Why LLL should be moved to the central stage of the system of education

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## Abstract

The paper argues that LLL should be transferred from the periphery to the centre stage of education in the Nordic countries, even though the general argument has a much wider application. This would mean that the rhetoric of lifelong learning should be implemented as the core of the system of education. The point of departure for the paper is professional education but the argument extends to all work related education and education for citizenship. The paper is in four parts:

1. First we briefly argue that the premises for our current system of education are largely outdated and then describe a new general perspective that must replace the older one.
2. In the second part theoretical underpinnings for the LLL perspective are presented, derived from three perspectives. The first perspective focuses on change, i.e. how changes along at least four dimensions are becoming increasingly important, i.e., changes within any job (such as technological changes), people increasingly taking on many jobs during their lifetime, quite dramatic changes in cultures in many sections of the labour market and new ideas about how change can most fruitfully be orchestrated from within the workplace. The second focus, the pedagogical focus will note that there are motivational, developmental and pragmatic reasons why incremental changes interwoven with the tasks at hand are most likely to become tools of thought and action. The third focus is the professional (or expert) focus, where it will be noted that developing any skill takes time and is often situation specific.
3. In the third section of the paper various obstacles to system change are presented, in particular how the current system itself resists change.
4. The fourth part is a brief mention of the elements that must be tackled in the educational systems for change to be possible.

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## Introduction[[1]](#footnote-1)

The thrust of the paper is that the rhetoric of lifelong learning should be taken seriously and implemented as the core of the system of education. The point of departure is professional education but the argument extends both to all work related education and, very importantly, education for citizenship. The claim that lifelong learning should provide the framework for educational thinking and rhetoric has been alive and accepted for half a century (Tuijnman & Boström, 2002). But it is not clear to what extent it has been probed by those who promote the LLL arguments to what extent these require a fundamental change of the system of education itself, moving LLL learning from the periphery to the centre of the system.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Our systems of education, at least in Europe, and those countries under its former political and cultural influence, have a very long and in most respects, a slow moving history. Generally, these are robust systems. In many ways the content, i.e. the subjects taught, reach back to the Greek and the Roman curriculum and the structures at the vocational and university levels to the 11th and 12th centuries (Myhre, 1981, 1985). The involvement of the church began very early in its history and the involvement of state, at all levels can easily be traced five or six centuries back, depending on the degree of involvement and the level of education and whether the emphasis is on curricula or control of financial commitment.[[3]](#footnote-3)

### Perspectives

Ideas do not always fit with reality. This is indicated in a schematic way in Figure 1.



Figure 1. A schematic outline of two different views of lifelong learning, one depicting the ideal situation and one being more realistic. The top part shows the basic idea of the lifelong learning rhetoric, where learning extends from the early years right to the end of our lives. It is one continuum of learning and development. The lower part shows on the other hand the formal system, which for some people extends to university studies and is then succeeded by a somewhat amorphous situation of non-systematic educational offerings.

Two perspectives shape the arguments of the paper. The first is that the societies and cultures that mould the current systems of education are old and outdated. The second is that there are strong arguments based on current trends and knowledge that demand that we move out of the stagnant old framework and into a new one. Thus the paper argues that many aspects of adult education should be transferred from the peripheral to the central stage of education, e.g. in the Nordic countries, even though the central argument has a global application.

Figure 2 shows in a schematic way a important difference between the discourse on lifelong learning which respects the current (and possibly outdated) system of education and the way learning operates in most western societies.



Figure 2. The upper panel is supposed to show the basic idea about education in the earlier part of the 20th century, as in Figure 1, when the bulk of the population went to primary school, and many went on to secondary school and a smaller proportion of society to university. This was education for (the rest of) life. It was not to be expected that much would be added in terms of education and thus it was very important to ensure that everything that might be relevant at some time would be included. The lower panel is meant to indicate that already and definitely in the coming decades the situation is, or should be, for most people completely different. They receive basic education, but would be well served to receive continuous updating on both professional and general knowledge and skills. Continuous updating is necessary for most people.

