

## Continuously improving our professional performance

### Principal VII

#### Principal's basis

Continuously improving our professional performance could constitute a principle that is difficult to understand or to approach, since it involves breaking down, in the first place, the spheres of professional performance and to determine what continuous improvement means. In order to be more rigorous when determining these spheres of performance, we would have to agree, initially, to the fact that different jobs or different roles involve different scopes of performance. Thus, whereas to one teacher an improvement in his or her professional performance could be linked to being up to date with the knowledge in the field, in the case of an elite athlete, his or her sphere of improvement could be the optimization of physical resources and of the technique required in his or her professional practice. Given the wide variety of improvement areas that we could identify based on different roles or professions, it is in this document that we will focus on the continuous professional improvement of the teacher.

With the purpose of tackling the complexity of the teaching job and to define, from there, what continuous improvement and the development of the teachers' maximum potential entails, is that standards, just like in other countries, have been set. Already in 2005, Ávalos (2005) noted that:

“Confronted to the growing political worries over the effectiveness of the teaching work and over installing accountability systems that ensure the quality of that work, the need to count with evaluation instruments based on the descriptions of what a good teaching work is, became evident. This has led to the formulation of what today is known as teaching competencies and standards” (p.20).

The relevance of counting with these standards is precisely to accurately know what the spheres of the teaching job are and learn about the expectations associated with this role, clearly distinguishing what is to be expected in the teacher's initial training (Pedagogical Standards) and in the professional practice (Framework for the Good Teaching of Preschool Education and Standards for the Teaching Profession. Framework for Good Teaching). This way, the standards work as a guide to orient the teachers' continuous professional improvement, both in their training and in their practice.

The main documents that address what the teacher's continuous improvement consists in, are: Framework for the Good Teaching of Preschool Education (FGT PE) and Standards for the Teaching Profession. Framework for Good Teaching (STP-FGT). As it is indicated in the first document “a Framework for Good Teaching is a referent that orients the teachers or educators with regards to reflection and the pedagogical practice they must develop as teaching professionals for the continuous improvement of their job, establishing the performances that are expected of them in their teaching role” (FGT PE). Both the FGT PE and the STP-FGT are structured within 4 great domains. The spheres of continuous improvement of a teacher's professional performance are linked to Preparation for the Teaching and Learning Process, Creation of a propitious Environment for Learning, Teaching for the Learning of all students and Professional Development and Commitment (or Professional Responsibilities).

In synthesis, these standards represent a valuable tool for orienting teaching improvement processes, given that they consider what is to be expected of a teacher in relation to the necessary abilities, dispositions and knowledge to tackle the learning process' complexity.

In parallel, and with the exact purpose of highlighting the constant need to be improving and learning, is that lifelong learning could be considered as central in any continuous improvement process.

“The notion of lifelong learning has an important and rich trajectory rooted in the first Conferences of the UNESCO on Adult Education (UNESCO, 2009). The definition of the European Commission (2001) has been chosen as the operational referent, which identifies it as «all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skill, and/or qualification for personal, social and/or professional reasons»” (Cajide, J., García, B., Jato, E. & Muñoz, M., 2016, p.71).

Lifelong learning becomes central in a changing and globalized world, in which autonomous and strategic learning is required (Pozo y Monereo, 1999). According to the life competencies outlined by the Cambridge University (2019), there are three key areas in Learning to Learn: a) developing practical skills to participate in learning (taking notes, store and retrieve information), b) taking control of our own learning developing strategies of self-regulation, autonomy, motivation and concentration on the task, and c) reflecting on the success of our own learning and evaluating it.

Following the same line, the World Economic Forum (WEF) has established that by 2025, 50% of all employees will need reskilling, given the rise of technology. It is for this reason that in its report, presented in the year 2020, “The Future of Jobs Report 2020”, they suggest the 15 most demanded skills by employers for 2025. Among them, Active Learning and Learning Strategies stand out. These skills highlight the need for workers and collaborators to become active participants in their own learning.

