WHAT IS PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ABOUT? FRAMING AN EDUCATIONAL POINT OF VIEW

Mariana Gaio Alves

UIED – FCT/Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal
mga@fct.unl.pt

Resumo

O principal objectivo deste trabalho é o de esboçar uma abordagem à educação profissional que permita um entendimento mais profundo da sua dinâmica, dimensão e desafios. Desta forma será possível adoptar um ponto de vista sobre o sistema educativo a partir do qual (a) o ponto de análise seja o processo de aprendizagem que conduz à formação de um profissional; (b) que este processo seja entendido como o resultado da interação entre indivíduos, conhecimento e diferentes contextos de aprendizagem (escolas, universidades, centros de formação) e que (c) este processo não seja um mero exercício teórico já que envolve várias dimensões como as emoções, crenças e pertenças culturais e sociais.

Palavras-chave: Aprendizagem profissional; Ensino superior; Inserção profissional; Processo de aprendizagem.

Abstract

The paper's main goal is to sketch an approach to professional learning that allows for a deeper understanding of its dynamics, dimensions and challenges. In doing so, an educational point of view is adopted whereby: (a) the focus is on the process of learning to be a professional; (b) this process is understood as the result of an interaction between individuals, knowledge and different learning contexts (schools, universities, work organisations); and (c) this process is not a mere rational exercise because it involves diverse dimensions such as emotions and beliefs as well as cultural and social engagements.

Keywords: Professional learning; Higher education; Transition to work; Learning process.

Why (and How) has the Theme "Professional Learning" arisen in (My) Research?

Professional learning is certainly not a new phenomenon. Nevertheless, becoming a professional is a process that assumes different features according to the time and space in which it occurs. For instance, the appearance and expansion of national educational systems in the 19th century in Europe meant that schooling was reinforced as a fundamental context in the process of becoming a professional, whereas previously individuals learned a profession mainly through observing others and practising with them.

Nowadays lifelong learning has been increasingly valued both as a central guiding principal for educational policies and as a recurrent practice of individuals and organisations (Alves, 2010b). Within this present setting questions arise about the nature and value of the learning that takes place outside the educational system, as well as about its links with the learning occurring inside the educational systems; namely, regarding the process of becoming a professional.

Thus even if the theme of professional learning is far from being a novelty, it has arisen in a quite different context across my research focusing two main streams. One of these streams concerns the research work in the field of higher education graduates' transitions to the labour market. This field of research has been under construction in Portugal and in other countries; it has been focusing mainly on issues such as the employment/unemployment of graduates, the match (or mismatch) between educational credentials and positions within the labour market, and so on. Another stream that leads me to approach professional learning is my own experience as teacher and researcher in higher education since I have been acknowledging the importance of different life contexts for my own development, as well as the influence of personal and social characteristics in the process of becoming a professional.

The Research Field on Transitions from Higher Education to Work

Regarding the first stream, it should be noted that, in Portugal as in other European countries, we live in a context in which unemployment rates have been increasing in general and social debates around individual and societal investment in higher education express enormous worries about the work conditions of graduates. The model that emerged after World War II of European societies as places where everyone is employed is now considered a prophecy that will never be fulfilled.

This being so, analyzing professional trajectories of graduates has been the main aim of research on transitions into the world of work, namely considering unemployment experiences, work conditions, adequacy of educational credentials of the individual regarding its professional activities, and so on. This conveys the idea that research in this field has been centred mainly on employability understood as getting (or not getting) a job, as well as research that has been centred on the match (or mismatch) between job and education. Meanwhile, other issues such as the learning involved in the transition from the educational system to the world of work have been given much less attention (Alves, 2010a).

However, several authors highlight that the main difficulties faced by higher education graduates when entering working life are those related to the ways in which they lack the knowledge to act as professionals in the world of work and to perform in their professional trajectories (Bennett, Dunne, & Carré, 2000; Alves, 2007). Namely, they refer to knowledge about inter-personal relationships and about practical procedures more than specific knowledge about their field of academic studies.