Our well entrenched western education systems were moulded during the 19th and 20th centuries when basic education was solid, well defined, but limited. There was at that time a general consensus that the foundations laid a basis for the rest of each person’s life. Thus everything that might be useful later in life should be crammed into the period available at “school age”, which tended to be extended gradually because so much needed to be covered.

The upper panel in Figure 2 thus illustrates a situation when education came first and only after this period people went to work and education was primarily intended to prepare for the world of work for the rest of one’s working life, even though education also had wider purposes. Therefore it had to be carefully deliberated what should be the ingredients of this education.

The situation depicted in the upper panel of Figure 2, is now totally outdated from several perspectives. First, the knowledge that is currently relevant becomes outdated very quickly. Significant changes constantly take place in all walks of life, so even if someone stays within a single profession a constant update is necessary. Furthermore, most people also move frequently between fields of expertise and thus for most people preparation for a particular job or profession is unrealistic. This has long since been accepted at the rhetorical level, and to certain, but a limited extent, at the political level: the idea of the importance of lifelong learning has been propounded quite actively for over half a century as a general policy. But it seems nevertheless, that the way many people – including governments - think about the structure of education, is more in line with a century old preconceptions and this also holds for the way education is conducted within the system.

Thus for many centuries an elaborate system for a “basic” (i.e. general education) or “pre-service” (i.e. before work) education has been developed - a system which is meant to prepare for life and last a lifetime. It is also quite explicit that this system does not extend to professional development or in-service development or what might be called lifelong learning outside the basic educational system. Any such addition, must, in the minds of many people and according to the understanding the system itself, be outside the system. Once people are out of school any further education must be taken care of by somebody else. The exceptions are (and they are becoming very important) when people choose to add to their basic education within the formal system (e.g. with a master’s degree) later in life, even though in some systems, even this is considered to be outside the system. Thus even though the notion of lifelong learning clearly colours the political rhetoric, the elaboration of basic and pre-service education dominates the implementation of education.

Therefore we have a problem. When, already, the current situation, not to mention future developments, demands a system that revolves around continuous updating and development of the population, both at the civil and professional levels, many people act as if CPD ( continuous professional development) and CVD (continuous vocational development) are issues that don’t need any special attention by the system of education. They think that these tasks are outside the purview of the system. Universities or other tertiary institutions are a case in point. It is generally thought[[4]](#footnote-4) that *pre-service* education of professional groups is among their core missions, but *in-service* education is not. Essentially the same applies to vocational as well as professional education and certainly to skill development in the workplace.

In all these cases it is of course a crucial question of who pays for what. But the question about the importance or usefulness of system is also being raised. Is it sensible that a modern system of education can be justified in claiming, that on-going and substantial developments in civic life and industry after the traditional formal education is over, are not within its purview. Except, of course, if people are willing and able to continue their education within the current formal secondary or tertiary systems? The problem is that these systems have not very clear responsibilities vis-à-vis recurrent education. Is it possible that the focus of the current system is becoming alarmingly aloof, narrow and outdated in this respect? It is claimed here that facing up to these questions and adapting the system facing constantly changing environment is certainly one of the primary grand challenges facing education.

### Theoretical underpinnings of a LLL perspective

The rationale for the old system does not need to be explained or defended. It is simply in place (and for good, if largely outdated reasons). There were several reasons why its structure was a sensible arrangement. Children had time to learn and many were more than ready to do so, a preparation had to take place, a solid basis would be laid and the world would not change very much, and the young could be moulded, right from the beginning. Thus when a new arrangement is suggested there is implicit or hidden suggestion that the old arrangement was not sensible. Furthermore it will also be argued that basic education is important, but by implication, its nature, role and extent must be radically rethought (but this is not within the purview of the present paper).

But we suggest here that there are compelling theoretical underpinnings for the LLL point of departure, derived from three different perspectives. These in turn imply that the system of education should change but the arguments for a new framework do not clarify what changes should be made to the current framework; that is a problem to be tackled. The three perspectives are introduced in order to rationalise the claim that a new system should literally replace the current system of professional education, i.e. move from an essentially pre-service system with lip-service being paid to in-service recurrent education, to a system where continuous education and professional development is the essence of the system. This, of course, has very substantial financial implications, not only related to the amount of money spent, but how it is spent.

