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Maureen Coady

FROM HOULE TO DIRKX: CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION (CPE), A CRITICAL STATE-OF-THE-FIELD REVIEW

Maureen Coady
St. Francis Xavier University

Abstract

Learning is a central focus in the discourse on professional development in the educational and professional development literature in North America. Yet, despite the consensus and significant research on how professionals learn, most professional development and continuing professional education (CPE) practices continue to focus on delivering content rather than enhancing learning. This paper maps the literature of this field from Houle (1980) onward, providing an assessment of the progress in continuing professional development (CPD) and CPE to the present time. The author profiles a long-standing effort by educational scholars to advance this vital area of study and practice in order to bring to bear their critical questions and insights.

Résumé

L'apprentissage constitue un sujet central dans le discours portant sur le développement professionnel dans les recherches sur le développement éducatif et professionnel en Amérique du Nord. Pourtant, malgré l'opinion générale et les recherches importantes sur la manière dont les professionnels apprennent, la plupart des pratiques de la formation professionnelle et de l'éducation professionnelle continue (EPC) continuent de se concentrer sur la présentation du contenu au lieu du développement de l'apprentissage. Cet article fait un bilan des travaux de ce domaine à partir de ceux de Houle (1980) afin d'évaluer le progrès qu'a connu le domaine de la formation professionnelle continue (FPC) et de l'EPC d'alors jusqu'au présent. L'auteur décrit les efforts continuels des chercheurs d'éducation visant à développer ce domaine de recherches et de pratiques bien important afin de mettre en lumière leurs questions et leurs idées critiques.

Introduction

Lifelong learning is considered a primary responsibility for individuals involved in any type of professional practice (e.g., medicine, law, social work, nursing, education) (Houle, 1980). The underlying assumption is that practising professionals (i.e., those whose practice

is based on a specific body of practice knowledge and skills) will continue to learn to maintain their competence (Queeney, 2000). Indeed, as individuals become professionals and participate in professional practice, they acquire knowledge, gain skills, and increase occupational sensibilities through practical experiences or through informal or formal study (Cervero, 2000; Houle, 1980; Jeris, 2010).

The area of adult and continuing education that concerns professional groups and their learning and development is typically referred to as continuing professional education (CPE) (Jeris, 2010). Some notion of *continuing education* has been with us since at least the Middle Ages, although prior to the 1960s, little systematic thought was given to the need for *continuing* professional education beyond the three to six years of a professional's initial education. Many leaders in the professions believed that these early years of professional education, along with some refreshers, were sufficient for a lifetime of work in the professions (Queeney, 2000). By the 1970s, however, rapid social change, the explosion of research-based knowledge, and societal demands for greater professional accountability and consumer protection gave rise to the professionalization of occupations and the need to prepare adults to continue to develop knowledge and skills through CPE (Cervero, 2000, 2001; Cervero & Daley, 2011; Houle, 1980; Wilson & Cervero, 2006).

Fueled by the remarkable growth of professionalization in the 1970s and 1980s, standardized bodies of accredited knowledge were developed within professions, and organized programs of continuing education began to be developed and delivered (Cervero, 2000; Houle, 1980). Adult education played a key role in the development of CPE and brought a decided learning focus to the field. This paper traces that focus, describes its waning, and outlines efforts by educational scholars to foster a learning-focused approach in CPE on the basis of its potential to promote individual and social transformation. I ask whether the rhetoric on learning has been fruitful and provide a critical review of progress in CPE.

Since the 1970s and 1980s, the steady rise of acceptable levels of performance has led to CPE becoming increasingly mandated and tied to credential renewal, licensure, certification, or practice to ensure the professional's accountability and ability to keep up to date with the profession's knowledge base (Gravani, 2007; Houle, 1980; Tobias, 2003). Today, remaining in good standing in many professions requires that individuals provide evidence of having engaged with the profession's required training and the appropriate number of continuing education units (Jeris & Conway, 2003). Yet, despite the requirement for courses, little attention is paid to whether these result in actual learning and improved competency.

