

# The Application Of The Concept Of Continuous Development To The Cyprus Educational System

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**ABSTRACT:** The main aim of this article is to examine the application of the concept of continuous development to the Cyprus Educational System. First, the concept of continuous development, the necessary conditions for its existence, the policies of the organization, and the responsibilities of those involved are discussed. Afterwards, the identification of learning opportunities and needs, the provision of resources, and the benefits and results for the organization are examined. A historical background of the Cyprus Educational System is also given and a continuous development plan that can be adopted for the whole system is proposed. Finally, conclusions and suggestions for the future are presented. All these aspects are investigated by reviewing the pertinent literature and drawing from the author's professional experience.

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### Introduction

There is a general consensus that nearly everything in our world is changing at an accelerating rate, and the existence of organizations and individuals depends on their ability to adjust and find flexible ways to cope with the new challenges that they have to face (Tsiakkiros & Pashiardis, 2002a). What we know today might not hold true tomorrow, since knowledge, ideas, and technologies, all requiring new skills, are constantly evolving. What we have learned in the past will surely not be the same in the future since 'the only stable thing is constant change' (Pashiardis, 2001, p. 1).

Only organizations that will be able to respond quickly and effectively to change will succeed. Many organizations have realized this fact, and, as a result, have begun the process of investment in making continuous professional development opportunities available to their members in an effort to ensure they are prepared to deal with the effects of constant change. Today, the initial education and training workers bring to an organization are not enough to generate progress. Everybody must be ready to adapt, apply learned information to new situations, and be able to meet the changing demands of work; therefore, organization members need access to continuing educational and development opportunities.

In order to achieve the goal of being able to adapt to a changing world with the ability of its members to respond to a world in flux, organizations need to encourage their members to be lifelong learners by providing ongoing education. For example, organizations should have specific programs for the introduction of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) that all employees should attend. School systems and individual schools within those larger educational systems, as organizations, need to recognize the importance of providing continuous professional development opportunities for their own organization members – administrators and teachers. Such opportunities may take the form of in-service training for the learner's specialized needs or staff mobility in various countries. Teachers, as the facilitators of the learning process for their students, must learn throughout their careers in order to model the concept of lifelong learning, and to provide ever better learning opportunities for their students that reflect our constantly deepening understanding of the learning process. The need for development is continual, from initial training until retirement, and management has the obligation to encourage it. In a broader educational sense, there is a need for lifelong learning and development that goes on beyond retirement and is a personal possession of the learners with the capacity to enrich their lives.

Since educational systems are open social systems that interact with the environment, all changes within the environment will affect them as well as businesses and other service organizations. Subsequently, the concept of continuous development can, and should, also be applied and examined within the context of educational systems. The UNESCO Report (1997) has revealed some problems in the Cyprus educational system; such as lack of teacher motivation and dearth of appropriate education for headteachers. The theory of continuous development provides a means for thinking about how to address these problems; therefore, the main objectives of this article are (1) to explain what the concept of continuous development entails, and (2) to provide a continuous development plan for an efficient and effective educational system in Cyprus.

## Literature Review

### *The concept of continuous development*

A clear definition of the term “continuous development” is difficult to give. Instead, it is better to outline the main elements of a culture that is committed to continuous development and how ongoing learning is managed in such a culture. According to Wood, Barrington and Johnson (1994) continuous development is the integration of learning with work. It is not, then, simply self-development in the broadest sense; rather, continuous development involves an attitude of mind, a way of tackling work that recognizes the need for the kind of on-going learning that helps circumvent stagnation for both the employees and the organizations in which they perform. The improvement of employees and organizations is simultaneous. Continuous development involves learning from real experiences at work and learning throughout the working life of both the individual and the organization.

The Institute of Personnel Management (1994) distinguishes the meaning of continuous development for the individual from that of its meaning for the organization. For the individual, it means lifelong learning with a strong element of self-management and self-direction. For the organization, it means the management of learning on a continuing basis. Learning is promoted to the members by the organization as an integral part of work itself. The concept of continuous development involves the testing of new theories and models as a result of reflection on, and reaction to, practical experience with existing theories and models. It helps working people maintain their effectiveness and lead their organizations to constant growth.

### *Essential conditions for continuous development*

Five essential conditions that an organization must fulfill in order to provide a culture of continuous development are outlined below:

- 1) The organization must have an operational plan in order to work effectively, and the implications of this plan should be well known to all employees. The aims, objectives, and skills required should be very clear if the organization is to be able to achieve the best possible outcome and reach its maximum capacity.
- 2) Managers must be able, eager, and ready to define and satisfy their employees' needs for learning that is integrated with, and supports, their work. Doing so, of course, is not easy, but in the initial efforts to establish a culture of continuous development, employees should be encouraged to suggest learning needs as they encounter them in their daily activities. In this way, the organization will be aware of its staff's needs, and can then try to meet them accordingly.
- 3) The impetus for continuous development must come from members of the top management team. They should regularly revise procedures, and consider the practical aspects of the introduction of this approach. In the education system, the directors, the inspectors, or the headteachers might provide this impetus. Due to their position, headteachers can set an example for their colleagues to follow by their own commitment and dedication to continuous development.
- 4) Learning and work must be integrated, since employees learn best from responding to the problems and challenges they face in their work. Moreover, Tolley and Day (1992) contend that ‘employers can multi-skill their workforces and ... workers can up-grade their qualifications’ (p. 45).
- 5) The investment in continuous development must be regarded as important as investment in research or new product development, and therefore the resources to support the process must be forthcoming. Whatever money is spent on human resource development will not be wasted, since the goal of making such capital outlay is to help organizations and their members – in this case, schools and their administrators and teachers – continuously refine their ability to serve the students who will take their places as part of a constantly changing world (Institute of Personnel Management, 1994). Having the above conditions in mind, we need to think of schools as “organizations” and head teachers as “managers”.