The analytic framework is proposed as a general frame for all professional development and in principle applies also to civic development, which, however, will not be in focus here. In the following I will take teacher education as my example, but keep a number of other professions in mind and emphasise that a general argument is presented.

The thrust of the argument is that professional education is a lifelong process and is not sensible to have only the pre-service component within “the” (or “a”) system. This does not imply a weak pre-service component but opens up the question of what belongs to the pre-service part and what to later stages. This issue will not be resolved here.

When we turn to the task of educating a professional, we might be well advised to consider the life course of a successful individual, just about to retire and speculate, how did the relevant expertise develop, what was its time course and what changes did this person experience during her career? What moulded it and what might we learn from this perspective?

#### The contrast of the pre-service and LLL perspectives: Teachers taken as an example[[5]](#footnote-5)

Pre-service education only accounts for a very limited part of the development of any professional. This is emphasised in Figure 3. The left panel we indicate within the circle the scope of pre-service education. No strings to any professional subsequent development are attached, but of course not precluded. The larger circle in the right panel indicates a LLL perspective.

 

Figure 3. The three dimensions showing the scope of teacher education. The vertical dimensions indicates the levels within the educational system, the horizontal line shows the professional time and the oblique line is meant to indicate the various specialisations within the system, and progression within the system, involving tasks that are gradually being distinguished from the normal teaching jobs. The frame on the left has a circle indicating the traditional focus of teacher education. The larger circle on the right indicates a scope covering the professional life of a teacher, as the paper suggests should be the perspective adopted in the discussion.

Here it is suggested, because of relatively fast changes in the culture, content and tasks of the practice of education, for which the apprenticeship teachers are preparing, that emphasis should be placed on the idea of teacher education being an ongoing process.[[6]](#footnote-6) This view demands the merging of pre-service and in-service programmes (including induction) within a system of teacher education, seeing the task as a project being characterised more by being an authentic partner in the development of education rather than being seen simply as an initial stepping stone. An important part of this perspective is to move away from the notion that expertise within a profession is primarily composed of individual experts who acquire their understanding and learn their skills outside the actual job rather than being an integral part of a professional team.

The three perspectives mentioned above which are used to argue for the LLL framework are presented in Figure 4.



Figure 4. The three basic perspectives or rationales used for advocating lifelong learning as being the building block of the most sensible model for professional education.

The first perspective points to the change focus or rationale. Throughout the lifetime of a professional, enormous changes take place in relation to the job and these will occur at a steadily faster rate. Changes related to the role of the professional or the nature of the task she is undertaking; changes related to the culture of the task, its context and changes related to its content (subjects). There is no chance these changes are foreseen except in very general terms, even in a programme that is very farsighted; let alone if it is not. But it is certain that these changes will take place and the discussion of those and the potential influence must be an integral part of the new system which covers the course of the professional while on the job.

The second perspective is based on the pedagogical rationale that relates to motivational and pedagogical reasons for distributing the professional education over an extended period. This is a very important, somewhat pragmatic rationale, arguing why a lot of education, even with strong theoretical flavour should take place in- service and fairly continuously.

We may suggest that the third perspective is based on the professionalization rationale that takes into account various arguments related to the development of expertise, which takes time and practice and also arguments noting the situated aspects of developing competence within communities of practice.

#### The change rationale

The first focus is on change. It is useful to think along four dimensions of change that are becoming increasingly important, i.e., a) changes within any job (such as due to technological changes), b) changes due to people changing jobs or taking on completely new tasks, c) quite dramatic changes in cultures among employees (e.g. taking up teamwork or working at a distance) and d) increasing demands on employees to take initiative or being creative, at least in many professional fields, where change becomes a natural part of the job.

The constant flux of practically every aspect of education and society underpin a powerful argument for an on-going professional development of the staff in education.

Considering teachers, specifically. In the past decades there have been enormous changes in practically all aspect of teaching. Here some will be mentioned, drawing the Icelandic school system, but similar changes have without doubt also been in other systems.

The content of the standard curriculum has changed gradually in recent years and new emphasis related to global warming and self-sustainability (to mention important examples) has been brought into the curriculum. The focus on 21st century skills has also influenced the curriculum.