Notwithstanding these developments, most professions today embrace the importance of lifelong professional education, and their members regularly participate in a diverse array of CPE offerings to increase their knowledge and competence in professional practice. These CPE offerings are made available by a pluralistic group of providers (e.g., workplaces, private organizations, professional associations/regulatory agencies, and universities), who use a variety of terms to describe the concept of CPE (e.g., continuing professional development, professional learning, and staff development) and who deliver CPE in different settings using a variety of modalities (Cervero, 2000 Cervero & Daley, 2011).

Literature Selection and Analysis

I approached the literature with a goal to identify key conceptual debates on professional learning that adult education research in North America has offered to support CPE. This historical investigation provides a foundation for further and deeper investigation within and beyond North America. For example, a significant body of new and innovative international (European, Australian, UK) literature on professional learning and CPE exists, but is not included here. This paper may be of interest to graduate students and scholars seeking a foundational understanding in this area of adult education within North America.

This review of the literature is by no means exhaustive. Rather than conduct a formal ethnographic content analysis, I let the work from the field emerge from recognized Canadian and American adult education sources, including the annual conference proceedings of the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (CASAE) and the American Educational Research Conference (AERC) as well as their corresponding journals, the *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education* (*CJSAE*), *Canadian Journal of University Continuing Education* (*CJUCE), Adult Education Quarterly* (*AEQ), Adults Learning* (*AL*), and *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* (*NDACE*). Relevant debates on professional learning and CPE within human resources literature resulted in the inclusion of two special editions of *Advances in Developing Human Resources* (*ADHR*) (Daley & Jeris, 2004; Sleezer, 2004). In addition, key texts on the subject of continuous professional learning and CPE were included. The process of analysis involved a synthesis of the selected reading and location of key scholars and debates beginning with Houle to the present time in North America. Conference proceedings provided important insights on research into practice and programmatic considerations, while conceptual debates were more prominently featured in journals and books, particularly those of American origin.

Houle, Lifelong Learning, and CPE (1960–1980)

CPE as a distinct area of interest within adult and continuing education emerged in the 1960s largely as a result of the work of Cyril Houle. Although CPE was in its infancy, Houle noted similarities in CPE efforts across professions and wondered whether understanding these similarities might yield a fresh exchange of ideas, practices, and solutions to commonly shared problems. He examined the learning and development needs of 17 different occupational groups, ranging from traditional to emergent professions, over a 20-year period that culminated in his seminal publication *Continuing Learning in the Professions* (1980). His research explored notions of professionalism and the experience of post-qualification professionals as they worked to keep up with new developments, gain mastery, understand the connection of their field to related disciplines, and grow as people as well as professionals. His book remains the touchstone of CPE, so it is important to know if the progress he envisaged was ever achieved.

Houle's (1980) research established a strong link between continuing education and lifelong learning (Jeris, 2010). One of his key findings was that across these professional groups, experiential knowledge (informal learning) acquired from practice was often more useful than what was being acquired through more formal continuing education (Queeney, 2000). Houle viewed professionals as agentic individuals capable of determining their own learning needs, and he saw the educational systems and processes serving those needs as

secondary (Jeris). In light of this, he emphasized *continuous* and *self-directed learning*—a desire and obligation to continue to learn over the course of one's professional career—as a primary concern and focus of CPE. As the field of CPE providers broadened, Houle feared that false assumptions about learning could result in ill-conceived mandatory continuing education requirements for professionals.

As such, he undertook and encouraged research into forms of learning, including self-directed learning, that he believed would result in actual improvements in practice. His work contributes to our general understanding of the professions and was critical in establishing CPE as a distinct area of study and practice within adult education. Houle's legacy extends to providing subsequent scholars with a framework for inquiry and a standard of scholarship.