### *Policies of the organization*

When we say policies of the organization, we mean those statements that promote continuous development and help the workforce adapt to changes. Very often, these statements are written and agreed upon by the stakeholders who also determine a relevant framework for implementation of such policies. In this way, their implementation may be secured and monitored.

Barrington and Wood (1994) argue that statements of general policy related to the management of people are useful,

and in the first place, they suggest that organizations must express a strict commitment to continuous development. Self-improvement and self-development are the responsibility of each individual who has to take ownership of his/her own learning. All must understand the importance of learning, both for individuals and groups. Furthermore, improved performance should be provided with appropriate rewards, if the organization wants a well-motivated staff. Evans (1998) discovered that if employees do not receive praise or any kind of feedback for their efforts, or if their efforts go unrecognized, then they can become dissatisfied and become unmotivated and demoralized. Equally important, the organization must provide all those facilities that are necessary for learning during work time, as well as the procedures and processes for career development and progression.

A final set of policies should be outlined that articulates the relationships of the organization to its employees. Employees should be actively involved in making decisions about their work, since research suggests that they perceive their job to be stressful if they have little or no influence over decisions that affect them (Savery & Luks, 2001). For example, they must agree with the ways in which the aims and objectives are communicated to them, with the methods of appraisal and assessment or with the training facilities and resources provided by the organization.

### *Responsibilities*

Everybody in an organization has responsibilities. In a continuous development culture, the crucial point is that each and every individual, starting from the bottom up to the top, is contributing to the identification of learning opportunities and is making full use of existing resources. Senior executives and personnel professionals, as the Institute of Personnel Management (1994) indicates, have the responsibility to ensure that all the statements and practices of the institution promote continuous development. Organizational policies and reward structures must also encourage managers to design learning activities to facilitate the process of change and monitor the extent and quality of learning. In a school setting, for instance, the inclusion of students with special needs in the regular classroom makes many teachers feel threatened. The organization needs to take all the necessary measures to alleviate these negative feelings from its employees. As a result, the employees will be able to work in an environment that is conducive to learning.

### *Roles*

In educational systems, the role of senior managers is equally important as it is within other organizations. Managers – head teachers at the school level, and inspectors at the system level – should get the best out of their staff by paying regular attention to their subordinates' continuous development (Institute of Personnel Management, 1994). Megginson, Joy-Matthews and Banfield (1993) contend that, "the most important part of the line manager's role is to directly provide training for their staff" (p. 30). This training might take the form of instructing, coaching, mentoring or providing a peer-network, all of which are strategies or mechanisms within educational systems that can assist in the raising of standards for teachers and students, and help in achieving their attainment (Rhodes & Beneicke, 2002). Heads of departments become "line managers," and head teachers need to develop the competencies needed to perform these staff development tasks through in-service support. The importance of headteachers has been referred to in much of the existing literature. Bredeson and Johansson (2000) stress the fact that headteachers can exercise significant influence on teachers' professional development. As a result, their role should be given extra attention, and in order to fulfill this role they, too, must not only have the necessary training but the necessary resources as well.

All learners (teachers or head teachers) are seen as partners and prime movers in the process of change. With this perspective in mind, learners should articulate their problems, review their own performance, suggest what they would like to learn, and demonstrate new learning whenever possible. In this way, the professional-bureaucratic conflict (Hoy & Miskel, 2001) will be reduced, and the goals of the organization as well as the needs of the individual will be satisfied to the greatest possible extent. When all groups understand and realize their responsibilities and roles in the organization, then only the best outcomes should be expected.

### *Identification of learning opportunities and provision of resources*

Being involved in the process of identifying learning opportunities and needs is a worthwhile experience for everybody. Some sources of information that are the policy documents in which learning opportunities are outlined could be the following:

- Operational plans: Any innovation introduced into the organization should be done so bearing in mind certain issues. In writing the organizational plan, questions such as the following should be addressed: Which employees most need to learn on an ongoing basis? What strategies and mechanisms need to be in place in order to ensure learning opportunities are available when needed by those who need them?
- Job descriptions and specifications: Responsibilities of management and roles of the organization and the individual

related to the process of continuous development should be stated clearly, so as to avoid misunderstandings. Each individual's self-development should be able to be fostered – and then evaluated – on a continuous basis.

- Appraisal: Appraisal procedures provide an excellent opportunity to nurture the continuous professional development of the individual – and, in turn, to receive input from the individual about his or her perceptions of the needs of the organization. The appraiser, through interviews, discussions, and questions should be able to help the appraisee realize the extent to which self-development is taking place. We should have in mind, though, that much depends on the way in which appraisal is used and perceived by the appraiser and the appraisee; often, appraisal procedures are perceived as punitive in nature, and such perceptions run counter to the goals of continuous development.

- Special reviews and audits: Such procedures provide useful opportunities for reviewing, renewing, and refreshing the learning system. If, during such audits, the staff feels free to report their perceptions regarding learning opportunities and needs, then the organization will be able to respond more effectively (Barrington & Wood, 1994).

