



**PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN ORGANIZING STUDENTS' ACTIVITIES  
OF TEACHING LATIN AMERICAN LITERATURE  
IN HCMC UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION – LINGUISTICS  
AND LITERATURE DEPARTMENT\***

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**ABSTRACT**

*Modern life and society demand that education must improve regularly and continuously. In the context of teacher-centered and student-centered models of education gradually reveal many shortcomings, the orientation of professional learning is born to take students' result as center; the role of teachers, learners and curriculum, thereby, are considered carefully again. This article presents the concept of professional learning in a broad sense which includes three of those components through the task of organizing activities in the Latin American Literature class. On that base, a number of ideas for training and improving teacher are presented and discussed.*

**Keywords:** professional learning, pedagogical lecturer, organizing activity, Latin American Literature.

**TÓM TẮT**

***Định hướng Dạy học chuyên nghiệp trong Tổ chức hoạt động dạy học Văn học Mĩ Latin ở Khoa Ngữ văn – Trường Đại học Sư phạm Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh***

*Xã hội và đời sống hiện đại đòi hỏi giáo dục phải đổi mới thường xuyên và liên tục. Trong hoàn cảnh mô hình giáo dục lấy người thầy hay lấy học trò làm trung tâm dần thể hiện nhiều khiếm khuyết, định hướng dạy học chuyên nghiệp ra đời dùng kết quả của học trò làm trung tâm, thông qua đó điều chỉnh nhận thức về giáo viên, học viên và chương trình giáo dục. Bài viết này, trình bày khái niệm dạy học chuyên nghiệp theo nghĩa rộng bao hàm cả ba thành phần nêu trên thông qua nhiệm vụ tổ chức hoạt động trong lớp học Văn học Mĩ Latin tại Khoa Ngữ văn – Trường Đại học Sư phạm TPHCM. Trên cơ sở đó, một vài ý tưởng đào tạo và bồi dưỡng giảng viên sư phạm được trình bày và thảo luận.*

**Từ khóa:** dạy học chuyên nghiệp, giảng viên sư phạm, tổ chức hoạt động, Văn học Mĩ Latin.

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Once upon a time, in the Andalusia region of southern Spain, there was a boy named Santiago, who dreamed of a big treasure in the Pyramids. Under the guidance of Melquiades, the king of Salem and the alchemist, he realizes that the most important treasure is "The Legend of Self." Finally he has love, finds out the treasure and understands the soul of universe. Through the journey with the boy, alchemist also successfully turns stone into gold. That is what told in *Alchemist* written by Paulo Coelho. And that's Latin American Literature, which will be discussed in terms of professional learning.

Considering the novel of *Alchemist* from an educational viewpoint, it is easy for the reader to recognize that Santiago is one of the most comprehensive students. Appearing under many names, functions such as challenging, guiding, cheering, Melquiades and alchemist play a common role that is teaching. Melquiades does not go along, solving all of Santiago's problems but uses educational means to help him: the Urim and Thummim stones. Santiago can use them to make decisions but his question must be clear; there must be answers to choose from. The alchemist gives Santiago method but shepherd himself has to practice it directly to understand the universal soul. It should remember that both Melquiades and alchemists learn a lot from Santiago, not only his dream, his youth but also his effort, his will and they must continue to perfect their own Self Legend for total development. There are many implications of professional learning in this novel on the principle that professional learning should involve both teacher and learner.