A similar trend is identified when looking up results from inquiring into the employers of graduates and when assessing their evaluation about the graduates' professional performance: employers do not question the graduates' knowledge of their own academic and disciplinary field, but they recognise the need for the development of capacities, knowledge and attitudes that allow the graduates to be fully integrated and competent in the world of work and in the organisation in which they are employed (Alves, 2007; Teixeira, 2010).

Likewise, research being conducted on higher education's impact on professional performance reveals that the characteristics of study programmes in higher education seem to have minor effects on the chances of obtaining a job, but these same characteristics have significant effects on actually doing a certain job. The type of characteristics mentioned are, for instance, lectures, group assignments, participation in research projects, internships/work placement, project and/or problem-based learning, written assignments, oral presentation by students, among others (Felouzis, 2003; Vaatstra & Vries, 2007; Storen & Aamodt, 2010). This being so, professional learning can be addressed as a phenomenon that takes place in professional settings, but it also takes place in the educational system, and probably most importantly it has to be understood within the interaction between these two main contexts for professional learning.

Another related idea to keep in mind from the field of research on higher education graduates' entry into working life is the way in which the dichotomy theory-practice is insufficient to deal with the interaction between school context and professional context. Even if this dichotomy is always used by the actors (whether academics, students or employers) involved, when they reflect upon the relationship between education and work (Alves, 2007) we notice that the dichotomy conveys the idea of a simple adjustment through which the theory acquired in the educational system is applied in the real world of professional practice, but the dynamics of this interaction is, as we all know, much more complex. Assuming that learning takes place in professional settings, and considering that the characteristics of learning processes promoted within the educational system impact on professional performance, allows us to enlighten the complexity of professional learning and the enormous range of factors involved in each of these contexts (school and work) and in the interaction between the two.

To sum up, it should be noticed that not only the perspective of a learning process is frequently absent when analysing transitions from higher education to work, but also these transitions tend to be considered in terms of a correspondence (or its absence) between educational credentials and positions in the labour market or still between what is learned and what needs to be learned in order to be a professional. In part, this reveals the popularity of human capital theory that originates an analytical framework strongly centred on the adjustment (or on its absence) of education and work. The need to overcome such an analytical framework, developing an alternative one that adopts an educational point of view, is acknowledged. Consequently the focus on professional learning as a process of becoming is argued as a strategy to pave the way towards that alternative approach.

One Personal Experience of Professional Learning

In what concerns the second stream, it should be stressed that the importance of reflecting on the theme of professional learning and considering it as a process of becoming has been emerging similarly in my own professional learning trajectory.

When I finished a first degree in sociology I started participating in research projects in the field of education and shortly after I started lecturing sociology of education and other courses within the initial and continuing training of elementary and secondary school teachers. There is a paradox in this situation, since I did not have

any training to teach but I was acting as a teacher of other teachers. It is quite obvious that this did not happen only to me or just in my country (see, for instance, Carr, 2005). In fact this situation is the result of different factors, such as the political orientations concerning the educational sector and the training of teachers that echo deeply rooted social conceptions about each level of schooling, its characteristics, aims and requirements.

When starting to become a university teacher the first set of questions I had to deal with included "do I know what I'm supposed to teach?", "do the students not know what I'm supposed to teach them?" and "what type of inter-personal relationship shall I promote with my students?". From the beginning the fact that I was teaching teachers (or future teachers) was a challenge due to the fact that there was always a quite clear interest in reflecting upon the ways in which the course I was teaching related to other courses, and how they altogether could promote the professional learning of school teachers. But another challenge aroused from the circumstance that my students' disciplinary origins are math, physics, chemistry, biology and geology since they are (or they will be) teachers of these disciplines, while I myself have a background in the social sciences. This being so, there are clear demands on the dialogue between different disciplinary fields characterised by different cultures and paradigms concerning knowledge and ways of understanding the world.

To address these issues it seemed to me unavoidable to define an integrated perspective on my action as teacher that takes into account a multiplicity of challenges, some of them converging and others diverging. Consequently the first remark to be made on the process of professional learning is **to focus on the importance of interaction** within that process.