These strategies have their parallels in educational systems as well. The meeting of staff's needs is perhaps the single most important factor in ensuring the institution's success and the production of the desired outcomes. Day (1993a) refers to the kinds of needs some teachers voice, which among others might include job rotation, help from a colleague within the school, modification in teaching and/or management emphasis, additional experience in a specific area, or change of responsibility. The view being promoted here is that schools themselves, through their procedures used to accomplish the daily business of educating young people, must provide opportunities for the work-based professional learning of teachers on a continuous basis. There are many factors that create new needs for teachers. Most of these needs develop in response to changing perceptions and understandings of the goals we have to have for our students, given the ever-evolving nature of the society in which they will live and work after graduation. The critical issue is that teachers try to identify their own professional development needs and make full use of the opportunities provided by the organization for self-development and progress, since as Harris (2000) points out, teachers' involvement in this process is an essential starting point for their professional development.

In order to promote and facilitate the concept of continuous development, organizations must provide the learning resources and materials necessary for individuals to face the challenges of engaging in professional development. For this reason, managers should ensure that employees are aware of the available resources and facilities. Some of the resources and materials necessary to create opportunities for learning might include: training/ learning budgets; facilities and support for study, including paid or unpaid leave or open and distance learning; coaching and tutorial help; awards and/or scholarships; access to advisers, counselors or facilitators; financial assistance with courses, books, tapes, or other materials.

Above all, the organization must recognize management's responsibility to create an environment in which human resources can prosper and grow professionally – and therefore the organization has to provide the managers with the appropriate resources necessary for them, in turn, to make professional development opportunities available to their employees. (Institute of Personnel Management, 1994). When an organization has a plethora of resources and facilities, then individuals can choose the ones that satisfy their needs and develop their competence to the greatest extent.

#### *Benefits and results*

Organizations that have already introduced a continuous development approach report a number of benefits, the most significant of which is the growth of the company (Lathrope, Barrington, Johnson & Wood, 1994). Money spent on education, training, and development should be regarded as an investment that will pay useful dividends in the future. The benefits are not seen immediately; they are felt in the mid- and long-term. Barrington and Wood (1994) regard as the major benefits both the improvement of operational performance and the simultaneous development of people and work. Furthermore, they argue that organizations providing continuous development are more likely to achieve the goals outlined in their strategic plans. As a result, participants will be more positive about continuing to engage in continuous development as they realize that doing so helps their organization and thus they, themselves, survive.

Equally important is the fact that by enabling employees to make full use of their competencies, then the organization will use them more effectively and create a motivated workforce. In such an atmosphere, ideas are more likely to be generated in a form which will be related to operational needs. If we add all these together, we should expect fewer mistakes, less time wastage, lower staff turnover, higher morale and productivity, better relations and service, and consequently, greater returns for everybody involved. At this point, it is important to note the links with the concept of Total Quality Management, the essence of which is leadership. What is required in Total Quality Management is a leader who will provide an environment where the employees are 'working in a way that ensures consistently high

performance and constant improvement' (Murgatroyd & Morgan, 1993, p. 60).

Some organizations claim that they have a continuous development approach, where in fact they do not. When goals are not shared, change is forced and resisted, documents are available with difficulty, and team members are dependent upon one or more leaders, then it means that this organization does not demonstrate the required characteristics. On the contrary, an organization that fosters a culture of continuous development can be easily identified, since the most significant characteristics are: all members understand and share ownership of operational goals; immediate objectives exist and are understood by all; managers discuss learning methods with their subordinates and ask them frequently what they have learned; change is welcomed and enjoyed; time is found by all to work on individual members' problems; learning facilities and materials are easily available and are used effectively; all members share responsibility for success or failure and they use each other as resource; members learn while they work and enjoy both (Barrington & Wood, 1994).

If an organization meets the majority of these results and characteristics, then it is likely that it has and promotes a continuous development culture and ensures its competence and prosperity. Many of the aforementioned benefits and results have an application in education as well. These benefits and results are strong enough to convince all stakeholders of the importance of a continuous development culture and the necessity of its introduction in the highly competitive learning world of the 21st century.

### **Methodology**

We have briefly examined the theory of continuous development and will now examine its practice in the form of a case study. According to Cohen and Manion (1995), a case study is the observation, either participant or non-participant, of the characteristics of an individual unit. This unit might be a child, a class, a school, a community, or even the whole system. The type of observation used was non-participant (researcher just observes and notes down). The case study was used as a technique for gaining data because it allows detailed exploration of the particular area in which we are interested.

Besides observation, interviews were also used. O'Sullivan, Saunders and Rice (1996) report that interviews have a number of strengths such as freedom, directness of contact and feedback, speed of response and the data may usefully confirm or disconfirm findings from other sources. On the other hand, interviews have some weaknesses. They are usually time-consuming, the analysis of responses may present problems, and it might be difficult to lay down rules for their conduct (Bell, 1995). The type of interview used was that defined by Wragg (1984) as "semi-structured," which "allows respondents to express themselves at some length, but offers enough shape to prevent aimless rambling" (p. 184). In order to avoid subjectivity and to develop objectivity, the interview questions were structured in a non-directive format and some supplementary questions were based upon them.

Finally, document analysis was also used. With the study of all relevant documents, which is an indirect technique compared to the previous two that were direct, the researcher examines something that was produced for another purpose. As a result, the nature of the document is not influenced by the fact that it will be used for research purposes (Robson, 1997). Thus, we studied all written texts and other documents that were considered to be helpful and directly related to our subject.

As a result, the methodology used was a combination of techniques, and the data were collected and analyzed through non-participant observation, interviews with teachers and administrators, and document analysis, as well as the researcher's professional experience.