Since the work of Houle (1980), many new developments and insights have broadened and deepened thinking about CPE practice, and a state-of-the-field update is required. In this article, I profile and critique some of these post-Houle developments within adult and continuing education in North America. A final section briefly considers the current state-of-the-field thinking relative to CPE, asking about the progress in understanding and practice.

CPE Developments Post-Houle (1980–2000)

Twenty years after the publication of *Continuous Learning in the Professions* (Houle, 1980), scholars Daley and Mott (2000) lamented that while CPE had undergone significant changes, little progress had been made toward establishing it as a field of practice and that in many ways CPE was even more fragmented than in Houle's conceptualization and challenge to the 20th and 21st centuries. Indeed, in stark contrast to Houle's holistic vision, Cervero (2000) argued that what had emerged was a rather universally narrower conceptualization and belief that the aim of CPE was to keep professionals up to date on the profession's knowledge base. Like Houle, Cervero observed that the most commonly experienced forms of CPE provided episodic updates of technical and practice knowledge within professions. Cervero cited an increasingly complex world, the race toward professionalization, and the growing use of CPE to regulate practice as having shaped a deeply embedded view that professional practice consisted of instrumental problem solving made rigorous by the application of scientific theory and technique. Similar to Schön (1987), Cervero questioned the underlying assumptions, arguing that this conceptualization of professional practice was insufficient given that in the "swampy lowlands" of professional practice, messy confusing problems often defy technical solutions. Drawing on the work of Jurgen Habermas (1984, 1987), Cervero proposed a more expansive conceptualization of CPE, encompassing not only *technical* knowledge, but also *practical* knowledge—the accumulation of tacit knowledge (informal learning) from experience, which contributes to a professional's wisdom and ability to exercise discretionary judgment in practice. Cervero also acknowledged *emancipatory* learning, with its emphasis on self-knowledge or self-reflection, as a third domain for knowledge generation. Emancipatory knowledge, Cervero imagined, provided a base for professionals becoming more critically reflective of their meaning perspectives—the assumptions that guided their interpretation of experience. This was consistent with Houle's understanding of how professionals learn and develop knowledge through practice. Yet it is unclear that emancipatory learning occurs in CPE as it is practised today.

Like Houle, Cervero (2000) believed that for CPE to be truly effective, a model of learning must be at the heart of educational practice, and he expanded understanding of the multiple forms of knowledge needed in professional practice. This prompted Daley (2000) to imagine that a valuable model of learning might extend to consider (beyond knowledge requirements) *how professionals learn* and make meaning of new knowledge (from CPE) in their distinctive practice contexts—those places where they provide care or deliver services.

What Daley (2000) and Mott (2000) suggested was that professionals made knowledge meaningful through constructivist learning—by establishing connections between the knowledge learned (through CPE), previous experiences, and the context in which they found themselves, as well as how they perceived that context. Daley extended this notion of constructivist thinking, emphasizing emancipatory knowledge and reflective action as providing opportunities for transformative learning. Like Cervero, Daley envisioned that as professionals acquired and acted on new information, the potential existed for them to become more critically aware of the limitations of their previous knowledge and perspectives and to change their understanding of that information (constructing new meaning frames) based on experience—so, consistent with Houle's (1980) and Schön's (1987) understanding, learning *in* and *from* practice. Despite the potential for transformation envisioned by Daley, it is an area of CPE that continues to be overlooked.

From a lifelong learning perspective, Daley (2000) proposed that professionals develop from novice to expert, along a continuum, as they learn to "rely on past concrete experiences rather than on abstract principles, as they understand situations as integrated wholes rather than as discreet parts, and as they begin to act as involved performers rather than detached observers" (p. 39). As professionals developed into exemplary practitioners along this continuum, it seemed that critical reflection, as a recursive activity of examining practice and implementing new practices, played an important role. As such, it seemed the development of reflective skills was an important learning dimension to be incorporated into both professional and continuing professional education efforts (Schön 1983, 1987; Wilson, 2001). Daley's ideas on constructivism opened space for consideration of the ideas of artistry, reflection, and alternative ways of knowing. The focus on reflection was much more pronounced by Daley than with Houle or Cervero.