On the one hand, observe the interaction with students, with other teachers, with the contents and methods of teaching, and in this sense the process of professional learning can be seen as a "case of reciprocal learning" and as a "co-creation of oneself" (Jörg, 2009). This means that becoming a university teacher is a co-authored task in which others (students, teachers) have also been developing at the same time. It should also be noticed that it is a strongly informal and non-formal process due to the fact that I never had the opportunity to attend courses to be trained to teach. However, I did attend courses on the contents of what I was teaching, and I also I developed by trying different ways of teaching and discussing them with students and occasionally with other teachers.

On the other hand, there is interaction with oneself that one might call a work of reflexivity (Giddens, 1994) and within this there is interaction with who I am and the questions and challenges that I deal with in the various spheres of my life. What I mean to say is that only to respect an analytical strategy is it possible to consider professional learning without taking into account all the other contexts within my life and namely those in which educational concerns (for instance as mother of children) are present. This being so, what I have learned professionally throughout the years is closely linked to what was happening and getting my attention in my life as a whole.

After the first years as a university teacher (that someone called the "phase of survival") the set of questions I had to deal with was changing. It become much more "how can I contribute to promote the professional learning of my students?", "how can I contribute to promote changes in the work of teachers in schools?", "which dimensions should be involved in professional learning?", and "what model of school teacher are we training?". Looking at these questions from my point of view, it looks as though the focus of attention has changed from me (and my knowledge) to my students and the ways through which they learn and act as teachers. But it also seems clear to me that, besides the importance of interaction, my own process of professional learning obliges me to recognise the central role of teleological issues – the intention – that is always present in every educational setting, even if it is not explicitly stated quite often.

So the second remark I would like to make about the process of professional learning is **to focus on the importance of intention** (both the individual and the collective intention) underlying that process; or, in other words, the importance of purpose. About intention and purpose, I argue that these are quite dependent on geographical, political, historical and social contexts, since these elements frame different intentions/purposes for educational practice and for educational systems. Concerning my own professional learning it became progressively clear that my intention as a university teacher is to enable people to become, instead of socialising people to be like others (or like a certain defined model of teacher). Accordingly the intention is much more to provide "opportunity for individuals to come into presence, that is to show who they are and where they stand" (Biesta, 2005, p. 62) instead of thinking of a simple relationship between a provider of knowledge and consumers of it. There is not only the educational problem of knowledge, but that is complementary to the educational problem of being. In other words, it is possible to consider "critical being" that involves not only reflecting critically on knowledge but also developing critical self-reflection and critical action in a transformatory way (Barnett, 1997). Thus

the challenge is not to teach students the correct answers but to support them in reaching their own answers.

To sum up, it should be noted that professional learning appears to be a process that involves time and a series of continuities and changes over the years. Additionally this process develops across different settings and life contexts; that is, it is framed by large social, economical and cultural trends as well as by personal characteristics and circumstances. This being so, certain educational perspectives centred on learning as a rational exercise that occurs in younger ages or considering only learning that takes place in formal educational settings and disregarding life experience, become insufficient. Alternatively it is argued that professional learning implies interaction between individuals, knowledge and different learning contexts (inside and outside educational systems), as well as involving diverse dimensions such as emotions and beliefs, cultural and social engagements.

Why (and How) is the Theme "Professional Learning" Relevant in Contemporary Societies?

Part of the relevance of addressing the theme of professional learning arises from what has been exposed in the previous section. Namely, it is a consequence of a set of questions, doubts and absences within a research field and a personal and professional trajectory.

Nevertheless, an approach to professional learning such as the one that we have been starting to sketch in this paper is deeply enclosed with the social and scientific debates concerning the lifelong learning societies in which we live nowadays. On the one hand, the characteristics of contemporary societies frame a certain perspective on professional learning. On the other hand, it should be emphasised that the importance of lifelong learning in today's societies enclose the need to clearly identify when, where, how and why do we learn – namely learn a profession.

In fact the recognition that learning takes place everywhere (whether in schools, in professional settings or in other contexts of our lives) and occurs in different ages of the life-cycle is not a novelty in itself, since it is quite obvious that learning has always occurred in different contexts and in every age. However, there is something new in the way in which learning is valued and becomes a central feature for the life of each individual in contemporary societies (Alves, 2010b). This trend is connected to the statement that we now live in knowledge and learning societies (Popkewitz, Olsson, &

Petersson, 2006) in which each individual has the right and the duty to engage in lifelong learning (Biesta, 2010), meaning that at least potentially our whole lives become pedagogised (Edwards, 2009).