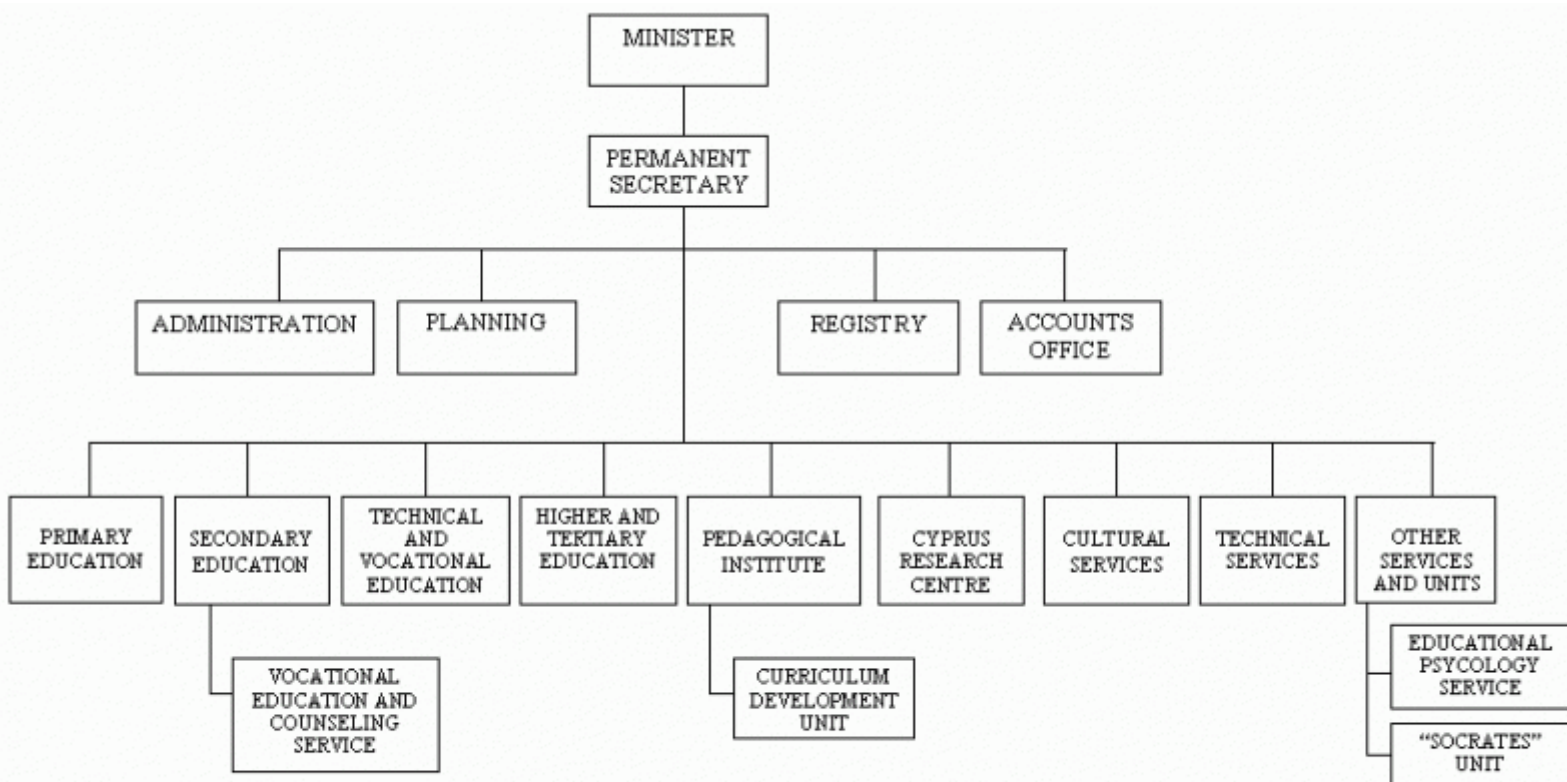
### **Historical Background Of The Cyprus Educational System**

This is a good point at which to mention a few general issues about the Cyprus Educational System (CES) in order to set the context for the proposed plan that will follow. Cyprus is situated in the northeastern part of the Mediterranean Sea with a surface area of 9,251 square kilometers. As of 1997, the estimated population was 750,800 with an ethnic composition of 84% Greek Cypriots, 13% Turkish Cypriots, 3% foreign residents, and a few Maronites, Armenians, and Latins. Public expenditure on all levels of education in 2003 accounted for 14.5% of the Government Budget and 6.7% of the Gross Domestic Product. (Statistical Service, 2004).

The CES has been an important subsystem of Cypriot society and has reflected its spiritual, economic, and technological achievements throughout the years (Tsiakkiros & Pashiardis, 2002a). According to the Ministry of Education (1992), education in Cyprus in the ancient years was practiced at home and was a privilege of the rich. Later, children went to schools that were near churches and monasteries. Polydorou (1995) adds that when the Ottoman Turks occupied Cyprus, education was not organized at all and did not explicitly foster the spiritual development of the Cypriots. It was then that the Church of Cyprus showed its interest in the education of children,

developing its own educational system in which most of the teachers were priests within a decentralized structure. When the British Government decided to colonize Cyprus, the CES became centralized, as Maratheftis (1992) explains, because the aim of the British was to control education and give all the power to the Director of Education. After independence, the system remained centralized and started to develop rapidly, both in a qualitative and a quantitative way.

