THE HANDBOOK OF LEADERSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

EDITED BY
CAROL A. MULLEN

The Handbook of Leadership and Professional Learning Communities

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With fondness and appreciation, I have dedicated this book to W. Brad Johnson, Professor of Psychology at the United States Naval Academy and Faculty Associate at John Hopkins University. It is striking that although we've never actually met, he is one of my closest colleagues. Brad is a very talented and generous person whose first thoughts are always about the well-being of others. A pioneer in the mentoring field, he has published numerous books for faculty and students that include *On Being a Mentor: A Guide for Higher Education Faculty, Getting Mentored in Graduate School, The Elements of Mentoring, The Elements of Ethics*, and *Write to the Top! How to Become a Prolific Academic*—the one we did together. Given his prolific and practical scholarship in the area of mentoring it's no surprise that I am one of the lucky beneficiaries of his expertise and wisdom.

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Preface

Collaborating as learners and leaders within new and evolving communities of practice geared toward desirable change is the focus of *The Handbook of Leadership and Professional Learning Communities*. Regrettably, many of us work alone these days, even though education is a highly interactive field. But "the demands on teachers to learn, unlearn, and relearn, more and more require that the model of the isolated teacher be set aside" (Klein, 2008, p. 95). Such social networks as professional learning communities (PLCs) offer an invaluable source of human capital that leaders utilize when building coalitions of support or maintaining a position where they face conflict (English, 2008). A major goal of a democratic leadership is to foster learning communities that are relational, interactive, and mutually constructed (English, 2008) and have egalitarian and humanistic aims. Networks that support professional communities of collaborative inquiry and reflective practice yield benefits with respect to informational flow, reciprocal learning and bonding, collective action, and identity formation and solidarity. Notably, the "I" mentality and identity of those who belong transforms into a "we" mentality and identity (President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2007). On a cautionary note, social justice proponents know all too well that the "we" mentality is dangerous if it perpetuates the status quo, subverts individual identity differences, or worsens the ills of society.

Clearly, along with other widespread and growing societal problems, such as poverty and obesity, social isolation has reached an epidemic proportion. As the once American staple—communities and teams—lost potency, educators hunkered down, taking to private corners of the world. Because schools and universities show signs of psychological insulation, it is more of a feat than it should be to build organizational capacity through connections and partnerships with outsiders. Professional isolation is a daunting challenge that beginning teachers, especially, continue to face, and it is a primary reason they give for leaving the profession. Many work alone in physically isolated classrooms where the support of potential teammates (e.g., veteran teachers, administrators, support staff) is simply unavailable to them. Such attitudes permeate the conditions of school as a workplace and the culture of the teaching profession more generally (Gordon & Maxey, 2000). In *Bowling Alone*, political scientist Richard Putnam (2000) describes how profoundly Americans feel disconnected from our social structures and from one another. Significant changes in society that span changing generational values, the virtual world, suburban sprawl and more have adversely affected the catalytic role of community in bringing people together for shared purposes. When we "bowl"/work alone, we cut ourselves off from social interaction and consequently

limit our capacity as change agents. In contrast, our ability to make a difference grows exponentially when we function as part of a social network.

The concept of community has, arguably, disintegrated over time, and yet reinvigoration has occurred in the educational literature and sporadically in some institutions. The metaphor of schools and universities as organizations is limiting, even stifling; a structural frame of reference that is not bolstered by a human frame of reference can dissolve into isolating people, and their disciplines and work, from one another. In contrast, the metaphor of community underscores value for social progress through networking, interacting, and bonding. We have community-minded scholar Thomas Sergiovanni (1992) to thank for encouraging this "paradigm" shift in our thinking. He convincingly argued that "organization" is a counterproductive way to think about the places in which we educate and seek democratically shared spaces in which to grow and learn. Thus it is incumbent upon us to revisit how we think about education; how we interact as leaders, educators, and learners; and the structures and processes we create for this purpose. In the worldview we present herein, relationships and community, supported by developed and evolving structures, are brought to the fore. We put a human face on the places where professional educators rise to the occasion of "bowling"/collaborating together. At the center of democratic practice, then, are people, relationships, and community, facilitators of which are structures, policies, and shared understandings, as well as collaborative approaches that support individuals' growth as democratic, caring leaders (Sergiovanni, 2000).