It is possible to maintain that the continuous improvement of the professional performance goes hand in hand with teaching improvements through which certain knowledge and methodologies are updated, in order to make the teaching process more effective. But also, and with the purpose of highlighting the teacher's autonomy, it is important to point out the need by the teacher of self-reflective work that allows him or her to be aware of those areas for improvement and perfecting and to have this become linked, in turn, with their own professional project, and the responsibility this implies. Thus, professional improvement or upgrade cannot constitute an external threat. According to Álvarez (2004), the teachers' continuous formation should be also understood as an opportunity to reconsider and to reorient their professional projections. In turn, it must also be considered from a cognitive dimension given that a formation project is also a mental construction, meaning, a group of articulated representations that give the formation an end, responding thus to the changes that we seek to generate in a given context. All in all, we could as well point out that the improvement implies knowing and acknowledging the context in which we are situated as teachers, interpreting our needs for change and channeling them towards the professional projections every teacher has started to forge, with the purpose of positively affecting the students' learning and the education community as a whole.

Lastly, following this line, it is important to underline that the teacher's role should not be reduced to a mere technical management or implementation of the curriculum. Given that his or her teaching practices have an impact in social and cultural terms, it becomes necessary to recognize and to potentiate the intellectual dimension of the teaching profession and, from there, to make visible the importance for teachers to actively participate in the debate, in the public policies and in the construction of the curriculum. As such, the continuous teaching formation should accentuate and reinforce this intellectual, reflective and prominent role of teachers in the construction of an educational community and in the encouragement of their students learning and development. As H. Giroux holds, it is about "reflective professionals in our learning" (1990). Only in this sense is it possible to create new pedagogical proposals that, escaping a more technical conception of education, allow teachers to stand in front of the curriculum critically and proactively.

In synthesis, we count today with ministerial documents that establish and, therefore, clarify what are the spheres of improvement and the expected performance in what is considered a good teacher. On the other hand, continuously improving our professional performance requires us to understand and to assume the need and the relevance of always forming ourselves. From there, it becomes imperative that -from the initial teaching formation- certain skills, that encourage and make possible for the teachers to be continuously learning and perfecting themselves, are developed and potentiated, such as lifelong learning or learning to learn.

## Relevance of this Principle

Continuously improving our professional performance constitutes a relevant principle in the training of teachers and in professional practice. Evidence of this is that the Pedagogical Standards, the FGT PE and the STP-FGT do not only work as a guide for orienting the continuous improvement of the professional performance of both active teachers and those under training, but also because they have an influence on evaluation processes that are central both in pedagogical careers and in the School System. It is worth remembering that, according to the law that creates the System for Professional Teaching Development (Article 20.903 from the year 2016), the Pedagogical and Disciplinary Standards for Pedagogical Careers constitutes the basis for the National Diagnostics Evaluation in the Initial Teaching Formation (NDE ITF). The results of this evaluation, applied by the Ministry of Education to all students who are in their second to last year of pedagogical career, are considered in these careers' accreditation processes.

In relation to the Performance Standards from the Framework for Good Teaching, these constitute -according to the Teaching Development law- “the main referent for the evaluation and recognition processes towards teaching applied by the Ministry of Education”<sup>1</sup>

Oriented towards the educational establishment's directors and/or directive teams, we count with the Performance Indicative Standards. These “constitute an orienting framework for the evaluation of the education management processes of the establishment and its shareholders. These are part of the requirements stipulated by the National System for Ensuring Education's Quality and were elaborated with the purpose of supporting and orienting the establishments in their process of continuous improvement, and thus contributing to the goal that the country has set of ensuring a quality education for all students and young people in Chile”<sup>2</sup>.