The growth and prosperity of the CES was interrupted temporarily by the Turkish invasion in 1974, when 42 per cent of the students lost their schools, and 41 per cent of teachers were kept away from their workplaces through violent means (Ministry of Education, 1992). With the co-operation and persistence of all stakeholders, the problems caused by the invasion were overcome quickly, and the educational system in Cyprus managed to continue to improve, and has now reached standards that 'can be favorably compared to those of the European Union' (Georgiou, Papayianni, Savvides & Pashiardis 2001, p. 71). In this article, we are referring only to the schools under the control of the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Cyprus and not to the schools in the occupied area. The Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for the enforcement of educational laws and the preparation of educational bills. In addition, the Ministry prescribes syllabi, curricula, and textbooks, and regulates and supervises all the institutions under its jurisdiction. Any policy or decision which involves education is taken by the Council of Ministers, through the Ministry of Education and Culture which has a bureaucratic structure of authority and is organized into departments as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Organogram of the Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture**

*Source: Adapted from Ministry of Education and Culture (2005).*

Education is provided in pre-primary, primary, general secondary, technical, and vocational secondary schools and in special schools. In 2003-2004, there were 779 schools with 128,064 students and 11,070 teachers (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2005). More details for each level of education are shown in Table 1 that follows.

<b>NUMBERS</b>	<b>TYPE OF SCHOOLS</b>	<b>NUMBER OF SCHOOLS</b>	<b>NUMBER OF STUDENTS</b>	<b>NUMBER OF TEACHERS</b>
	<b>NURSERY SCHOOLS (public and communal)</b>	308	11 212	650
	<b>PRIMARY SCHOOLS</b>	348	58 373	3 849
	<b>SCHOOLS FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS</b>	9	295	110
	<b>SECONDARY SCHOOLS</b>	102	52 221	5 742
	<b>TECHNICAL SCHOOLS</b>	12	5 963	719
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>779</b>	<b>128 064</b>	<b>11 070</b>

**Table 1. Number of schools, students and teachers in the year 2003-2004 in pre-primary, primary, special, secondary and technical education**

*Source:* Adapted from Ministry of Education and Culture (2005).

Appointments, secondments, transfers, promotions, and discipline of all teaching personnel and the inspectorate of the CES are the responsibility of the Educational Service Commission, a five-member, independent body, appointed by the Council of Ministers for a period of six years. Inspectors visit schools at all levels and offer consultations, advice, and supervision. School evaluation is also their responsibility. Inspectors can promote teachers to positions as deputy headteachers, head teachers or inspectors. However, there is no specific pre-service training programme designed for becoming qualified for a promotion post. The procedure is based on seniority, an assessment by the inspectors, additional academic qualifications and an interview with the Educational Service Commission. The inspectors' evaluation on one hand, and seniority on the other, each carries a considerable weight. Teacher evaluations improve with seniority and age, and as a result, the older teachers are mostly the ones promoted.

The Pedagogical Institute, which is mainly a staff development organization providing in-service training to both primary and secondary teachers on the island offers a variety of professional development programmes for teachers. For example, it provides lessons, seminars, and courses to teachers, some of which may be compulsory, but others of which are available on a voluntary basis to any interested educator. Such opportunities are usually provided during afternoons and after the school day (Georgiou et al., 2001; Tsiakkios & Pashiardis, 2002b).

The way schools, head teachers, and teachers are to operate is clearly defined in specific regulations of the Educational Law (Public Schools Elementary Education Functioning Regulations, 1997), whereas the general aims, objectives, and subjects of the CES are set in the curriculum which teachers have to follow (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1996). Head teachers mainly deal with routine administrative duties, and are in close co-operation with a number of stakeholders for the smooth operation of their schools. In addition, they are responsible for developing a

positive school climate and encouraging the staff to engage in activities that promote their professional development. Teachers, on the other hand, are merely asked to implement the instructions given by the Ministry of Education and Culture, without having the opportunity to take an active part in any process of decision-making. Their morale and sense of security are affected, since there is a National Curriculum that mandates content. As a result, teachers do not have the flexibility to modify the curriculum to fit their particular students, and they also do not have flexibility in choosing materials and instructional methods.

We have tried to give a short description of the CES, so as to lay out the general framework in which teachers work, and give the Government's philosophy as far as education is concerned. It is important to understand both the history of the educational system in Cyprus as well as the current social and political realities in order to better grasp the need for, and difficulties in, implementing a program of continuous professional development within the CES.

### **A Continuous Development Plan For The CES**

#### *The extent to which the CES has a continuous development culture*

The theory of continuous development has been discussed in the literature review, and the context of the CES has been provided in the next section of the paper. The aim of this section is to link theory and practice and try to connect these two areas by suggesting a continuous development plan that can be adopted for the CES, and by giving specific ideas and recommendations for a successful application of the approach.

We will work on a plan for the whole system because we believe that it is better to examine issues that concern education in a wider context, and because innovations of such a range need to be monitored carefully in their initial stages. However, before the presentation of the proposed plan the extent to which the CES has a continuous development culture will be critically examined.

The general feeling is that the CES is not committed to the continuous development approach to any great extent, and, as a result, the opportunities it provides for career and personal development are limited, since there is not a specific plan that promotes the process on a regular and systematic basis. At this point, it would be a good idea to examine whether the organization, which in this case is the Ministry of Education and Culture, meets the essential conditions for continuous development as these were outlined in the literature review.

It is a fact that the organization has an operational plan the main aim of which is the continuous upgrading and updating of the provided education, the broadening of educational experiences and opportunities as well as the constant renewal of the curricular content and the methods by which it is delivered to students (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2005). The problem is that the implications of this plan are not clear to the teachers who are not asked to take an active part in the process of curriculum review, materials selection, classroom research or professional renewal.

On the other hand, most of the headteachers are not able to meet their staff's needs, not because they do not want to, but mainly because they are not given the necessary tools for doing so, such as adequate training and resources. The impetus for continuous development does not come from the top management team as it should, but mainly from those few teachers who continuously seek opportunities for career and personal development and care for their professional growth.

