development are defined as: courses, training programs, and diploma programs, complemented by other organizational forms such as seminars, workshops, specialized conferences, scientific debates, consultations, and self-preparation. The latter is of immense importance in the current context in which professionals operate.⁽¹⁹⁾

Course: it is designed to complement, deepen, or update professional training achieved through the teaching-learning process, organized with contents that cover relevant research findings or essential aspects contributing to the improvement or reorientation of professional performance.

Training: it involves updating, refining, systematizing, and consolidating practical skills and knowledge with an elevated level of independence for professional performance or reorientation. It also includes the use of new procedures and technologies and is conducted in settings conducive to research, development, innovation, artistic creation, specialized performance, or other activities related to professional practice. Training is conducted under the guidance and monitoring of the tutor.

Diploma Program: This form of professional development is designed to specialize, update, deepen, and expand the professional training achieved or contribute to the attainment of specific professional performances or the reorientation of those already attained. It comprises a system of courses, training sessions, and other forms of professional development that are mutually articulated.

Among the primary organizational forms of postgraduate professional development (courses, training, and self-preparation), it adheres to the arguments posed by Bernaza et al. (2018), differentiating the reasons (why), methods (how), and timing (when) for the use of courses, training, and self-preparation; these forms constitute a guiding foundation for the structure of programs based on the diagnosis. It establishes its projective nature towards the utilization of diploma programs.⁽²⁰⁾ Additionally, it acknowledges other secondary organizational forms of professional development, including seminars, workshops, specialized conferences, and self-preparation.

CONCLUSIONS

The conducted review and the analysis of criteria addressed by various researchers allow us to identify that professional development, as a pedagogical process, is characterized not only by its focused approach and conscious organization but also by its intricate nature. This process not only seeks to prepare individuals but also aspires to transform them into multipliers of the knowledge acquired in their own pedagogical practice. Consequently, professional development can be defined as a pedagogical process that involves both continuous teaching and learning and the permanent formation of individuals.

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