In synthesis, we count with diverse documents emanating from the Ministry of Education that suggest promoting self-evaluation, analysis and reflection instances with the aim of supporting and scaffolding continuous improvement processes. Familiarizing ourselves with and knowing these documents only constitutes a first step. If this knowledge does not come hand in hand with a constant interest for learning and perfecting ourselves, it will be impossible to visualize improvements in professional performance. Hence the suggestion to link this knowledge to abilities that promote these improvement processes, recognizing the intellectual role and, consequently, the teacher's influence in the promotion of the education community, in the discussion of public policies and in the construction of the curriculum. Now, what does it mean in concrete terms to continuously improve our professional performance?

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1 For more information, see <https://estandaresdocentes.mineduc.cl/estandares-docentes/>

2 For more information, see [https://www.curriculumnacional.cl/portal/Documentos-Curriculares/Estandares-e-indicadores-de-calidad/#in\\_EID](https://www.curriculumnacional.cl/portal/Documentos-Curriculares/Estandares-e-indicadores-de-calidad/#in_EID)

## How to continuously improve our professional performance

- **Analyzing our own pedagogical practice identifying strengths and opportunities for improvement:** central in the continuous improvement process, in professional development, is to be able to look at our own practice, self-evaluate it and reflect on those aspects or spheres that require support. Becoming aware of the strengths and opportunities for improvement is the first step in planning out professional improvement instances.
- **Identifying and looking for opportunities of improvement by establishing goals in our own professional development:** to improve our professional performance requires initiative, being proactive and having an interest to participate in learning and development instances. We arrive late to these instances when we are invited by others (leading staff, for example), since in many occasions we are notified when a deficiency or fault becomes apparent. Hence it is relevant to be up to date and to be aware of our own breaches, so as to identify them, but also to search for the space to make up for them. It is important to be able to establish achievable tasks and goals, with a defined and reasonable deadline and to consider those aspects that can be tackled and that do not imply or generate anxiety or stress.
- **Organizing our time safeguarding instances of improvement or study:** safeguarding times for improvement is not easy. We always have pressing or important tasks to tackle and these study instances are not always -at a first glance- instances that will help us solve what is urgent and important. However, if we think long term, these improvements or study instances can indeed constitute an important help in the optimization of tasks and time. In this sense, it is convenient to ponder the benefits obtained through these activities, training or study instances in the long term and to organize ourselves in a way such as to have the time available for it.
- **Showing a positive attitude towards learning:** being willing to learn and to appreciate study and practice are key in these continuous improvement processes. For this it is important to believe in oneself, to be optimistic regarding these processes and the difficulties that could arise and to have clear, defined and achievable goals.
- **Staying up to date with regards to discipline, pedagogical practices, scientific literature and educational referents:** knowledge, just like society, changes very quickly. For this reason, it is important that teachers remain up to date, with regards to their own discipline's knowledge as well as to the pedagogical competencies necessary to perform with excellence in the classroom. But also, the teacher ought to remain up to date with regards to the main referents on his or her role or field.
- **Being prepared to make mistakes and to acknowledge our ignorance in front of our peers:** improving our professional performance implies acknowledging areas for

improvement and the improvement process could reveal mistakes, mismanagement or lack of knowledge about certain topics. Whoever is willing to learn, however, must be prepared for it, acknowledging that mistakes constitute a learning instance and not a time to judge or to criticize.

- **Asking for help and feedback when necessary:** looking for support, advice and orientation when necessary is key to supporting professional improvement processes. This requires us to be open to constructive criticism and to respond positively to the feedback provided by our peers or leading staff with regards to our professional performance. The disposition to receive feedback and to critically self-evaluate our work or performance in the light of this evaluation allows us to identify new aspects and areas for improvement.
- **Establishing high standards and maintaining high expectations with regards to our own pedagogical practice:** continuous improvement involves recognizing that there is always new knowledge to be learned or practices, skills and/or attitudes to improve. For that reason, it is relevant to keep high standards in the horizon, of the pedagogical practices linked to the teaching-learning, the planning, the classroom management, the evaluation processes, etc., as well as of the disciplinary practices -linked to the knowledge and depth of what is being taught- and the ethical practices, relative to the behavior and ways of being in a changing and highly complex world.

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