Daley (2001) acknowledged that basing one's CPE practice on a model of learning or a learning system would involve a significant change in mindset for the majority of CPE providers, who work from the assumption that professionals transfer information to their practice. In reality, she had discovered that transfer of learning and adoptions of innovation were part of the knowledge-construction process and integral parts of a professional's learning. As such, she advocated shifting the role of CPE provider from developer of specific program content to facilitator of learning and including methods that encourage the participants to link the content of the CPE program to their actual practice and work environment. In her view, this would significantly enhance the meaning they could derive from CPE and the potential for transformative learning to occur. She was less specific on how one can support this happening or assess whether it happened.

Taking a wider view and examining emergent trends in CPE, Wilson (2000) observed that large scale organization and systemized delivery of professional services in the 1990s was creating an emphasis on "system competency," such that systems, not individual practitioners, provided services. The result, he feared, was that professionals were "constantly producing and reproducing the institutional and social mechanism by which

they were required to operate, leading to the increasing loss of professional autonomy, and corresponding organizational rather than client allegiance" (p. 78). The growing dominance of these expert systems, he argued, was superseding and undermining the traditional power and autonomy of the individual professional expert, such that they were experiencing a failure in "professional knowing" (Schön, 1987, p. 33) and uncertainty about how to use their expertise to serve client needs. To counteract this, Wilson encouraged continuing professional educators (while continuing to provide knowledge and technique updates) to more deeply consider the fundamental nature of professional practice and ways to support professionals in reclaiming their professional (discretionary) power and capacity for client advocacy. Despite his pronouncements and recommendations, Wilson had little systematic data collection to support this dismal appraisal. However, more research might be undertaken to examine whether these trends do challenge the capacity of professionals to develop a unique knowledge base, frame of reference, and judgment/reasoning capacity in professional practice.

New Conceptual Horizons (2000–2013)

These historical debates and developments across the 20th, century and the beginning of the 21st century have been of enduring interest to scholars and researchers in adult and continuing education. They are continuing their pursuit of a unifying picture of effective CPE by posing critical questions and probing for a deeper understanding of how professionals learn and the kinds of knowing that characterize effective practice. Yet even in 2001, much of this literature continued to be both prescriptive and descriptive (e.g., Mott, 2001). Cervero's (2001) examination of persistent issues that impeded progress in building an effective system of CPE across professions has been more helpful. His analysis has revealed political and ethical struggles and the need for clarification and consensus on at least three issues, which he framed using the following questions: *Continuing education for what?* (the struggle between updating professionals' knowledge versus improving practice); *Who benefits from continuing education?* (the struggle between the learning agenda and the political and economic agendas of continuing educators); and *Who will provide continuing education?* (the struggle for turf versus collaborative relationships). Jeris and Conway (2003) added a fourth question: *What impact does the workplace as the site for CPE have on its planning, design, delivery, content and participation, and outcomes?* (the struggle between continuing education's learning agenda and the goal of performance improvement through increased productivity). This critical turn in CPE has stimulated practitioners and researchers alike in the new millennium.

Scholars have reality-tested these critical questions in diverse practice contexts. For example, Umber, Cervero, and Langone (2001) investigated power relationships within the context of a continuing education program in public health and discovered that the practice of CPE was shaped by power relationships, rooted in complex historical organizational processes, such that courses often did not meet the interests of some stakeholders. They found that interests, power relations, and programs were not static and needed to be continually negotiated. Similarly, Daley (2002) observed that in addition to the organizational culture, the level of professional autonomy, and the sociocultural background (including class, race, gender, and sexual orientation) and positionality of the individual shaped professional learning and so needed to be considered in planning CPE.