There has been a substantial move in the direction of school independence requiring more enlightened leadership but also general expertise e.g. in setting and respecting financial objectives, writing school curricula or participating in internal or external evaluation.

The widespread use of technology has changed many things quite dramatically. This ranges from its general introduction as an effective management tool, through a tool of communication with parents and students, through the use of the web as a reference tool and an effective teaching device. The use of the computer as a standalone teaching device has also gradually, if somewhat slowly taken hold in many subjects, even to the extent of changing the curricular content. The technology has also opened up many avenues for the independent work of the pupils, allowing them to be both creative and diverse. The technology has also changed the world, i.e. the culture of the pupils themselves, often substantially changing the way they want to operate and the ways they can be motivated. Technology has also facilitated data collection for domestic and international comparisons allowing various potentially formative feedback into the system, but it requires considerable understanding to be able to harness this all these new data.

A greater emphasis has been put on gender equality, but also on equality in general, both in the curriculum and also in the general operation of the schools. Multicultural issue are becoming very important and real tasks for the schools. There has been placed more emphasis on pupil participation, on student discussion, moral, ethical and civic issues on the use of drama for expression and generally on much varied ways for the pupils to express themselves. Dramatic increase in the vigilance against bullying, call both for education of pupils and school staff and in any cases a changed approach to classroom management.

The very clear and direct emphasis on access to the mainstream school for all, calls for a changed culture, methods and knowledge, both in terms of assessment and teaching. Furthermore, the increased understanding of various characteristics of the children such as those associated with ADHD or Tourette call for special knowledge and response. In general individual responses and plans are increasingly called for in the schools.

What changes might we typically expect to occur in the possible development of the professional life of an expert, given the flux over the last decades? The various changes being of concern are affecting our system of education at an ever increasing rate and the bulk of the teaching force was long since in the formal teacher education programme (see e.g. Murgatroyd, 2011; OECD, 2013). Figure 5 shows that over half of the teaching force according to Talis is over forty years old and many of them are probably going to stay within this professional arena for one or two decades more.



Figure 5. The cumulative age of the teaching force in a number of countries according to the Talis 2009 data, here emphasising the Nordic region. The open circles show the average for all the Talis countries, many of which are shown in the figure. The open circles show that over 55% of the teaching force is over 40 when the data was collected.

The changes that take place within the educational arena range from the cultural and social context of schools which is changing gradually to their educational roles which are also changing. There is also the question of changing division of labour within the school system, developing ambition levels, scope of expertise, content, methods, division of labour and technology. There is also massive educational research that opens up a host of avenues for improvement and change; wealth of information, knowledge and understanding that is currently not made use of by the systems of education. We suggest that there are many crucial developments that call for a substantial and deliberate continuous professional development, most sensibly in a close cooperation between the educational system at large and the universities, but only if the system of higher education, is ready to respect the nature, the organisation and the primary roles of other parts of the educational system.

We note that such state of affairs has not characterised the development of the school system nor the relationship between the schools and the universities. Therefore we might ask if it is needed. The simple answer seems to be negative, i.e., if the main criterion for judgement is if the school system is functioning without such an arrangement. But we are suggesting, that given the flux of our society, the constantly enhanced understanding of the process of education and that of the increased potential in the expertise of the teachers, the system and society would be well advised (and with some urgency) to implement such an arrangement of cooperation.

It is impossible to catalogue all the changes that have occurred in many educational systems over the past few decades, and these may vary substantially according to systems[[7]](#footnote-7) and even individual schools, in addition to being fuzzy in their essence. But we will refer to a number of issues that most readers will recognize in some form.

#### The pedagogical rationale

The second focus, the pedagogical focus emphasises that there are motivational, developmental and pragmatic reasons why incremental changes related to the tasks at hand, as a developing professional, are most likely to become tools of thought and action.