Given the climate of professional isolation, reaching out becomes an act of resistance. By engaging in meaningful ways with our colleagues, students, and constituents, we influence the basic principles of how we organize for teaching and learning within our educational institutions. Working to change emotional and physical experiences of seclusion through vibrant communities of practice supported by learning organizations, educators and leaders further what is known about effective schooling practices and the systems in which these occur. By doing so, they enact what Sergiovanni has coined a "smart school" (as cited in Mullen, 2009). The idea that places, like people, can be thought of not only as "learners" but rather as "smart learners" squarely puts community-based organization and action at the center of democratic schooling. We share this bias as contributors to this book. Toward this end, we discuss the "smart" ways that leaders and activists have organized themselves for "moving knowledge into practice" as learners and leaders for the purpose of educating themselves and others, primarily students (Schweitzer, Howard, & Doran, 2008, p. 50).

The escalated pressures of the "quick-fix" accountability push across the United States have greatly changed the complexion of schooling. Unfortunately, educational leaders are often so inundated with survival (in such pressing forms as high-stakes testing, teacher attrition, and daily responsibilities) that they see community and team building as a luxury. Obviously, being transfixed in a survival mode is not a "smart" leadership orientation. Democratic leaders free themselves of the survivalist mindset—they establish the conditions for transforming their workplaces into vital communities of learning wherein members feel motivated to make a difference. They consciously work with others to develop the structures that promote human synergy and partnership, and that sustain the momentum for revitalization in their buildings. As we demonstrate herein, democratic leaders see success not as that which can be measured but rather as an indicator of transformational learning through which the capacity of their organizations and its members are expanded, and in ways commensurate with liberatory and nondiscriminatory practices.

The authors further the educational conversation about community building among different professional groups and within highly varied contexts replete with competing worldviews. Some adopt advocacy stances relative to the learning community initiative, others critical and balanced stances, and collectively we address relevant organizational, democratic, and leadership issues. The conceptual frameworks we illustrate in practice "interrogate" the plight of professional isolation and learning by trial. We want the fragmented, dysfunctional state of American public schools to be mended and for inequities along socioeconomic, race, and class lines to be resolved (Kincheloe, 1999). Although school reform is in its infancy, we are hopeful that our living examples of democratic community will inspire collective learning and organizational change. We look forward to learning from our readers about their own experiences with social networks and the enrichment that comes from knowledge-sharing.

Carol A. Mullen

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CHAPTER 1

Introducing Collaborative Communities With Edge and Vitality

Carol A. Mullen

Professional learning communities (PLCs) are rapidly gaining momentum in schools and school districts. Based on widespread and multifarious policies, implementations, and examples that have sprung up across North America, the PLC idea is certainly a timely subject for investigation. We believe that this potent strategy for educational change, and specifically school improvement, shows promise of becoming "contagious." Persons at all levels of the educational system concerned about school improvement have an invested interest in this staff development model. Stakeholder groups include state department personnel, intermediate service agency staff, district and campus administrators, teacher-leaders, parents, local school community members, university scholars, clinical faculty members, and higher-education administrators. In fact, the development of PLCs is "currently in vogue" as a vehicle for school-wide change and improvement (Dufour, 2004, p. 6) and is becoming more aligned with student learning and achievement (Mullen & Hutinger, 2008; Murphy & Lick, 2005). The concept of a learning community is a commonplace idea, and the PLC is fast approaching on its heels. In fact, the concept has become so popular that the PLC initiative has probably become something of an educational movement—it will likely reach a "tipping point" where an idea "sticks," culturally speaking, and has staying power (Gladwell, 2002).