Within this context, if it is true that professional learning is far from being a novelty, it is also true that it is a much more valued and organised process in our contemporary societies than in other historical moments and sites. And this is in part because educational systems have been growing enormously, and so more and more people continue to study for more and more years within educational systems. But it is also because learning occurring outside the educational system is increasingly being formally recognised and certificated, frequently leading to new systems and new social practices that try to assess to what extent the knowledge that an individual has learned in his or her life can be considered equivalent to a certain school degree[1].

Are we promoting permanent learning or permanent schooling? Are we saying that everything we do results in learning? Are we saying – looking at it the other way around – that learning is a condition to live in today's societies (Gewirtz, 2008)? Is learning a responsibility of the individual? Or is it a collective responsibility (Biesta, 2010)? This leads us to raise questions about the specificities of both a learning context and a learning process (Edwards, 2009).

To sum up, let us keep with the idea that, if it is true that professional learning is far from being a novelty, it is also true that professional learning is a much more valued and organised process in our contemporary societies than in other historical moments and sites. We argued before that professional learning takes place inside and outside educational systems and we can now add that it takes place during the whole life cycle in societies in which learning becomes an issue of great importance within the lives of the individuals and organisations. Given this large landscape in which professional learning develops across different spaces and along the timeline in individual and collective terms, it turns out to be particularly important to propose an analytical

---

[1] The educational policies implemented recently (since 2005) in Portugal award a high priority to the recognition of experiential learning and establish the conditions under which the knowledge of the individual can be considered equivalent to the requirements for completion of basic or secondary school level, as well as to what extent knowledge can allow entering higher education to study without the formal required credentials. Underlying these initiatives there are obvious political goals, namely aiming both at raising the educational level of the Portuguese population and at attracting adult students to return to the educational system. But as a researcher, what I consider important is to signal this new trend and maintain a critical questioning not only about the way it is being implemented but also about the implications it has in our societies.

framework to research those processes.

Sketching an Analytical Framework for "Professional Learning"

Assuming the relevance of addressing professional learning, and namely the particular conditions of it in in contemporary societies, the proposal of an analytical framework for "professional learning" demands the clarification of a few theoretical assumptions given that they constitute layers in the definition of such a framework. Afterwards the dimensions constituting the analytical framework proposed must be identified, drawing on the reflection previously presented about professional learning in contemporary societies.

Theoretical Assumptions

First, as pointed out before, the proposal draws on the intention to overcome approaches inspired by the more pure versions of the human capital theory. Thus the **first assumption** clarifies that the choice is not to analyse the match (or mismatch) between what is learned and what needs to be learned in order to be a professional, but alternatively to focus on the learning occurring both in educational and in work contexts and in the transitions from one to the other. It is important to remark that we are not exploring concepts and dynamics such as the process of building professional identities, but we are examining learning processes for becoming a professional.

This being so, the **second assumption** relates to the recognition that it is possible to learn during adulthood and in different life contexts. The first aspect is no longer a matter of debate since it is nowadays widely accepted that adults can learn at all ages (Bélanger, 2011). The second aspect is twofold in the sense that it derives from the consensus around the importance of life experience as a root for learning, especially for adult learning, but it then originates the need to clarify the ways in which experience can be transformed into learning (Jarvis, 2009). For instance, concerning links between (professional) experience and (professional) learning, it has to be considered that we can learn for work, from work and through work.

Finally, the **third assumption** concerns the understanding of professional learning as a matter of becoming, and not of having or being (Biesta, 2010). The objective is not to identify knowledge and competencies developed throughout the learning process, characterising which characteristics the individuals have or how they

are and act. Neither is the objective to sketch a pattern of knowledge and competencies suitable for being a professional after graduating from higher education.

In a different perspective, a fundamental point within the approach sketched is to recognise that nowadays a professional is in a permanent process of becoming in permanent challenging contexts and circumstances. Within that process of becoming, what seems to be crucial from an educationalist point of view is to ensure the possibilities of exposing learners to otherness and difference, allowing for their uniqueness to emerge (Biesta, 2005). Moreover, investing in them this way can enable the individuals to be increasingly critical whether in thought, self-reflection or action (Barnett, 1997).