It is generally accepted that motivation for learning or any task for that matter is related to the grasp of the situation and understanding why one is learning about particular concepts or ideas or methods. This may even be more important for adults than for children, even though that differentiation is not important here.[[8]](#footnote-8) It is also well accepted that having a notion and an experience of a task or a situation that is being discussed can be very important but it depends on how it is utilised in the educational process. Working on a task, potentially, provides understanding, incentives and context for improving the tasks actually being carried out. There are thus strong motivational, developmental and pedagogical reasons why a continuous interaction with professional coaching, provided by peers or the academia is most sensible for effective professional development. We place this in a special category of reasons for arguing for the LLL perspective of professional education and development. But we will return to the situational reasons again in the next section.

#### The professional rationale

The third focus is the professional (or expert) focus, where it will be noted that developing any skill takes time, deliberation and is most often very situation specific.

We suggest that both perspectives of change and pedagogy provide important imperatives to consider professional education as a continuum and thus as a life-long learning exercise. We do, however, consider what have here grouped under the professional perspective further important reasons why this should be done. There are a number of different but related arguments, partly inspired by the notion of developing expertise, which claim that it takes time and deliberate and situated practice to show expertise in a field of work; and partly inspired by ideas developed within the framework of activity theory, using the notions of individuals working with and within an activity system, hopefully exhibiting expansive learning and co-configuration, which means that progression is being made to improve the work done, being sensitive to the situation at hand.

Recent discussion encourages the differentiation between producing an expert, which on one hand seems to indicate a context independent mastery and on the other hand producing expertise which invites a strong context related or situation related competence.[[9]](#footnote-9) We therefore ask what setting is the most appropriate to produce an expert whose expertise has the maximum value within the setting where she is operating? What framework would thus be sensible to construct for the developing expert, given the understanding that we are now allowed to think and plan in terms of LLL? I.e. how might the framework look, in an ideal setting? How long should the initial education course take, and what should be its ingredients? When should the subsequent periods come and what might be their form and ingredients?

In some sense the notion of developing a professional expert has been weakened by endless (and often very sensible) demands for more ideas to cover in a professional programme. Among the most noticeable shifts in educational practice, especially during the last two centuries (19th and 20th), has been the move from the emphasis on skill and practice within a trade or vocation to knowledge and understanding, i.e. from the apprenticeship model (procedural or tacit knowledge) to the model of attained knowledge (declarative or codified knowledge). We suggest that vocational and professional knowledge has been moved into the theoretical arena. It has nevertheless been emphasised by those who advocate this that this theoretical knowledge must be internalised or constructed in order to be of some value. What has been, largely, left out in this process has been the idea of skill and mastery, except perhaps within the fields of music and sport. In this context the literature on how people develop expertise is of considerable interest.[[10]](#footnote-10) This seems to be normally neglected, i.e. the difference between attempting something and becoming skilled at it, mastering it: becoming a professional expert. This complaint is in some sense supported by the expertise literature which states that people must become skilled at what they should be doing in order to be able to perform, even in somewhat unfavourable circumstances. We are not necessarily claiming that one should go by the 10.000 hour rule, but still want to go along with the general idea that it takes time, involving both training, reflection and a mixture of self-confidence and modesty to become an expert; see also (see also Desforges & Fox, 2002; Ericsson, 1996; Ericsson, 2006). The principal point we want to make at this stage is that the education of a flexible teacher and her development as an expert should take place both within academia but also within the school (workplace). The latter affords the very important reflective communication with the mentor, the supervisor or whichever term we want to use for the person representing the academic (i.e. detached but reflective) community. In settings where she is both a competent expert in her field, able to stand on her own feet, showing flexibility and innovative skills, but also an effective team player.

What should be the relationship between the education of an individual professional and the professional development of the institution she is a part of? The problem with the idea of the development of expertise, and indeed most of the pre-service discussion is that both are preoccupied with the individual as an agent or operator, neglecting the enormous power of the situation or the context in which she is placed.

In recent years it has become clear that the situational factors moulding a workplace are so powerful that they largely determine how a novice functions in the system. She has to learn to operate there. especially if she wants to initiate changes.