The tipping point is a sociological concept referring to when something unusual or rare, such as Internet use or population patterns, suddenly becomes common. In Gladwell's (2002) *Tipping Point*, "stickiness" happens when people find ideas (or products) compelling, causing them to catch on and grow exponentially. A comparable vision for PLC models is for them to generate excitement and endure within the schooling culture in which they are initiated, thereby having a lasting impact on the people and their workplaces. Change can happen slowly and expectedly or quickly and unexpectedly, but the tipping point is a dramatic and rapid change process. In the case of the PLC, it would mean that through such processes as well-executed program structure and coordination—and especially shared leadership, stakeholder and partnership

buy-in, synergy, reinforcement, celebration, and recognition—desirable outcomes with respect to faculty collaboration, student learning, and organizational performance would suddenly spark, making a significant difference to the culture of schooling.

What Is a PLC?

A PLC is an integration of two traditionally distinct concepts—professional learning and community. In this model, the professional's expert knowledge and focus on student learning and needs are combined with the community's shared interests, core values, and mutual responsibility, but the PLC can be defined in different ways and from various perspectives.

Organizational Perspective

From an organizational perspective, a PLC is a reform initiative, a staff or professional development model, and an educational improvement strategy aimed at building the capacity of schools. (The concept can also be applied to the higher education setting, with contextual modifications, as is evident from the contributions to this book.) Viewed in organizational terms as a change model, the PLC is harnessed to promote campus-wide improvement, with student learning and achievement as the primary goal. Through his extensive work with school-based PLCs, Dufour (2004) has found that social networks are best operationalized when members work together, focus on learning, and hold themselves accountable to their vision and for results. Departments of education endorse this view; they see PLC development as a proven organizational strategy for promoting staff collaboration and reflection, with the goal of improving student achievement (e.g., The Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005).

Cultural Perspective

From a cultural perspective, the focus of PLCs is on transforming schools into communities and extending the classroom, pedagogy, and curriculum into the community to enhance learning for students and teaching for educators. The idea is also to simultaneously engage students, teachers, administrators, and other professional educators and groups, such as university faculty and community representatives, in learning (Hord, 1997). Democratic schools are "where the voices of teachers, practitioners, parents, and students are heard" (Jenlink, 2002, p. 30); they are active in decision making, support diversity and equality, and value creating and sustaining the community (Jenlink & Jenlink, 2006; Mullen & Johnson, 2006; Ringo, 2006). In such places, as Larson and Ovando (2001) attest, change agents commit themselves to dismantling "systems of racism, exclusion, and power" (p. 3) and resurrecting vital, dynamic communities of learning that are inclusive and self-monitoring.

Members of PLCs may join forces with culturally different institutions and agencies that share school improvement and societal change as a vision, and that can help build their capacity for change. Culturally responsive learning communities are compensatory in nature, meaning that the members strive to address the deficiency of culturally relevant practices in U.S. institutions and curriculum. By committing to continuous inquiry and improvement, these communities propel change; the professional educators within them honor such shared values as equitable schooling for all students, and

they confront and transform their biases. Such school teams may involve students and families in collaborative learning with teachers and school staff.

Generally, the following principles and values inform the work of a PLC (Danielson & McGreat, 2000; Levine & Shapiro, 2004; Mullen & Lick, 1999).

- A common impetus for change
- A shared vision and common goals regarding the need for universal design in the school
- The belief that all members of the school team are equal, which can lead to increased collaborative planning among staff to support the needs of special learners
- The commitment of all team members to actions that improve student achievement, with focused support for students with special needs
- An environment that encourages risk taking, where people are not afraid to comment and communicate their ideas for supporting students
- The recognition by staff that professional inquiry is crucial, including disciplined and facilitated access of research-supported teaching strategies
- Shared responsibility among staff members for students with special needs
- Planning for assessment reflected in a school-wide action plan with indicators for achievement of objectives, including systematic and ongoing support structures for students with special needs (The Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 54)