Cervero's (2001) critical questions have also served as a useful lens for examining the broader discourses guiding the practice of CPE. For example, with these questions in mind, Tobias (2003) researched the underlying ideology and essentialist nature of existing models and discourses on continuing professional development (CPD), including discourses on professionalization. He found tensions and contradictory tendencies were inherent in all forms of initial and continuing professional development (and corresponding CPE)—for example, while the processes of professionalization had played a key role in raising the standards of technical competence of members (enabling them to achieve higher levels of excellence in their fields), the same processes and standardized performance guidelines often limited creativity. Moreover, while the drive to regulate practice ensured observable, measurable professional skills, these skills were sometimes valued over more ephemeral qualities such as empathy. Tobias's critical work highlighted the limitations of a "one size fits all" approach and the need to consider important political and economic questions—such as those posed by Cervero—in any debate about the boundaries or the aims, structure, and purposes of CPD and CPE.

Yet other thinkers in the field continued the conceptual approach through model building. Dirkx and Austin (2002, 2005) searched to locate a common framework for professionals to understand their work, irrespective of context. Significant in their work is that it marked a decided move to human resource development (HRD) and workplace training and, to some extent, a distancing from adult education and learning-focused conversations. Their conceptual model highlighted that the goals of professional development are met in four primary contexts: HRD, CPE, faculty development, and staff development. The model depicted the aims of CPE to include technical, practical, and emancipatory goals, and it provided for consideration of contexts and aims from the point of view of the focus (organizational or individual). The intended advantage for CPE planners was that it helped them to identify and think about practice boundaries.

Jeris and Daley (2004) reconfigured and adapted this conceptual model to highlight CPE and HRD as the primary dimensions of professional development (with staff and faculty development secondary) in an effort to explore the boundaries that existed between the two fields, which had developed, and were studied, independently of each other. Their premise was that each area of practice had "valuable theoretical bases, research traditions, and educational practices, and yet because of differences in language, focus, and purpose, often have not found ways to share information and enhance practice and research in each area" (p. 110). Their work advanced thinking on how to enhance the performance and value of CPE to organizations and individuals.

Writing in the same period, Bierema and Eraut (2004) revealed significant differences across HRD and CPE contexts. They found that while the emphasis on learning was shared across both fields, different learning traditions had developed over time for these two groups. CPE has traditionally conceptualized the processes of learning and change largely from an individualistic or psychological perspective and has emphasized the updating of work-related knowledge and technique. The focus of change in CPE was reflected in new or different content transmitted through the process. HRD relied more on sociological and organizational theories of change, stressing organizational culture and broader institutional factors that needed to be taken into account in any change initiative. Bierema and Eraut observed that the focus of change in HRD was on the process rather than the content of change (Dirkx, Gilley, & Maycunich-Gilley, 2004), although learning was often given less

priority than knowledge, with a focus on skills and competencies being more common than in CPE (Bierema & Eraut). In linking CPE and HRD, these authors helped to build alliances, which are vital in a complex world.

Ross-Gordon and Brooks (2004) contributed to the HRD–CPE nexus by noting differences and by observing points of convergence across the two fields, including a shared interest in workplace learning and performance and a reliance on objective truths. Shared areas of struggle included "the traditions of updating, weak links to performance, the isolation of learning from the workplace, and insufficient attention of research to the concept of learning" (Jeris & Daley, 2004, p. 104). By 2004, it seems, Houle's ideas about professional learning still had little impact on CPE and HRD practices.