In recent years activity theory as e.g. expounded by Engeström emphasises that the operation in a workplace depends on the individual, the task and the tools at hand. But the situation is more complex than this. It also depends on the operational rules of the community, the division of labour, the stimulation, the co-operation and even the friction there exists. The complex activity of any institution is shaped by many interrelated forces and constraints within the system, but also by the possible and hopefully fruitful interaction with other systems. Furthermore the theoretical framework suggests how innovation may take place within an institution, being somewhat dependent on the internal relations there. But her we will especially note the emphasis it places on the community of practitioners over and above the individuals that are there. It therefore suggests that professional development has a strong community or systemic component.

#### The force of the three perspectives as a case for a systemic LLL

There is nothing in the previous arguments that undermines high quality basic education, nor solid pre-service education. But it has been indicated that the arguments for professional development throughout the course of a profession can also be made very compelling. Perhaps to the extent that serious professional development needs a system that is on par with the system of pre-service education.

### Why it is difficult to change

A good educational system has a great number of positive attributes and strengths. It is well developed and professional in most ways. It is professional in the sense that it is competent, knowledgeable and concerned about being at the frontier of its fields of competence. It is fair in the sense that it honours equity, academic honesty, transparency, and accepts responsibility for the tasks it has been given. A good system is also a strong system. But despite all these positive assets, it is precisely its strength that can become a major weakness: it may become too rigid, it may become too narrow minded while respecting the various vested interests within the system, it may be too bound to outdated traditions, and it may value or honour behaviour or attitudes that were once valuable, but have ceased to be. The current system itself may resist change. But the framework around the current discourse on professional education makes it also difficult to bring in the LLL focus as a serious system focus.

#### Three possible foci[[11]](#footnote-11) of the discourse of professional development

The discourse on professional education is complex because it may be approached using very different foci; above we have only discussed one of them. Above we have discussed the life-long learning (the LLL) focus. We will discuss two other foci, see Figure 6, i.e. the focus of content, which is preoccupied with what are the basics of a professional degree, i.e. the foundations of a profession. This focus dominates the discussion about professional education. But we will also discuss in some detail what we call the system focus, i.e. what do the traditional and financial and structural constraints of professional education allow or demand. This focus is mostly hidden or rather implicit in the discourse but has a very powerful moulding effect.



Figure 6. Three possible foci for the discussion of professional education. It is argued in the text that the content focus is the dominant one but the system focus is very forceful parallel to the content focus but it is largely implicit or hidden. The LLL focus is the one advocated in the chapter and has been discussed above.

Of course the discourses overlap considerably and that certainly complicates the issue. We will now turn to the two foci that have not been discussed above. First we will discuss the system focus. It is the least interesting one, but perhaps the most important and most controlling framework. We will indeed argue that the various systemic issues are the ones that in the end decide how professional education will be discussed and organised despite various theoretical reasons why we should proceed otherwise. Secondly we will discuss the content issues, which we think are perhaps the most interesting ones, and the ones that are most commonly at the centre of the debate, where perhaps declarative and procedural issues may be interwoven.

##### The systemic focus of professional education

Systemic features are very strong framing forces for the organisation of professional education. This means that the form of the system of education, in particular higher education, determines how professional education is and will be organised.

As the general understanding of the importance of education has increased followed by a determined build-up of educational system all over the world, we have seen the development of different systems developing, playing different roles and each obeying its own rules and ambitions. We see governments forming their stance and rules, e.g. with national curricula and national quality systems. We see the school systems developing, partly within the national or local community frameworks forming alliances with the governments and unions, and other interested agents. Then we see the development of higher education also moulding its own rule systems, being characterised by strong academic and institutional drift, recently well demonstrated in the discussion about Bologna process or the THES ranking schemes, which spurs a very competitive research emphasis.

There are three basic points we want to make about these developments. One is that vocational education has through the last century and a half been moved from one activity system to another, i.e., effectively from the field (being apprenticeship based) into that of the educational system. The second is that all systems of activity change in character with time where some of the changes are fairly transparent, understandable and robust, others are less transparent and go on unnoticed. The third is that, as each system grows more elaborate and ambitious, it has in some sense more difficulties interacting with the other systems despite considerable understanding, at the rhetorical level, of the importance of their interaction.