Dimensions within the Analytical Framework

Considering the previous theoretical assumptions, it is then possible to present the dimensions constituting the proposed analytical framework. The global aim is to outline which dimensions must be considered in order to understand professional learning processes, accepting that all those dimensions are interdependent and framed by a certain social, economical and political macro-context. The analytical framework's intention is to support future empirical approaches and it comprises **four inter-related dimensions**: learning spaces (and spaces free of learning); time and temporality; types of learning; and intentionality within learning.

The **first dimension** relates to **learning spaces**, and eventually involves also spaces free of learning. Within this dimension we intend to overcome the debates around the typology of formal, non-formal and informal learning, accepting not only that learning is situated (Lave, 2009; Wenger, 2009) but also that a certain space is part of the dynamics and outcomes of the learning that takes place there.

Regarding this, and focusing lifelong learning in contemporary societies, Ileris (2009, p. 139) argued that it is possible to identify five main types of general learning spaces: "everyday learning" that occurs in daily life even when we are not participating in any specifically defined activities; "school and educational learning" referring to intentional learning taking place inside the educational system; "workplace learning" seen as both learning that inevitably is part of working life and also as more formalised learning in the workplace; "interest-based learning" related to a personal interest and occurring in different activities (associations, communities, etc.); and, finally, "net-based learning", which can be practiced independently and is quite flexible compared to

school and workplace learning.

Exploiting this proposal by Ileris (2009) as a point of depart, and also considering some results from previous research work on higher education graduates' transitions to work, it is possible to defend the adoption of a typology of four different learning spaces: "educational system", "workplace", "everyday life" and "interest-based". In our view, "net-based learning" is currently transversal to all the other four learning spaces and should not be considered a specific space.

Furthermore, it must be noticed that the interactions among these four spaces cannot be forgotten. In fact, previous research acknowledges that work experience while studying in higher education has a significant impact on transition trajectories after graduation (Alves, 2007; Teixeira, 2010), as well as different models of proximity to the world of work promoted by higher education institutions (Vaatstra & Vries, 2007).

The links between different learning spaces make possible the existence of a diversity of learning experiences and simultaneously illustrate the idea that the four learning spaces identified cannot be seen as totally independent from one another. Another illustration of this is given by considering that everyday life learning is transversal to periods in our lives in which we are mainly either studying or working.

Taking into account the context of the learning society, several authors have been pointing out that the emphasis on learning as a life-wide phenomenon, meaning that we learn in every situation, must be confronted: Gewirtz (2008) stresses the importance of "learning-free" spaces, because if it is true that all spaces are rich in opportunities for learning it is also recognisable that the pressure on the need and logic of learning in every situation in our lives might be counterproductive from an educationalist point of view; Edwards (2009, p. 1) points out that "insofar as we expand our concept of learning to embrace apparently all strata of life, we might be said to start to lose conceptual basis for talking specifically of a learning context"; Fenwick (2010, p. 88) claims that "if learning embraces all conscious experience and sense-making, individual and collective, what then is not learning? The object that was learning ultimately dissolves".

To sum up, a dimension containing four spaces of learning is proposed in order to analyse "professional learning" processes, having in mind the need to consider the overlapping among these spaces that frequently occurs. Moreover, even if learning opportunities exist in different spaces, it might be important to consider the need to maintain learning-free spaces avoiding the prominence of learning over life, study and

work. But when can learning take place?

The **second dimension** concerns the **time of life** in which learning occurs. Regarding this, the previous assumption generally accepted is that it is possible to learn at all ages within the life cycle. Lifelong learning is frequently assumed as adult learning or as work life learning, but it is important to stress that it is more adequately described as a lifelong process from childhood to older age. Professional learning is part of that lifelong learning process and is certainly affected by the age of the learner.

Jarvis (2009) indicates that younger learners have a much more instrumental view and attitude towards learning than later in life when learning becomes more transformative of the learner. However, in contemporary societies these kind of generalisations must be applied with caution, since many transitions happen along the life cycle and professional mobility might imply instrumental learning at different stages in life in order to respond to the need to perform a new professional activity.