### **1. Professional learning (PL) and organizing student activities**

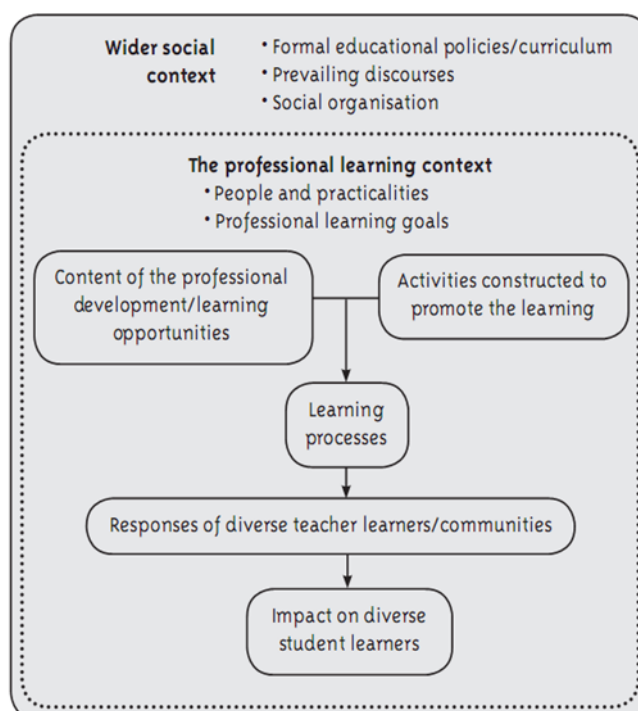
The teacher-centered education model, in which students play the role of satellites, has being revealed many problems; so does the tendency of student-centered. Educators are anxious that they cannot let students play a central role, or at least it is necessary to distinguish central roles in theory or practice. Student is only possible to be the center of practice. Offering the issue of Professional Learning with Latin American Literature, this article introduces a solution that regulates teaching and learning, creates a new energy and a valuable opportunity for modern teaching.

Professional learning is introduced by Western educators, most notably in Australia and the UK, and offers a number of measures to enhance student achievement:

*(PL) This refers to the formal or informal learning experiences undertaken by teachers and school leaders that improve their individual professional practice, and a school's collective effectiveness, as measured by improved student learning, engagement with learning and wellbeing (AITSL, 5).*

In this situation, professional learning asks for the development of teacher, this purpose is quantified through the student's development goals expressed in the learning outcomes. The result should be demonstrated by professional development reflected not only in the orientations, policies, educational facilities but also in each teaching activity, in the themes. In other words, it means the regularity, problematic nature in teaching

activities. Therefore the most specific mission of the teacher is to set and solve the problems arising in teaching process rather than any directions, principles... The teaching task of teacher as well as results of the students must necessarily solve problems such as the inability to express the smooth flow of ideas from students, the ability to write effectively, to make the point clear; teaching only attracts a small proportion of students among many kinds of intelligence (knowledge, action, etc.); teaching has not created enough motivation and attraction for student. These should be reflected directly in the context of modern professional learning. It is possible to visualize this process through the next model.



**Figure 1.** Framework for analyzing the effectiveness of professional learning experiences. (Helen Timperley 2007, xv)

Therefore, the wider social context through education policy, powerful discourses, social organizations, etc. influences the formation of professional learning context (people and practicalities, the goal of professional learning). Then learning processes are impacted by two resources: the content of professional development / professional learning opportunities and structured activities to accelerate learning process. The result of learning process is feedback, which come from the teacher/student community, have a profound impact on the learner.

Helen Timperley (Helen Timperley 2007, 29) makes a list of particular forms for professional learning as below:

Activities constructed to promote learning
Professional development / professional learning activities designed to develop and deepen professional understandings and skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• listening;</li> <li>• watching;</li> <li>• being observed and receiving feedback;</li> <li>• receiving student activities and materials;</li> <li>• engaging with professional readings;</li> <li>• discussing practice with someone more expert;</li> <li>• authentic experience of subject in action;</li> <li>• discussing own theories of practice and their implications;</li> <li>• examining student understandings and outcomes;</li> <li>• analysis of current practice and reconstruction of new practice;</li> <li>• discussing self or mutually identified issues.</li> </ul>

*Figure 2. Professional learning activities mapped onto the framework*

Professional learning/development, as in the November 2017 conference in NTTU, is classified into 3 parts focusing on 3 separate objects:

*Table 1. Professional learning/development classified*

Professional learning	Professional development	Vocational pedagogies
Student focus	Teacher focus	Curriculum focus

Although much discussed, the concept covering these three areas is still not consistent. In spite of being appropriate in meaning, "Professional Education" has a too wide meaning to meet demand. In that context, it is proposed using "Professional Learning" to refer to the development of these three aspects (teacher, learner and program), aim to improve the learning outcomes of students. In its most general sense, "Learning" should include learner and teacher. Actually, in the process of working, teachers not only teach but also learn a lot from students. Perhaps, that is the reason why Helen Timperley gives a very broad definition for Learning:

*A learning is when you have a 'can't', then you learn you can.* (Helen Timperley 2007, xv).