History shows a very different status and trajectory of professional and vocation education, even if their paths converge and both are now largely within the same educational system. To cut a very long story short, professional education has for many centuries had a very strong academic component and has enjoyed a very high status. Vocational education has on the other had a fairly low status, and been field based or of the apprentice ilk. It typically took place in the field. Gradually two developments have taken place concurrently and interdependently. The academic (theoretical or codified) part of vocational education has grown, as it has gradually been lifted into the school system and the status has been enhanced by elevating it within the educational system, typically moving it from upper secondary to tertiary (non-university) and sometimes to the university level. A clear academic drift in terms of content and system has been seen, where vocational education apparently strives towards the status and character of professional education.

In order to obtain a fairly full picture of the different systems, one would in particular look at the school, both as a grand system, but also individual schools as identifiable systems. That is our next task. We also have to investigate higher education as a particular system and what constraints it sets and subsequently investigate how these two sets of systems interact or fail to do so.

#### The school as a system

Here we will largely eschew the discussion of the inertia of education from the system perspective, but only remind ourselves that of course the objective of the school system is the education of pupils, not e.g. continuous professional development (CPD). There is hardly any need to point out that professional education, whether pre-service or in-service education of teachers or other school staff, or their professional development, is normally not seen as the objective for the schools. Making that a subsidiary objective of the schools would require a major break with tradition and of course a change in the ways both schools and professional development are conceptualised. Here we will concentrate on the systemic features of HE.

##### HE as an activity system

The current well established sturdy systems of HE have great difficulties accommodating professional education from the perspective presented here. First, normally and very explicitly, its major objective is seen to be theoretical education and research, even though the education of a host of professional groups is in practice a major task of many universities. Second, even though it is accepted that professional education is within the purview of universities, getting out of the traditional and robust pre-service educational mode, seems to be very difficult, except at an abstract level. To begin with it is conceptually difficult and formally it is perhaps impossible or at least very difficult. We will mention a number of rules or traditions that make the accommodation of professional education within status seeking universities difficult, but in particular which make an implementation of any kind of continuous professional development totally alien to the system of HE as it is developing. We will only briefly refer to the credential issue, but credentials are among the most valued possessions of the higher educational institutions, and we will also touch on the evaluation of mastery, financial issues and the traditional division of labour within universities.

###### The credential

The unit of educational discourse in HE is the credential, reinforced by the Bologna framework. Either a student obtains a credential or not; if not he is seen as a failure, a drop-out and a waste of resources both for the student and the institution. This can apply to individual courses and whole degrees; here we refer to the latter. The education and subsequently the credentials are seen as the all or none indicator of preparation for a professional task, and the higher the degree, the better the preparation; preparation for subsequently undertaking a particular task, that of a professional or a researcher. A university or a polytechnic is thus essentially a pre-service educational institution, even if it allows students to enter the programmes at any age. Thus any kind of continuous, perhaps piecemeal professional development would not fit within the tradition of a university, which doesn’t even really want to accommodate continuous education in the guise of coursework within its main frame activities. The credential issue, as presented here is largely a conceptual problem in that we are so used to think in this vein. In order to become a professional you have to be accredited and in many (but not all) professions, that is it. It suffices to obtain the credit once in a professional carrier. Once that is in hand, one has become a professional for life, whatever one does (or doesn’t do) and even if one moves around within one’s wide professional field. But there is no doubt that obtaining a credential is a major formal and symbolic event, but not completing is a mark of failure, both for the individual and the system.

###### Evaluating mastery

Evaluating professional mastery is in many ways alien to the university culture. It can well judge whether the students can deliver the academic tasks at a certain standard. But we hardly ever try, or very reluctantly, to judge if somebody has become a good professional, judged by elaborate criteria of sustained professional activity. The only judgements that take place occur prior to taking on the professional task in earnest. But given the pre-service nature of the professional programmes it is admittedly reasonable to ask if it is sensible to judge the sufficiency of a professional education of a student while in a pre-service programme.

###### Who pays for what?

Universities are financed on the basis that they provide pre-service education. It would be a formidable task to convince any government or municipality that professional development[[12]](#footnote-12) of school or hospital staff, not to mention industry, should be within the purview of the universities, however well the theoretical case might be argued. Who is going to pay for that type of professional development?