Leadership Perspective

From a leadership perspective, such communities are a welcome strategy for encouraging teacher leadership and the collaboration of school staff. PLCs enable shared governance and thus collegial power sharing among administrators and teachers and veteran and new teachers. K–12 teacher-leaders generate the conditions for turning schools into collaborative learning cultures by focusing their energy and time on grade-level teaching teams, schools, and entire school districts. Through such efforts, educators establish networks for exploring pedagogical issues, satisfy beginning teachers' expectations of community, foster multidisciplinary curricula, and bring community to schools and their neighborhoods. PLCs provide a channel for teacher leadership, dialogue, reflection, action, and promising practices, and they take such varied forms as school–university collaborations, faculty study groups, staff development, coaching/modeling/comentoring/walk-through models, action learning projects, and other collaborative strategies for change (Aubusson et al., 2007; Mullen, 2008). Faculty study groups, a type of community-based innovation, benefit from peer-to-peer mentoring and collective inquiry with university faculty; in whole-school study groups, members reflect on and assess teaching, learning, and student growth and academic success (Love, 2005; Moyer et al., 2006; Mullen & Hutinger, 2008).

Characteristics of a PLC

Members who understand the characteristics of PLCs will be able to nurture their community and achieve goals otherwise unattainable as individuals (Dufour & Eaker, 1998). Key characteristics of PLCs include (1) a focus on learning rather than teaching;

(2) dedication to a culture of collaboration; and (3) commitment to school improvement and student achievement (Dufour, 2004). Stoll and colleagues (2006) additionally identify such essential features as shared values and vision, collective responsibility, reflective professional inquiry, and inclusive membership. A perennial concern, however, is that "the building of an effective community of practice is a very delicate and complex process" (Aubusson et al., 2007, p. 134) that surfaces such matters of importance as respect for teachers (Zeichner, 2003) and teacher choice and empowerment (Hutinger = Mullen, 2007).

A PLC's learning environment is enhanced by the cooperation of all concerned and reflective dialogue involving respectful exchanges of ideas on teaching and learning (Hord, 1997). Members share their points of view and constantly seek to learn, collectively and collaboratively promoting desirable results in student achievement through dialogue and consensus building and the sharing of information. Specifically, PLCs that support collaboration through whole-faculty study groups, writing institutes, literacy projects, and other avenues serve as the cornerstone of shared vision and school reform (Moyer et al., 2006). PLC members have improved the quality of teacher professional development, coordinated adult learning with student needs, adopted research-based strategies, enhanced teacher leadership, and brought about a sense of community focused on a common vision that aligns with school and district goals (Roberts & Pruitt, 2003).

PLCs can be locally directed or partnership oriented. Those extending beyond individual schools or districts may embrace regional and state agencies, networks, partnerships, universities, and communities (Stoll et al., 2006). Representatives from universities, foundations (e.g., The Holmes Partnership, Wachovia Foundation), and the surrounding community affect local school culture and the professional learning of teachers. School and university practitioners who enter into a school–university partnership are expected to act as a liaison between the school and university faculties; be knowledgeable of the requirements of the school, district, and university; understand the motives and research agendas of both school and university faculty; provide time for these faculty to collaborate and address areas of potential conflict; monitor time demands on teachers; and be alert to any cultural tensions involving instructional practice (Marlo et al., 2005; Moyer et al., 2006; Shroyer et al., 2007; Stephens & Boldt, 2004).

Characteristics of a PLC Leader

Leaders who are activists in high-stakes accountability environments are not strictly visionaries or democratic leaders; instead, they must, realistically speaking, function as democratically accountable leaders who straddle the competing agendas of democracy and accountability (Mullen et al., in press). They understand all too well the push and pull between accountability and democracy in their work and perhaps that these function as principles guiding their decision making and actions. By being attuned to how these forces compete and complement one another, they are better able to assist their colleagues with the conflicting agendas and directions for change they endure. Such leaders satisfy educational mandates while leading in ways that are participatory, consensus building, empowering, and commensurate with improving the performance of their schools and students (Glickman, 1998). Teacher activists believe that

their instructional actions are not restricted to the classroom or even building level or to mandated testing and performance pressures. Because democratic learning honors "freedom of expression" and application within and beyond the immediate community (Glickman, 1998, p. 29), administrators, teachers, and students learn firsthand about "participation, equity, justice, and responsibility" (Glickman, 1998, p. 36)—the essence of democracy and accountability.