In continuing this comparative analysis, Dirkx et al. (2004) took a deeper look at change theory within CPE and HRD and their underlying assumptions, concluding that both fields needed to be grounded in a more holistic understanding of work-related learning and change and how it could be facilitated. Like others, Dirkx et al. challenged assumptions of lifelong learning that viewed professional development knowledge as objective, distinct from the practitioners who act on it, and not related to the particular socio-cultural context (Daley, 2001, 2002; Houle, 1980). Inspired by scholars who were exploring the spiritual nature of work and learning (e.g., English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003; Palmer, 1998, 2004; West, 2001), they offered a more expansive conceptualization of lifelong learning that proposed that the professional's identity was deeply intertwined with the processes of developing and sustaining knowledge in practice (Wenger, 1998; Wilson, 2001).

In Dirkx et al.'s (2004) view, professional development knowledge was influenced by the many subjective and richly felt (embodied) dimensions of practice, including the relationships, feelings, emotions, and instincts that shape professionals. Like Daley (2001, 2002) and Fenwick (2000) before them, Dirkx et al. argued that how people came to understand new information and techniques varied and acquired meaning and purpose, "when filtered through the experience and existing understandings that the practitioner brings to the tasks, as well as sociocultural context in which these tasks are performed" (p. 40). In this conceptualization, the self was viewed as active in the co-construction of knowledge, and lifelong learning in professional practice was characterized by "an evolving awareness of the self in relationship with itself, with others and with the social and cultural context" (p. 40). As such, a major aim in professional and continuing professional development, the authors advocated, should be to foster self-understanding. This continued the reflection emphasis of Daley (2000, 2001, 2002), drawing attention to intuitive (creative/ imaginative) and subjective dimensions of learning and providing a more expansive way of understanding the process of "knowing in practice" (Schön, 1987, p. 33). Rational processes alone, Dirkx (2008) argued, did not fully explain how professionals came to know how to navigate the messy and ill-structured nature that makes up much of what constitutes professional practice (Schön, 1983)—that place where there are no pat strategies or methods to guide the way. As such, he argued for the "augmentation of highly technical and rational conceptualizations of professional training and continuing education, with an emphasis on the ongoing importance of self-formative processes within the lives of students and practicing professionals" (p. 66).

Delving more deeply into the spiritual dimensions of practice, Dirkx (2013) explored the potential for meaning and purpose in work—those elements that contribute to "leading lives that matter" (p. 358). He and others (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; Palmer, 1998,

2004; Tennant, 2012) postulated that meaningful work arises from deep integration of these *inner* and *outer* aspects of our work—the *inner work* involves learning that allows us to connect with our souls and our selves (embodied learning), and the *outer work* as learning (often beyond our control) associated with navigating "the physical or structural organization of one's work, the individuals with whom one works, the culture of the organization in which one works, and the perception of the power and authority relations that characterize one's work environment" (Dirkx, 2013, p. 361). These inner and outer dimensions, they contended, provide a fundamental focus for lifelong learning and CPE, such that professionals are able to develop a more authentic presence and relationships in their work. In this sense, the knowledge developed and used in practice is always unique to the individual, and this authentic activity provides a basis for thinking about conceptualizations of professional development and how to support professional learning through CPE.

The notion of *authenticity*—used in education with respect to authentic tasks as genuine and embedded in real life—has been taken up by more recent scholars to more vividly convey this more holistic way of thinking about continuous professional learning and related CPE. For example, Webster-Wright (2009) advanced a concept of "authentic professional learning" (APL) (p. 715) to emphasize (continuous) professional learning as a personal, complex, and *lived* phenomenon, unique to individuals as they navigate multiple transitions. Like Houle, her large-scale study—all too rare in the CPE literature— investigated professional learning from the perspective of professionals themselves in order to gain insights on their experience of professional learning and how it could be supported. She discovered that professionals learn in situations that are important to them and that these situations "usually are areas they care about enough to engage with effortlessly and with intentionality, yet at the same time, experience uncertainty and doubt" (p. v). She isolated *personal experience* and *intentionality* as the key premise for a professional's ongoing learning, placing pedagogical emphasis on professional learning as a self-directed activity, encompassing not only activity directed by others, but also what the individual wishes to achieve.