Concerning time and learning, it must also be stressed that learning processes might be shorter or longer, depending on what, why and how we are learning – that is depending on the learning situation. Throughout these processes "unlearning" (Canário & Cabrito, 2008) might also take place in the sense that a part of learning requires forgetting what we knew and/or how we were doing things, in order to accommodate the contents of new learning.

To sum up, learning might happen at any age in life, as well as a learning process is not instantaneous but involves a certain period of time. Along that period it could be that sometimes we have to unlearn what we have learned before and this is why it is important to deepen the understanding of the possible types of learning. In fact, the **third dimension** within the framework is centred on the **types of learning**. To address this dimension we mobilise once more Ileris's (2009) contribution, since the author proposes a typology of four types of learning: "cumulative"; "assimilative"; "accommodative"; and "transformative". The distinction between these four types of learning involves different understandings of knowledge, as well as diverse effects of learning in the learner.

"Cumulative" learning seems to be more frequent in early childhood as it "is characterised by being an isolated formation, something new that is not a part of anything else" (Ileris, 2009, p. 141). Focusing on professional learning and the transition of graduates to work, it is possible to argue that this type of learning is relevant to analyse newcomers into the world of work because they need to develop

ways of applying and mobilising knowledge and competencies in new conditions; that is, in professional settings.

"Assimilative" learning is pointed out as the most common form of learning and could also be named as "learning by addition, meaning that the new element is linked as an addition to a scheme that is already established" (Ileris, 2009, p. 141). It can be envisaged that professional learning also comprises this type of learning, both for experienced professionals improving their knowledge and competencies and for newcomers in the world of work for whom the professional learning started in the school and educational trajectory.

"Accommodative" learning arises when something that takes place is difficult to be immediately linked to an existing scheme and one cannot really understand it. In this sense, this type of learning "implies that one breaks down (parts of) an existing scheme and reconstructs it in a way that allows the new situation to be linked in" (Ileris, 2009, p. 142). Within professional learning it can be anticipated that this kind of learning is common in everyday routines, being more or less intense according to the nature of the situations and changes affecting the working contexts.

Finally, "transformative" learning is a very demanding and profound process that changes identity since it "implies what could be termed personality changes or changes in the organisation of the self" (Ileris, 2009, p. 142). Transitions might be phases characterised by this kind of learning because they generally imply assuming a different social role (from student to worker, from one professional position to another, from worker to retired). In this way it can be expected to be an important dynamic of professional learning, though it does not occur frequently but only in special situations.

To sum up, four types of learning proposed by Ileris (2009) can be useful to analyse professional learning processes, enabling the identification of a diversity of implications regarding the learner and the knowledge involved in professional learning. Underlying this analytical strategy there is the objective of capturing the diversity of possible dynamics within the processes of professional learning, each dynamic being characterised by specific features and impacts.

Last, but not least, the **fourth dimension** of the analytical framework regards the **intentionality** present in every learning process. Considering intentionality (and purpose) as a dimension requires the identification of different possible aims from an educationalist point of view. Besides considering the individuals or the educational institution or the employers' perspectives about the aims of professional learning, it is

an alternative to choose to highlight the purposes that enable the educational development of the individuals. In fact discussing intentionality of professional learning goes beyond articulating personal preferences of individuals, educational institutions or employers.

To promote that discussion it is relevant to notice that in the learning societies in which we live today different discourses about learning goals are put together; namely Gewirtz (2008) points out four of these discourses corresponding to personal fulfilment, citizenship, social inclusion or social justice, and work-related learning. Aiming at grasping this set of mixed discourses, it is useful to adopt the proposal of three different (but) related functions (Biesta, 2010) of learning, mentioned as qualification, socialisation and subjectification.