Our Approach to the PLC Conversation

Collectively, the contributors to this book approach PLCs from organizational, cultural, and leadership perspectives. Our discussions are descriptive and empirical, and, alternatively, critical and provocative. Models of effective professional development that span organizations, partnerships, centers, and networks and address programming, collaboration, teams, action research, teacher thought, and teacher leadership are described.

Particular conduits we highlight for creating PLCs are school–university partnerships, professional development schools (PDSs), virtual learning communities, and racially inclusive PLCs. Through such conduits, the PLC members depicted in these pages commit to a group learning process whereby they reflect on their own practice with an eye toward improving it. The teacher groups work on identifying student-learning needs and taking action to meet those needs. As shown, PLC members can fruitfully engage in such potentially transformative practices as distributed leadership, collaborative inquiry, reflection, self-study, mentoring, coaching, and problem solving. PLCs are viewed by us as schools (and universities) where all levels of leadership are committed to improving student learning, enhancing faculty development, and enacting organizational change through such means as supportive and shared leadership, core values, collective learning, conducive conditions, and collaborative practice. As a discourse community, PLCs become the means and supporting structure for schools (and universities) to be continuously transformed and, when necessary, interrogated and pushed to change.

We view the PLC approach as a promising practice of educational change and improvement. However, we recognize that PLC efforts range in the importance of the work attempted and accomplished within them, and in their degree of functionality and effectiveness, capacity for outreach, and circumference of inclusion. They also vary in the synergy generated and the fulfillment of their promises. The belief that learning, teaching, and leading are inherently not only social but also democratic activities undergirds the PLC initiatives we describe; moreover, the work we report is political, experimental, and unfinished.

Rationale, Purpose, and Scope

An established approach for organizing the professional development of educators, the PLC is a popular form of practice-based research (e.g., Birchak et al., 1998; Donahoo & Hunter, 2007; Dufour, 2004; Mullen, 2008; Mullen & Hutinger, 2008; Mullen & Lick, 1999). Resources that promote teacher-centered professional development are widely available (e.g., The National Council of Teachers of English's [NCTE's] resource kits, see www.ncte.org). A special issue of *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*,

titled "Building Faculty Learning Communities" (Cox & Richlin, 2004), provides a higher-education perspective of PLCs, but a school-based parallel was needed—hence the impetus for a work of this scope that stages collaborative learning communities in schools. The context we have tackled extends outward though, bridging with higher education institutions and even, in a few chapters, giving university settings the separate attention they also warrant.

While the concept of professional learning is not new, the practical side of developing communities that are democratic, authentic, and sustainable remains challenging, even elusive. The contributors are scholar-practitioners from various schools and universities who, in their varying roles as activists, collaborators, and inquirers, have accepted the challenge to investigate and learn from experiments to which they feel drawn. We conceptualize PLCs and discuss different operationalizations and outcomes for staff and students alike. In addition to describing frameworks for orienting the thinking of professionally oriented learning community development, we share real possibilities for transformative learning and successful practice.

Building PLCs that promote transformational learning and have purposeful impact is the overarching purpose of our writing. We report data collected via documents analysis, focus groups, surveys, conversations, inquiry projects, and more with respect to PLCs and school–university partnerships. We have collectively learned, to quote Fullan and colleagues (2006), that "shared vision and ownership are less a precondition for success than they are an outcome of a quality process" (p. 88). The related themes uncovered through our work place importance on creating intentional and purposeful PLCs; promoting teacher leadership and principal collaboration; supporting school–university partnerships through democratic means, literacy initiatives, and more; and ascertaining the effects of partnership work that support mutual ends. We present newly initiated and well-developed implementations that were personally experienced by the authors, in addition to several simulations.