Webster-Wright's (2009, 2010) work provides a promising new vista and potentially a way forward in bridging (professional) learning theory and CPE practice. As this article reveals, a significant body of research examining the experience of professional learning has had little impact on CPE practices. Building on Houle's ideas and aspirations, Webster-Wright's work ties together learning and CPE, providing a more holistic and expansive way of thinking about professional leaning and CPE across professions. She locates the historical problem in finding a way forward in the mistaken assumption (by CPE stakeholders and professionals) that CPE and professional learning are the same thing, assuming that well-designed CPE programs lead to professional learning and improvements in practice. In contrast, Webster-Wright found that learning did not always occur from CPE courses, for example, when the supervision of standards and performance were privileged over understanding in learning. Moreover, she found little evidence to assure her that knowledge learned in these programs was always incorporated in practice and/or resulted in practice improvements.

Webster-Wright (2009, 2010) acknowledged that constructive strategies need to be developed to enable change from the practice of delivering CPE to that of supporting authentic professional learning. She identified two interdependent challenges—changing

organizational culture and supporting individual professionals and groups of professionals. Like those writing earlier such as Daley, Mott, Cervero, and Wilson, she suggested a reframing of CPD discourses in a way that respects and values professionals' ability to direct their own learning, while remaining cognizant of the requirements of the contemporary context (standards, accountability, efficiency, and evidence-based outcomes).

Similar to Cervero and Wilson, Webster-Wright (2010) contended that any serious effort to support authentic professional learning at the organizational level must take account of existing contextual constraints; for example, the reality that efforts to regulate practice and maintain standards through CPE are likely to increase and that learning activities amenable to measurable outcomes are more likely to be officially supported. As a way of broadening this focus, she advocated an expansive framework of supports and guiding principles to ensure that professionals are supported to continue learning in their own authentic manner, while at the same time responding to the realities of their workplace and professional responsibilities (Webster-Wright, 2010).

The State of the Field and Future Vistas

In 1980, Houle challenged scholars and practitioners to listen to the *experience* of professionals as a basis for supporting their professional learning. A process of taking stock reveals that much progress has been made on this agenda. In the subsequent 30 years or so, North American scholars such as Schön (1983, 1987); Daley and Mott (2000); Dirkx, Gilley, and Maycunich-Gilley (2004); Dirkx (2008, 2013); and others have engaged professionals, significantly deepening not only our understanding of the experience of (continuous) professional learning, but also the nature of professional knowledge and how it is constructed and reconstructed through different types of learning transitions. Their collective works reinforce that professional knowing is embodied, contextual, and embedded in practice; that the change of learning occurs through practice experience and critically reflective action within contexts that may pose dilemmas; and that continuous professional learning is situated, social, constructed, and influenced by identity.

Other scholars, particularly international scholars, have extended this thinking, focusing on related questions about how engagement in everyday practice at work affords varying learning experiences, how conditions at the workplace can either support or hinder continuous professional learning, and particular approaches and strategies that can support professional and transformative learning at work (Billett, 2001a, 2001b, 2004, 2008; Choy, 2009; Hansman, 2002). They have also extended these inquiries; for example, exploring the potential of "communities of practice" (Wenger, 1998)—where professionals collectively reflect on practice and share and create knowledge—as spaces for supporting continuous professional learning. Exercising more criticality, Servage (2008) and deGroot, Endedijk, Jaarsma, Simons, and van Beukelen (2013) have extended this thinking. They have explored the potential for transformative learning when the focus in such professional learning communities extends "beyond 'best practices' (collaborative planning, curriculum study, learning assessment) to critical reflection (with others) on their actions and the social and policy contexts within which these actions are framed" (Servage, p. 66). Still others have examined broader political and ethical issues, asking important critical questions about CPE trends over time, professional development discourses, and practices in CPE (Cervero 2000, 2001; Gravani, 2007; Tobias, 2003; Wilson & Cervero, 2006).