So do AITSL's definition which must devote a part to express such a broad meaning of "learning": *Where the report refers to 'learnings', this means the knowledge, skills and ability acquired through the professional learning that will be translated into practice* (AITSL, 5)

In that sense, "Professional Learning" is understood as professional education covering both instructor and learner through participation in curriculum. Professional learning is an educational orientation that integrates both theory and practice, pedagogical

knowledge with information evaluating; student learning methods; the relationship between teaching and learning, students and lecturers, etc. All of these factors affect the content and methodology of teaching in the classroom; at the same time they bring assessment tasks into teaching, learning and self-regulation. Professional learning, thus, should be the first step towards a far more fruitful outcome for the teacher to develop themselves. In comparison, the situation in Vietnam is not only similar but also worse than in America: *In most countries (in Europe – NTT), about 15 to 20 hours per week is spent on tasks related to teaching, such as preparing lessons, marking papers, meeting with students and parents, and working with colleagues. By contrast, U.S. teachers generally have from 3 to 5 hours a week for lesson planning, which is done independently.* (Linda Darling – Hammond, Ruth Chung Wei, 15). In the fact of Vietnam, this idea is not new, but it has not been aware fully in the sense of focusing on teacher in the process of observing between educated pedagogical people and practitioners who are self-training new knowledge in professional work. In other words, this is the process that Vietnam often calls vocational training, i.e. distance from theory to reality. In addition, professional learning is the process of developing and solving problems, it depends on a teacher's knowledge, ability and beliefs to decide what is important, how to learn, etc. to satisfy program outcome standard.

Professional learning is influenced by the environment, school culture and teachers contacts. In our case, the pedagogical environment (HCMC UE) prescribes many factors associated with the future career of the student, so teaching is not limited to knowledge but also expend to class management skills and teacher must keep learning to improve. In other words, the requirement focuses on student's output in each classroom activity which can train them all necessary skills such as: target identification, communication, decision making, problem solving, group working, critical listening, dynamic convincing conviction, self-studying, writing, presenting on board, etc. However, the teacher must look at the relationship of these skills and adjust the activities in accordance with target.

In short, professional learning is not just the learning of the teacher through colleagues but also the students, especially in the classroom activities. As Melquiades and alchemist learn a lot from Santiago; teachers, who organize activities, interact with students, can refresh themselves with the energy of creativity, open minds and the youth of students.

## **2. Student's activities in Latin American Literature module**

There are a lot of difficulties to teaching Latin American Literature: it has been taught at the Department of Linguistics and Literature, Ho Chi Minh City University of Education since 2010 as a new subject without any basic materials. While other educational institutions in the North have only introduced Latin American Literature as a

small part of American literature; Can Tho, An Giang universities offer Latin American literature as an advanced subject to students. The University of Education in HCMC offers Latin America literature as a compulsory subject for non-pedagogical students and as a compulsory selective subject for pedagogical student. Thus, both pedagogical and non-pedagogical students need to satisfy outcome result to become good teachers and specialists in fields of society and culture. These results should at least involve communicating (asking question), presenting (expressing ideas) and researching (essay writing) etc.

The first point to be considered is communicating through interviewing and answering questions. Asking questions is a change of role to increase students' activeness in learning process, instead of listening and taking note, each student must answer questions posed by their classmates and teacher. Knowledge formed through specific contexts, exchanges and corrections is more valuable than passive acceptance.