The function of "qualification" of the learners means: "providing them with the knowledge, skills and understandings and often also with the dispositions and forms of judgment that allow them to do something" (Biesta, 2010, pp. 19–20). In the specific case of professional learning, qualification can be understood as the training for a particular profession. "Socialisation" is another function that "has to do with the many ways in which [. . .] we become part of particular social, cultural and political orders" (Biesta, 2010, p. 20). Again considering the particular case of professional learning, this function can be rephrased as the insertion of individuals into social and cultural ways of doing and being in professional contexts. Finally, "subjectification" is about "ways of being in which the individual is not simply a specimen of a more encompassing order" (Biesta, 2010, p. 21) or in other terms corresponds to the process of becoming a subject. This is not less important for professional learning since it is argued that, given the profound and never ending changes that characterise the world of work nowadays, it is fundamental that each individual might not only perform, professionally speaking, but also reflect critically upon the implications and alternatives to its professional action.

To sum up, regarding intentionality we acknowledge a diversity of possible functions for professional learning. Introducing this dimension into the analytical framework means that it is necessary to observe the purposes explicitly and implicitly underlying each professional learning process. It is expected that the three functions (qualification, socialisation, subjectivation) always overlap, and it is relevant to consider its diverse intersections.

Concluding Remarks

As stated in the opening remarks, the paper's main goal is to sketch an approach to professional learning that allows for a deeper understanding of its dynamics, dimensions and challenges. From the beginning it was clear that an educational point of view is adopted; that is: (a) the focus is on the process of learning to be a professional; (b) this process is understood as the result of an interaction between individuals, knowledge and different learning contexts (schools, universities, work organisations); and (c) this process is not a mere rational exercise because it involves diverse dimensions such as emotions and beliefs, as well as cultural and social engagements.

Constituting an exploratory approach that aims at the formulation of an analytical framework for professional learning, the concluding remarks consider the main contributions of the paper towards that objective. Elsewhere (Gonçalves, Gomes, Alves & Azevedo, 2012) we argue that every educational system, programme, proposal or discourse is organised around the nature and organisation of knowledge (*epistemological*), conveys conceptions about the human subject and ways of teaching and learning (*anthropological*), is embedded in broader social structures, power relations, beliefs and values that affect its own dynamics (*sociological*) and, finally, represents a systematic outcome of the epistemological, anthropological and sociological dimensions so that educational systems and practices acquire meaning within a specific space and time (*systematic*).

These four dimensions were transversally present in the reflection produced in the paper, framing a particular perspective on professional learning as a process in which being and becoming are always intertwined (Jarvis, 2009). In this sense it is argued that what is currently required is not professional learning to adjust to the world of work, but instead that individuals are able to make their choices about their professional trajectories and actions and the ways they want to develop it. In other words, we do not propose to explore professional learning as a mere professional training, but to examine it as a process of qualification, socialisation and subjectivation, as uncovered earlier.

Additionally, as stated before, professional learning is about educational settings, work organisations, everyday learning and the interaction between them along (individual and collective) timelines. It is a process increasingly valued and recognised and even formally accredited in the so-called learning and knowledge societies in

which we live today, but it should be clear that not all learning could be considered educational. Actually, even if learning can occur everywhere and at every age, it must be emphasised that not all learning is educational in the sense of "education as an institutional process that involves a pedagogical relationship and that allows for learners to build knowledge that both takes them beyond their experience and that they could not build in their daily life contexts" (Young, 2010, pp. 4–5).

Finally, underlying the paper is the prospect that a deeper understanding of different types of professional learning (cumulative, assimilative, accommodative, transformative) will also enable us to (re)think the organisation and characteristics of educational practices within formal academic settings, as well as the ways in which those relate to the individuals' professional learning dynamics in working contexts and in everyday life.

References

Alves, M. G. (2007). *A inserção profissional de diplomados de ensino superior numa perspectiva educativa: o caso da Faculdade de Ciências e Tecnologia [Transition into working life of higher education graduates in an educational perspective: the case of FCT-UNL].* Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian & Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia.

Alves, M. G. (2010a). A inserção profissional de graduados em Portugal: notas sobre um campo de investigação em construção [Transition into working life of graduates in Portugal: remarks about a research field under construction]. In A. P. Marques, *Inserção Profissional de Graduados: (re) configurações teóricas e empíricas [Transition into working life of higher education graduates in Portugal: theoretical and empirical issues]* (pp. 31–50). Braga: Humus.