Scholars in North America from Houle (1980) to Dirkx (2013) have articulated a reformulated vision of CPE practice and an expanded understanding of the role of CPE providers in supporting professional learning and continuous professional learning. They advance an understanding that the task of CPE is the "identification of problems in professional practice and the determination of how education can foster professional development programs that ultimately promote the ability to work in an uncertain, confusing and dynamic world of professional practice for the betterment of clients" (Mott & Daley, 2000, p. 81). Yet there continues to be a noticeable disparity between this vision and CPE practice in most professions. Although the theory of and evidence for placing learning at the heart of CPE practice is well established, the practice of CPE remains stubbornly mired in update and competency approaches, and a coordinated system of continuing education, or arriving at any unifying picture of effective CPE across professions, remains elusive decades after Houle's work.

The most promising insights in North America in the past 30-year period are from those scholars such as Cervero who are engaging with issues of power in the workplace, as power is at the heart of the matter. Whose knowledge counts and how knowledge is attained are crucial questions for CPE. Other promising work is from scholars such as Daley and Dirkx, who remember to bring in the intuitive ways of knowing that engage subconscious processes. A significant development is that their work has had reach across disciplinary boundaries to workplace and HRD contexts, where most CPE occurs. Missing in much of the scholarship on CPE, however, are major empirical and long-term research studies that examine in close detail what is happening in the workplace and in CPE. Adult educators are still calling for learning to be integrated into CPE, but we do not have a great deal of data on whether learning is really an emphasis in practice. Broadening the conversation to include the available international literature on professional learning and CPE is likely to revitalize interest in professional learning and the wider social, political, and ethical debates surrounding CPE's aims, purposes, and methods.

Looking back, one might ask why this body of knowledge has not served to support more significant change in the direction envisioned by Houle. If they do not, why do CPE providers not embrace the view that developing a professional community and fostering involvement in professional work affects learning? What more needs to be known to help providers to re-envision and shift their role from creator and transmitter of generalizable knowledge to facilitator of knowledge-creating capacities in individuals and professional communities? A closer look reveals that the task of building a coordinated system of continuing education, or arriving at any unifying picture of effective CPE across professions, is fundamentally a longer-term and more complex process (Cervero & Daley, 2011) involving multiple stakeholders with diverse and competing professional, social, institutional, and educational agendas. As these agendas are negotiated toward a more integrated approach to CPE in future, the opportunity exists for us to use our existing insights on the importance of learning in CPE to inform those negotiations.

In the more intermediate future, it is crucial that adult education regain its voice in the ongoing debates about CPE and that we engage in the data collection that will give us support for our arguments. History has suggested that a focus on learning has been difficult to sustain in an environment increasingly oriented to technical and instrumentalist values. As Wilson and Cervero (2000) highlighted more than 15 years ago, what is involved is a "struggle for knowledge and power in society within which adult educators must see themselves as

social activists" (p. 85). Adult education has a rich history and much contemporary work that challenges the socially reproductive continuing professional education that many professionals are engaged with. The politics of our work, therefore, begins with us and involves continuing to probe for deeper understanding to how professionals learn and come to know in professional practice, within our own field. We must also continue to draw attention to the power relationships and interests of stakeholders—to name them to reflect on their significance and to build theories of practice that consider them (Daley, 2001, 2002). Outside our own field, we need to insert ourselves into those conversations and spaces where knowledge production and practitioner training and CPE are being discussed; for example, in specialty journals (e.g., *Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions*) where debates about lifelong learning and CPE have historically focused on continuous quality improvement, competency assessment, and knowledge translation rather than learning. In these places and spaces, harkening back to the vision of Houle (albeit with a critical eye), adult education can be a key player in shaping and reshaping understandings and practices of CPE well into the future.

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