But we might also ask who is going to find the time for professional development? All the professionals within the health or education systems have enough on their hands with their daily chores. This would, however, be a totally different problem to tackle, even though it would be problematic for a number of additional reasons, if we were talking about a close liaison of schools and universities in both pre- and in-service education.

###### The place of the graduate in the HE institution

The systemic issues are also related to the nature of HE institutions, in particular the universities. Here the post-graduate population is often seen as the crucial and cheap labour for ambitious researchers. This is, however, not the case in various MBA or MPA types of programmes, or other professional masters, but these are often seen as somewhat outside the normal operation of universities. Thus even normal pre-service professional courses are at the edge of university activity, and professional development is not seen within the purview of post-graduate HE, except perhaps as a source of revenue. Thus the placement of in-service education within the HE edifice is not a simple matter.

##### The content focus of professional education

This is dominant focus of professional education and will not be elaborated here. It is a constant debate if professional education should be at the college or university level, if it should be two, three, four or five years, if it should be subject focused or have a didactic focus and if it should be principally academic (theoretical) or apprenticeship based (school based). Most debates on education emphasise the role of the teachers and their education and whether explicit or implicit, the focus is on pre-service education, its content and form. How should it framed, planned, conducted. Very rarely does CPD enter the central debate on teacher education, even though it is of course discussed.

##### The discourse is swayed away from professional development

The two dominant foci on education will also, somewhat indirectly, prevent change. The content focus, by virtue of attracting all the attention, but the system focus by not coping with all the system complications that LLL in the guise of professional development invites.

But I suggest that is necessary, to understand how the different foci control the discourse and accept that a change of course is now advisable, but before long will become absolutely imperative.

### What might replace the present system

We have not being arguing against a system, but that the system in place needs to cover the professional life of the expert. The demands on professionals in all spheres are increasing, not decreasing and constant updating of skills, knowledge and cultures becomes the order of the day. It would be a serious misreading of the situation and totally irresponsible to assume there is less need for a systematic framework as time passes.

The criticism above of the present system is not an argument against a strong system; but it has to have important differences from the present one. With reference to Figure 2 the system has to be characterized by continuous professional education and development: it must thus be characterised with the perspective of LLL rather than pre-service (or pre-life!) education.

It is most likely that a new system has to include all, or at least some, of the system ingredients of HE.[[13]](#footnote-13) It must tackle the credential issue, how the content is distributed along the developmental path, how an accreditation is handled, what takes place at the university and what in the field (even though both venues may change dramatically), who is going to pay and for what and what is the place for the developing professional within the HE system (i.e. her status as a graduate) and who is going to be in charge. Here a very conservative change is is suggested in the sense that the new system copies many of the notable features of the older one.

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1. Please consider this as very much a first draft with many of the sections in need of considerable underpinning, development and references. But the main argument is being outlined in the present paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Note also Comenius on LLL. Discuss further Scott (2000) and also chapter 6 in Illich (1976). See also part 2 in (Longworth, 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This is a very complex topic and a thorough discussion is not intended here, but it is nevertheless important to understand where the roots of the system are and how and why it developed as it did. This discussion extends to all levels of the system and many different cultures. (For a further exploration of these issue we will draw on Archer, 1979; Benavot & Resnik, 2006; Green, 1990; Kamens, Meyer, & Benavot, 1996; Melton, 1988; Meyer, Ramirez, & Soysal, 1992; Müller, Ringer, & Simon, 1987; Ramirez, 1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This has of course also been debated, as some see professional pre-service education outside the purview of a proper university. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See JTJ, the PLA paper 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In the Finnish study, it is very clear how fuzzy the arrangement for in-service education is in many countries even though this varies greatly; see Teacher Education in Europe (Finnish Institute for Educational Research, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. My examples are drawn from the Icelandic school system. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. This is implied by much of the adult education literature and in particular by the notion of andragogy. But see on this issue e.g. in Bélanger (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Refer to the expert lit. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See e.g. the pieces on professional development in Ericsson (2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. It varies whether the plural of focus is foci or focuses; the latter is gradually taking over. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. I am of course not talking about field training during pre-service training. That is another matter that is within the system [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See a discussion of the issue but from a different angle (Werquin). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)