Painting is a supportive activity that attracts the interest and excitement of many students in the class. For example, Latin American Literature students, after learning about three characteristics of Latin American literature, will form teams and have 15 minutes to draw brief, lively maps, pictures. The knowledge is deeply engraved for the second time via the visual channel. Over time, teachers will show those pictures on the board, each group will briefly present their own idea within 1 minute; this is the third time students apply knowledge to present in front of the class. Here are two typical pictures drawn by Course 41 students with the above requirements:



*Picture 1-2. Characteristics of Latin American literature*

Through these two paintings, Latin American literature characters are shown clearly. There are strong connection between past and present perceptions, deep impressions of European culture and the ability to mix reality and magic. This activity attracted students so much that they posted their photos on face book and achieved a huge amount of likes

because it requires a good mix of skills: movement, image, color, etc. Besides, it simultaneously created direct, specific products for observation and evaluation.

In conventional presentations with power point, there is usually a student standing in front of the class, trying to explain, rereading all the content shown on the board. This method has the disadvantage that only one student participates, often causing distraction in audiences because the reading speed is higher than listeners ability to follow. However, being asked to create new forms of presentation, Latin American literature students bring the content of the lesson through plays, game shows. Here are some pictures of student's performance.



*Picture 3-4. Presenting Latin American literature lecture*

It is a fact that scientific researching is difficult to convey in classroom. However, with the characteristics of a new subject, we set up writing activities at school hours combined with a specific content taught by the lecturer and ask students to complete their own paragraph and essay. The editing experience is always the most anticipated part of the class. Many students claim that they are interested in writing scientific papers but do not know how to do it. But, after a Latin American literature study with the example of giving comment on sexual discourse in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (Marquez), they can apply this method to all subjects. Teachers themselves also get new and creative thinking through students' writing.

Writing activity is a four-step process; with sexual discourse in *Hundred Years of Solitude*, first of all, students freely find details related to sex; students then find the details that satisfy teacher's requirements, i.e. the searching activity is oriented; next, teachers and students discuss to classify details into points, topic and find out their relationships; finally, student chooses a thesis and write down a paragraph with structure offered by teacher.

Through and after reading and commenting on students' essays, we share scientific papers with students and receive back some interesting new points. Typically, students



comment on love that women loves by their ears (female characters are influenced by speech) and men love with eyes (they are impressed by woman's appearance). For example, in returning, "*Jose Arcadio looked at her body with shameless attention and said to her: 'You are a woman, litter sister.' Rebecca lost control of herself...*" (G.G.Marquez, 96). In addition, teacher ourselves, learn from students who are bhikkhuni (Buddhist nuns) another view on Latin American sexuality, Magical Realism from Buddhist perspective with some notions such as: Twelve Causes and Conditions (dvadasanga-pratityasamutpada), Theory of Consciousness (vijñāptimātratā), etc. They inspired us to write the article of Magical Realism in some Latin American novels viewed from Buddhist theory of Sunyata (Emptiness). Finally, even though being a young teacher, we recognize that there is a generation gap with students: In our school years, it was not easy to discuss sexuality without metaphor. With our student, it is not necessary to mention sex in literature indirectly. Students nowadays are closer to the modern and liberal spirit of Latin American Literature than our generation. The learning issue carried on by writing activity is two-way process and this is the real meaning of professional learning.

In addition to classroom activities, students are also required to perform small tasks related to the subject such as interviewing, making clips, etc. The Course 41 students group has conducted an interview on Latin American Literature for the students of Social Sciences and Humanities University on April 9, 2016. The results are that students whose major is Literature are familiar with One Hundred Years of Solitude (Marquez) while other students have heard The Alchemists (Paulo Coelho) more. It means that student (except of HCMCUE) is strange with Latin American Literature. This is a valuable result in the process of adjusting the content of not only teaching but also researching in the future. (specific content can be tracked at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=60Ru8rMBZAs>). Introducing a clip for 2-3 minutes of Hundred Years of Solitude accelerates the process of reading book and stimulates the application of information technology into learning and accessing to literary works; especially, students have a product from direct learning activity and it allows for long-term interaction. Such clips can be referenced at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lsJ7paqgvLY;>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2n08LAWQWY;](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2n08LAWQWY) ...