Teachers integrate learning and work to a satisfactory extent, but there is still space for further improvement. Since the Government believes that investment in education is important, it is crucial that it now realize the necessity for fostering and promoting a culture of continuous development at all levels within the educational system, and that it then takes all those measures required to ensure its implementation.

#### *Necessary measures that need to be taken*

Two essential measures for the establishment of a continuous development culture in schools are the following: (1) the decentralization of the educational system, and (2) the empowerment of the school unit. The application of these two prerequisites is more likely to give flexibility to schools to cater to the individual needs of their students and staff, and give priority to areas that need improvement that might differ from school to school. The above changes are fundamental and need to be addressed in advance, if continuous professional development is to be taken seriously.

Moreover, particular emphasis should be paid to the school climate, which can be defined as "a relatively enduring quality of the school environment that is experienced by participants, affects their behavior, and is based on their collective perceptions of behavior in schools" (Hoy & Miskel 2001, p. 190). This issue is a serious one, since ultimately the school climate is the context in which headteachers and teachers have to work. Fortunately, Pashiardis



(2000) in her study examined the beliefs of primary headteachers and teachers concerning their schools' climates and found that the climate in the particular schools she studied was satisfactory, with an overall mean of 2.33 on a three-point, Likert-type scale. Creating a positive school climate can be achieved, in part, by creating a climate of continuous development. In doing so, schools will need to address two areas that Pashiardis found to be particularly problematic: organizational structure and educational quality which do not help students to develop skills (e.g. self-learning or problem solving). These two parameters are in most need for improvement; therefore, any efforts for continuous professional development should take the above areas into account.

Wideen (1989) claims that today the need for continued professional development of teachers takes on a critical new importance due to the expanded knowledge base and the continuing nature of change that occurs in society. An appropriate response will be achieved only if the Ministry of Education and Culture, head teachers, and the teachers work together to find the best solutions to the various problems; their relationship must be based upon mutual respect and understanding, since they should all aim for the best possible education of students in schools. Each one's contribution to this common goal is examined in the sections that follow.

### *Implications – Recommendations*

#### The Ministry of Education and Culture

Initially, the Ministry of Education and Culture needs to express a whole-hearted commitment to continuous development. The absence of a national policy cannot continue. As a first step, stakeholders need to express their views and then a development plan with general guidelines has to be established and communicated to all.

The Ministry, as the employer, should realize that teachers are the schools' greatest assets (Day, 1993b). Therefore, it should make or embrace a decision to provide continuing professional development for teachers no matter how high the cost will be, since the well-being of teachers is crucial to the educational, economic, and social standing of the country. The initial education of teachers should include a short introductory course or some information on continuous professional development, on both why it is important and what opportunities are available to teachers. In this way, the prospective teachers will be introduced gradually to the concept and learn from the very beginning that they need to be lifelong learners. As was pointed out earlier, teachers cannot rely exclusively on their initial education. Continued growth and development are necessary throughout their careers if they are to respond to a continuously changing world. For example, a new issue teachers face that they did not have to address a decade ago is the increasing number of non-Greek-speaking students in some areas of the country.

Another useful strategy the CES might employ is the adoption of an induction program, which is defined by Dunham (1995) as "the process of introducing the new employee to the organization and the organization to the employee" (p. 89). This kind of program is very useful, because it provides newcomers with information about the school, and its policies and systems of organization. In addition, induction programmes are designed to help new teachers during their first few weeks on the job, and to settle them smoothly into their work place. The University of Cyprus or the Pedagogical Institute could initiate such an induction programme or course, or individual schools could be charged with the responsibility for developing such an induction support system, and should, in that case, be given the resources necessary for doing so.

Moreover, the CES or individual schools could introduce the concept of staff development days as another step in establishing a culture of continuous professional development. These professional days can be very significant in the development of the school and its staff, because they bring together the whole staff for an extended period, they build up a team spirit and a sense of shared achievement, and they can allow for a mixture of learning styles (Bradley, 1991). Schools can organize such days when it is necessary to introduce an innovation and teachers need to exchange ideas about its implementation, when there is a project under study and some members of the staff want to review its progress, or even when members of the staff have attended specific in-service training programs and want to inform their colleagues about what they have learned. The success of this initiative will increase if it is ensured that there will be careful planning by the organization and the expected/desired outcomes for the in-service workshops will be communicated to everybody involved. The first week of each school year when teachers have to report for work but students do not attend school could also be used for this purpose.

Then, there are a variety of policies that could be adopted in order to motivate teachers to engage in continuous learning and development. Stronger promotion prospects should be offered to those teachers who show special interest in their growth and development. As well, credits, rewards, and extra scales should be given to those who attend courses or seminars on a voluntary basis. In addition, the Ministry could organize opportunities for summer learning during which persons with specialized backgrounds would offer their knowledge and experience, or teachers of a particular subject or grade level could be brought together, with pay, to engage in the curriculum review and revision process. The Ministry could work with the University to provide graduate classes on topics of importance

given current problems and issues faced by its teachers. The Ministry could recognize the certificates given by the Pedagogical Institute as an extra qualification for promotion purposes, and it would need to provide all schools with books, journals, tapes, and other educational materials to promote the continuous development of staff.

Furthermore, Savvides (2000) refers to a number of opportunities that will help teachers develop their professional ability. These opportunities will provide a systematic and organized way of in-service training and a mechanism of incentives. Some of them are: sabbatical leaves that will be granted at regular time intervals, an increase in the number of scholarships that are directly related to the needs of the educational system, and the introduction of an in-service point system which teachers should complete within specified time limits by attending lessons, seminars, or lectures. When all these ideas are put into practice, the employees will realize that their employer believes in their abilities and invests in their personal growth and development. When the impetus is given from the top, then the bottom will respond accordingly.