Alves, M. G. (2010b). *Aprendizagem ao Longo da Vida e Políticas Educativas Europeias: tensões e ambiguidades nos discursos e nas práticas de estados, instituições e indivíduos [Lifelong Learning and European Educational Policies: ambiguities in the discourses and practices of national states, institutions and individuals] .* Monte de Caparica: UIED.

Barnett, R. (1997). *Higher Education: A Critical Business.* London: The Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press.

Bélanger, P. (2011). *Theories in Adult Learning and Education.* Opladen & Farmington Hills: Barbara Budrich Publishers.

Bennett, N., Dunne, E., & Carré, C. (2000). *Skills Development in Higher Education and Employment.* London: The Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press.

Biesta, G. (2005). Against Learning: Reclaiming a Language for Education in an Age of Learning. *Nordisk Pedagogik*, *25*, 54–66.

Biesta, G. (2010). *Good Education in an Age of Measurement: Ethics, Politics, Democracy.* London: Paradigm Publishers.

Canário, R., & Cabrito, B. (2008). *Educação e Formação de Adultos: mutações e convergências [Adult education and training: changes and convergences].* Lisboa: Educa.

Carr, W. (2005). The Role of Theory in the Professional Development of an Educationalist Theorist. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*, *13*(3), 333–345.

Edwards, R. (2009). Introduction: Life as a Learning Context? In R. Edwards, G. Biesta, & M. Thorpe, *Rethinking Contexts for Learning and Teaching* (pp. 1–14). London and New York: Routledge.

Felouzis, G. (2003). *Les Mutations Actuelles de l'Université.* Paris: PUF.

Fenwick, T. (2010). Workplace Learning and Adult Education. Messy Objects, Blurry Maps and Making Difference. *European Journal on Research for Education and Learning of Adults*, *1*(1–2), 79–98.

Gewirtz, S. (2008). Give Us a Break! A Sceptical Review of Contemporary Discourses of Lifelong Learning. *European Educational Research Journal*, *7*(4), 414–424.

Giddens, A. (1994). *Modernidade e Identidade Pessoal [Modernity and Self-Identity].* Oeiras: Celta.

Gonçalves, T. G.. Gomes, E. X., Alves, M. G., & Azevedo, N. R. (2012). Theory and Texts of Educational Policy: Possibilities and Constraints. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, in press.

Ileris, K. (2009). Transfer of Learning in the Learning Society: How Can the Barriers between Different Learning Spaces be Surmounted, and how can the Gap between Learning Inside and Outside Schools be Bridged? *International Journal of Lifelong Learning*, *28*(2), 137–148.

Jarvis, P. (2009). *Learning to Be a Person in Society.* London and New York: Routledge.

Jörg, T. (2009). Thinking in Complexity about Learning and Education: A Programmatic View. *Complicity: An International Journal of Complexity and Education*, *6*(1), 1–22.

Lave, J. (2009). The Practice of Learning. In K. Ileris, *Contemporary Theories of Learning* (pp. 200–208). London and New York: Routledge.

Popkewitz, T., Olsson, U., & Petersson, K. (2006). The Learning Society, the Unfinished Cosmopolitan, and Governing Education, Public Health and Crime Prevention at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *38*(4), 431–449.

Storen, L. A., & Aamodt, P. (2010). The Quality of Higher Education and the Employability of Graduates. *Quality in HIgher Education*, *16* (3), 297–313.

Teixeira, L. (2010). Perspectivar pontes, preencher vazios: um estudo exploratório das relações entre formação e emprego no Ensino Superior Politécnico de Santarém. In A. P. Marques & M. G. Alves, *Inserção Profissional de Graduados em Portugal: (re)configurações teóricas e empíricas [Transition into Working Life of Higher Education Graduates in Portugal: theoretical and empirical issues]* (pp. 99–133). Braga: Húmus.

Vaatstra, R., & Vries, R. (2007). The Effect of the Learning Environment in Competences and Training for the Working Places According to Graduates. *Higher Education*, *53*, 335–357.

Wenger, E. (2009). A Social Theory of Learning. In K. Ileris, *Contemporary Theories of Learning* (pp. 209–218). London and New York: Routledge.

Young, M. (2010). Alternative Educational Futures for a Knowledge Society. *European Educational Research Journal*, *9*(1), 1–12.