### **3. Self-assessment of organizing student's activity**

Learning must be associated with assessment; professional learning also requires a suitable kind of assessing, which is not in the score or certificate but in the cognitive, in self-evaluating. In evaluating the American Latin Literature curriculum with professional learning criteria, we used the New York City DOE Criteria for Professional Learning (Carmen Farina, Phil Weinberg, 8) which leads to some results as follows:



Criteria for Effective Professional Learning	Self-evaluate	
	Yes	No
1. purposeful	V	
2. evaluated and tied to educator and student outcomes	V	
3. data-driven and research-based	V	
4. relevant to participants and the current educational landscape	V	
5. provided in a safe environment for learning and risk-taking	V	
6. collaborative		V
7. experiential	V	
8. differentiated and addresses varying adult learning needs	V	
9. ongoing and sustainable with opportunities for reflection	V	
10. supported through dedicated time, resources, and structure		V

**Figure 3.** New York City DOE Criteria for Professional Learning

Through above result, we recognize that, on the principle of professional learning, Latin American literature has achieved a majority of the criteria according to Hassel. It demonstrates the advantage of professional learning that is ability to apply many new teaching methods such as constructive teaching, integrated teaching, etc. However, in order to effectively apply this orientation in training teacher, it should deal with these following issues:

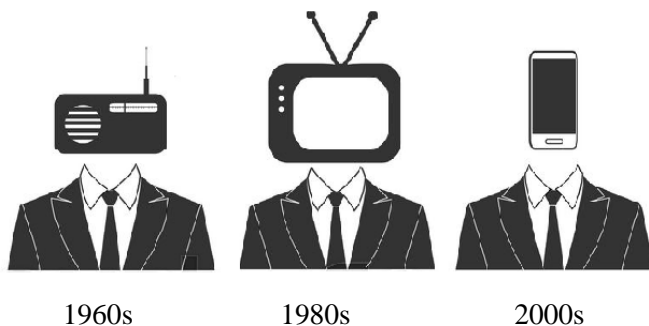
Firstly, it should concern that the principle of professional learning seems more appropriate for young instructors than older teachers in at least these five areas: knowledge, assessment, goals, styles, and methods. Handling with the result of G. Stanley Hall's survey, Helen M. Downey gave some conclusions and suggestions in a 26-page article published in the Pedagogical Seminary in June 1919, which was later abstracted and published in the journal of Pedagogy. Although these points are nearly 100 years old, their value is still worth considering. We briefly outline the main points through the following comparison table:

**Table 2.** Comparing young teachers and older teachers

	Young teachers	Old teachers
Knowledge	Bring things that make them interested into classroom	Having some care which shows itself and influences the schoolroom
	Becoming enthusiastic over some idea and strive to carry it out whether	Considering and doing it only when they are sure of it's good.

	conditions are favorable to it or not	
Evaluating	Judging from outside appear	Searching the matter out and forces no conclusions until they are certain of the causes of an act.
Target	Emphasizing on bringing students to the standard given by high effort	Little effort but good orientation through the knowledge of life, out of books
Style	Being careful of appearance, bright and entertaining, rules by love and kindness rather than by harsh treatment. They are nearer the age of the child itself and can enter into the plays and can more easily see things from the child's standpoint.	Being endowed, exclusively, with purpose and intelligence, to plan interesting work, with more knowledge of subject matter, conservativeness, stability, and ability to inspire respect and confidence; the negative qualities possessed by this group only are designated as setness in opinion, fixedness in method, resentment of suggestions for improvement, personal unattractiveness, and peculiarity of dress and manner.
	Being not so likely to take into consideration individual characters	
	Freely action	Mental stability
	Easily losing their tempers and become nervous at little thing; have sudden sympathy, sometimes severe, or vice versa; they are full of emotional, compassionate rather than disciplined	Good control, experience; use only a unified rule or law, but they cannot create new interest in students.
	Often being nervous because of uncertainty about the power to maintain order.	Having self-assurance and consequently are not inclined to be nervous.
Method	Enjoying more fun but not always	Focusing on knowledge, eliminating intermediaries
	Having ambition, dynamic, easily apply the new but it is not stable	The purpose is modest, it is near to a method drawn from practical experience which is in accordance with the individual and personal; tends to be stable, conservative with traditions and habits.