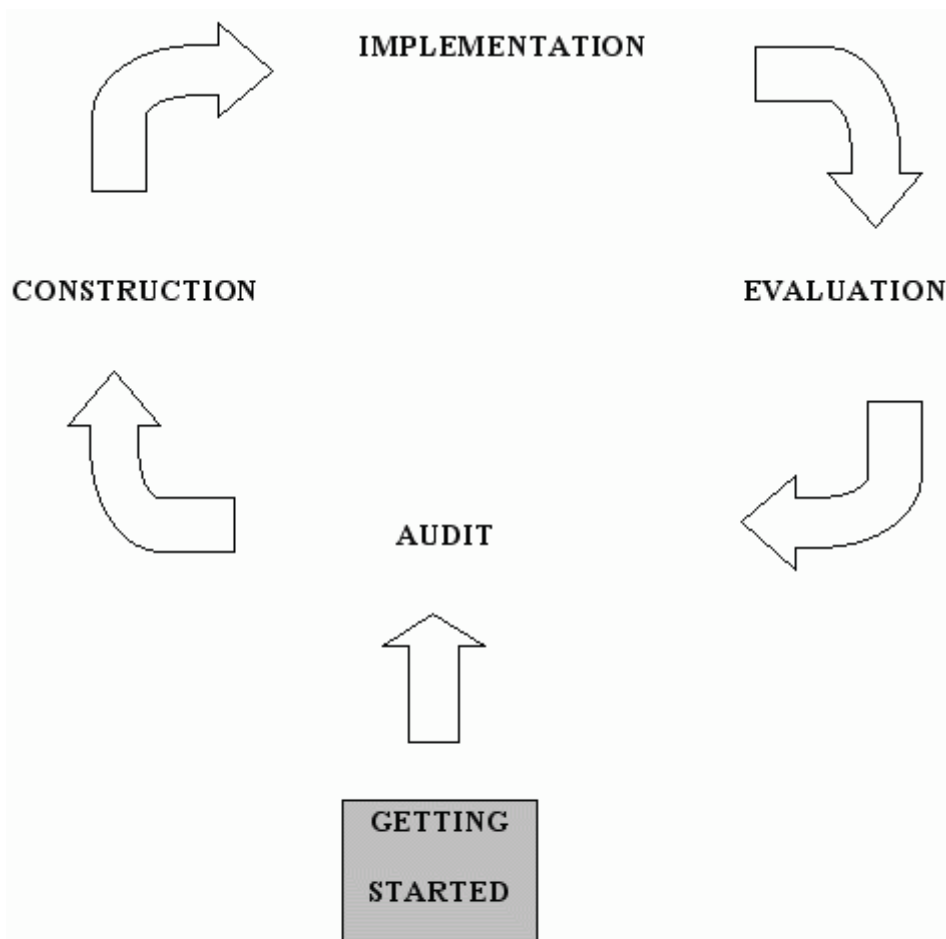
#### The Head Teachers

Head teachers should realize that they are not only responsible for the implementation of the Ministry's policies and decisions, but they are also responsible for their staff's professional development and growth. But as Savvides, Stylianides and Tsiakkiros (2002) conclude, the problematic selection procedures for head teachers, and the inadequacies of their training, often mean that not all head teachers are, in fact, able to manage the school effectively. To this end, head teachers must have the necessary training prior to their promotion, so as to be able to respond to their multiple duties and responsibilities.

Bredeson and Johansson (2000) identified four ways in which head teachers have the opportunity to exercise a substantial impact on teacher learning. These include: (1) the head teacher as an instructional leader and learner, (2) the creation of an environment conducive to learning, (3) direct involvement in the design, delivery, and content of professional development; and (4) the assessment of professional development outcomes.

Therefore, in training programs head teachers must learn how to model effective instructional strategies, how to coach their staff in using a wide variety of instructional techniques, and how to model being lifelong learners. They need to learn the characteristics of environments conducive to learning, how to create such an environment within the school as a whole, and how to help teachers do so within their individual classrooms. They need to learn how to take responsibility for establishing professional development opportunities that provide content important for their teachers and students, and they need training in how to develop and implement effective appraisal systems for their teachers individually and for their school as a whole.

One of the headteachers' first priorities should be the introduction of a school development plan that improves the quality of teaching and learning in schools. The four main processes of development planning are audit, construction, implementation, and evaluation, and a circular course is followed as shown in Figure 2. Hargreaves and Hopkins (1994) refer to the main benefits of development planning by suggesting that "it offers a means of managing rapid and substantial change... it allows the school to focus on its fundamental aims concerned with teaching and learning... [it] is really about school and classroom improvement" (p. 7).



**Figure 2. The development planning cycle**

*Source: Hargreaves & Hopkins (1994, p. 5)*

Head teachers should ask for the opinions of the staff on those issues in which they have a personal stake and expertise. In the first place, teachers need to participate in the process, since the results of any decisions made will affect them directly. In the second place, their contributions can be useful since they have first-hand knowledge of the students and classroom realities (Bridges, 1967). In this way, teachers feel that they are involved in the life of the school, and take an active part in the process of decision-making. In addition, head teachers should promote staff development, which is one of the most important elements of continuous development. In order to be able to do so, head teachers need training themselves on how to involve teachers in decision-making, and how to motivate them to engage in professional development. Head teachers should be trained in all the related areas that involve continuous development prior to their promotion.

Moreover, head teachers should create a climate in which learning and training are essential ingredients of school life for both students and teachers, and should create a total school environment that is conducive to learning. They can involve teachers in school management, and try to meet their needs and career aspirations through instructing, coaching and counseling. Head teachers should organize staff meetings and run them efficiently, modeling effective pedagogy in the process, and should provide time at these meetings during which teachers can present and discuss issues of their own choice, sharing and reflecting on their experiences with other colleagues. Additionally, head teachers of neighboring schools can organize common staff meetings to discuss matters of mutual concern and suggest ways of handling them effectively. Head teachers can also motivate and encourage the staff by frequently discussing various issues that concern teachers, not only during staff meetings, but also during breaks or common

off-hours. On the other hand, they should recognize and respect the fact that teachers have their own sense of professional responsibility and autonomy by providing a relevant flexibility in organizing their teaching.

One last thing point to be mentioned is that head teachers can organize school-based seminars with the cooperation of the Pedagogical Institute and the inspector of the school. The basic aim of these seminars is to provide help in solving a particular problem of the school unit and contributing to its staff development (Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus, 2005). Although the Institute is willing to offer its services as far as in-service training is concerned, head teachers do not often ask for its assistance, mainly because they are not aware of the programs offered. In sum, it is clear that the role of head teachers in promoting the continuous improvement of the school is vital, since they are the ones who will give the desirable impetus and set a model for the teachers to follow.

#### The teachers

Each individual has an important role to play in the development of any organization in which he/she is a member and everybody should act bearing this principle in mind. The teachers' contribution to continuous development depends, to a large degree, upon the Ministry's general policy. If the employer gives them the opportunities and facilities to develop, then there is a great probability that the staff will respond positively. However, if there is not a political will to promote the concept, then the results will not be encouraging no matter how hard the teachers try.

Teachers need to be open-minded, reflect on their teaching, and search for opportunities that will lead to constant growth if they want to cope effectively with the difficulties of the profession. They should have in mind that their participation in continuing professional development programs could raise student achievement (Flecknoe, 2000), and that their own further education and training broadens their horizons and helps them improve their abilities and skills. Teachers should be encouraged to try new approaches and techniques in teaching and share/exchange ideas with other colleagues who are also committed to this process.

Teachers should also be encouraged and facilitated to take active steps to promote their own continuous development. For example, they can manage their own professional development by compiling a personal development profile that is an important part of the continuous development process. Such a plan, according to Day (1993a), will enable teachers to interact with their school's management plan, and provide them with opportunities to identify areas of need or development that might otherwise remain unrecognized and unfulfilled. They can also keep a teaching log/journal in which they will regularly make entries on issues on which they have reflected critically or about situations they have experienced; for example, in trying new teaching ideas or trying specific strategies with particular students.

Within this spirit, teachers can be encouraged to, and provided the time to, establish critical friendships with key colleagues. Moreover, they should be encouraged to exchange information and ideas about their personal development plans and from their teaching logs or journals. This link provides support and challenge, since individuals can share ideas, perceptions, and understandings through a mutual disclosure of feelings, hopes and fears. Equally important is the process of mentoring, which is considered a vital aspect of any sustained drive towards the creation of learning communities in schools (Holden, 2002). To achieve this goal, newly qualified teachers need an experienced and skillful colleague to stand by their side and help them at the beginning of their careers.

The concept of continuous professional development can and should be applied to the entire educational system. It would be wrong to suggest that the approach of continuous development evolves, and can be applied without problems. We should always have in mind that it is a lifelong process and will require a great deal of effort to overcome the difficulties – including resistance – of its implementation. The key issue is that the Ministry of Education and Culture should invest in its human resources and should demonstrate its belief in its people by beginning the process of initiating continuous professional development programmes at all levels within the educational system. In this way, it is more likely that the efficiency of the CES will be ensured, and employers and employees will grow, since every one's role is equally significant.

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### **Conclusion**

We have considered the main issues of the concept of continuous development, and suggested a plan that can be adopted for the Cyprus Educational System. Within the range of this article we discussed some of the most important areas of the topic, and examined the professional development of teachers from a different perspective.

It is obvious that the ideas and initiatives presented in the previous sections, are concerned with the management of change. Kotter and Schlesinger (1991) claim that change usually brings some form of human resistance. They suggest that one way to overcome this resistance is to educate people beforehand, and try to avoid the two most common mistakes managers make. These are 1) to use only one approach or a limited set of approaches, regardless of the situation, and 2) to approach change in an incoherent way that is not a part of a clearly planned strategy. When these ideas are recognized, it is believed that the challenges such a reform practice generates will be faced, and the success of continuous professional development will be ensured to a large extent.

The introduction of such an approach is undoubtedly necessary for meeting the demanding challenges of our society and responding to the radical changes that occur in the educational system. Investing in people, and providing them with the necessary resources to cope with the problems they face, is the most effective way of improving the performance of any organization or institution, including schools. We would definitely agree with Hargreaves (1992) who states that "developing the teacher, therefore, also involves developing the person, developing the life" (p. 233). For this reason, teachers should actively get involved in their own growth and that of their schools.

In conclusion, the way of continuous development is long. What is required is the will of all stakeholders to contribute to the process, and make it happen for the common benefit. When teachers and educators are involved in lifelong learning, they provide a good role model for children, and may instill in them a desire to also participate in learning throughout their lives. Continuous development should be regarded as a path that ensures competency and prosperity in organizations. Official authorities, head teachers and teachers should follow this path, since the child to be educated should be their prime concern and at the center of their efforts.

Based on the above, any future educational reform program should invite dialogue among all interested parties, with a view to turning into reality the vision of a better and more modern educational system that would meet teachers' future needs and challenges for their continuous professional development.

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