Nowadays, in the context of professional learning, young lecturer, nowadays, plays the role of not only a witness but also a link in the shift of paradigm, thinking and working



Picture 5. Images of teacher through time

in the past 80 years. Technology is changing the life; putting objects into the process of scientific and technical development; professional learning requires lecturer to be represented by smart phones, while the young teacher is as a TV and the older teacher is a radio. Radio gives listener a great

deal of knowledge, no matter how big and small, what the color is, etc. However, its voice must sound good; so the voice of trainer becomes a tremendous big advantage despite the appearance. As a result, radio programs are well planned and prepared; this is what young lecturers need to learn. However, listening is the only channel to get; although it is possible to choose, the wave detecting is not always easy, therefore listeners only fix some channels as frequency; the style of lecturer is so rarely changed. Television adds visual channels, seeing is believing; viewers can exercise, dance through some corresponding programs. Because of being watched, the shape of the television is constantly being renewed. Broadcasting channel changing is easy, so there is the fact that people often change channels, this is also a problem of teaching. With a smartphone, it is not only audiovisual but also interactive; the whole world opens to connect and impact on reality; users take advantage of the utility to solve all problems. Requirements of professional learning set for young instructors are also new and practical like that. So, while being able to handle quite well problems of young lecturers, professional learning is quite not very compatible with the older generation of trainers; this is an important feature to note in training teacher.

Secondly, the prevalence of some organization forms operating on the principle of professional learning takes time to rise. In the workshop on *Exploring pedagogies for professional learning across international contexts* held by the British Council and Birmingham City University (Nov 08, 2017 at Nguyen Tat Thanh University, HCMC), after reporting this article, we received a respond from Birmingham City lecturer that whether this form of teaching is popular in Vietnamese universities or not. We think that the organization of teaching activities is not new but the important issue here is the way to organize. With a clear direction of teaching and learning; ability to invest, to work on a lesson, and a desire to turn a lecture into an opportunity for students to improve their own academic performance, although these above contents have not been applied widely, in the near future, many experts and lecturers will meet in the spirit of professional learning.

Thirdly, the notion of organizing, doing research on professional educating should be continuously made clear. Through the workshop mentioned above, we recognize that there is a notable difference in theoretical concepts, assessment tools, and normative models between Vietnamese and Western education specialists reflected in reports and questions for speakers. In contrast, educators from the UK tend to turn the presentation into shared opportunities for experience, reflection and insoluble issues. For example, Ilana Pressick (Birmingham City University) was asked by a Vietnamese education expert about the origins of the concept of professional learning and what tools could be applied in the field of co-operative observation. The UK scientist informed that every activity of the lecturers in the class always includes the principle of professional learning. In working, teacher does not try to force students into specific frameworks, however, they can solve problems, sometimes, in the most irregular ways and that is the spirit of professional learning. This is a remarkable point to consider for the future research and pedagogical work.

In addition to, there are some issues remained unresolved, such as poor teamwork management, suitable facility in professional learning. Particularly, due to the special characteristics of new subjects, there are no textbook of Latin American Literature; the system of quantitative criteria and operation guidelines is also lacking. Exchanging with colleagues must have been opened to teaching but is limited to the professional content. Working with students is bound to essay and feedback, group work is not really fully concerned.

In summary, professional learning should not be limited to the learning of teachers in collaborative work, but should extend to the classroom activities with students. Through specific teaching activities, teachers need to constantly improve their professional skills so that they can deliver lectures, organize best practices, etc. Moreover, working with students is also the process of training and learning for lecturer about knowledge, skills and attitudes, etc. These two parts (learner, teacher) combine with a well-organized curriculum will make the concept of professional learning perfect. In the context of national and international education reform, professional learning can share many perspectives and exchanges from educators to find and ensure the best results of students. It is a process that requires a lot of effort and will to train high quality teachers.

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