Consultants in the area of school-based PLCs have established a niche with schools. Their professional development interventions range from effective to cursory fixes. We are biased toward critical, reflective inquiry regarding matters of grave educational importance and so have endeavored to sidestep simplified treatments of learning, leadership, and reform in favor of deep, extended inquiry. We realize that balance is in order, and utility is a goal of this writing as well; to this end we offer models to be adapted, steps for implementation, and lessons learned.

How Is This Book Organized?

The 18 chapters (not including this introduction and the conclusion), written by 42 authors, are organized around four overarching themes: organization and the learning community, democracy and the learning community, technology and the learning community, and mentoring and the learning community. The themes for this collection arose organically out of the contributions that were sent to me as editor in response to the call for proposals I distributed electronically to various professional organizations and conferences in the education field. Abundant learning tools, such as cases, problems, summaries, implementation steps, and exercises, are provided throughout.

The four sections each contain an overview of the included chapters.

Who Is This Book for?

This book is for school and university educators, in addition to program developers and policymakers for whom our comprehensive focus on PLCs should prove welcoming. Practitioners will need to know how to design, monitor, and assess such communities and understand the various types. The authors offer plenty of ideas and resources to help site-based and district leaders (e.g., principals, assistant principals, lead teachers, district-level supervisors) tackle the many challenges of building and sustaining successful communities focused on professional learning, organizational change, and student achievement.

Higher education teachers can use this text in their courses and for their scholarship concerned with leadership, learning communities, and partnerships. Professors of teacher education and educational leadership have as their colleagues preservice teachers and leaders who can benefit from seeing, at the ground level, the work of PLCs, through which they can better imagine their own role in forging community development and collection action. Certainly worth pondering are the issues of social activism that permeate this volume, and such related concepts as democracy, accountability, justice, equity, bias (personal and cultural), and values.

Educational and Social Importance

This unique book about professional community development brings together multiple perspectives on contemporary and critical issues embedded within institutional, political, and sociological frameworks. A popular staff development delivery model, the PLC promotes school success and encourages a climate of teaching, learning, and leadership. Promising practices in faculty learning and community development can enhance the professional development of entire school faculties and the learning of all students.

The collective learning of schools and universities is largely dependent on the willingness and expertise of their faculties to adopt expanded definitions of learning community, leadership, and governance. Professional educators who support inclusive views and practices of community and make provisions for dialogue across cultural differences, for example, enable organizational goals to be met in previously unrealized ways. School and university leaders who work effectively together encourage a reciprocal partnership that supports school/district/state initiatives through such processes as goal setting, collaborative problem solving, and inquiry projects and through such outcomes as content creation, program development, and community development. Leaders who purposefully set in motion positive change within their workplaces build organizational capacity, generate social capital, and impact their communities.

In these pages we tell a story of educational reform from the inside out as a complex but highly rewarding process and as a work in progress for which much good remains to be done.

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SECTION I

Organization and the Learning Community

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Introduction to Section I

In this most extensive section of this book, the authors of the seven chapters present frameworks and descriptions of schools and universities as new kinds of organizations. Specific emphasis is placed on the creation of partnerships and professional learning communities (PLCs) that successfully transform traditional schooling and are sustained over time. The metaphor of schools as organizations is translated as a concept of community fuelled by visionary leadership, capacity building, professional development, and societal change. The authors offer varied illustrations of live and imagined PLCs that range from short- to long-term partnerships and from particular to comprehensive arrangements. In Chapter 1, "Introducing Collaborative Communities With Edge and Vitality," Mullen asserts that the PLC initiative has become widespread within public schools. Encapsulating the text as a whole, she describes social networks from organizational, cultural, and leadership perspectives and outlines characteristics of PLCs and PLC leaders. She also describes the authors' approach to the broader conversation about PLCs: the rationale, purpose, and scope of this book, including its organization and intended audiences, and issues of educational and social importance.

In Chapter 2, "Understanding Schools as Organizations: Implications for Realizing Professional Learning Communities," Johnson provides a provocative conceptual framework that addresses some of the limitations and promises of this reform as a school improvement strategy. He argues that proposed changes to traditional ways of schooling as exemplified in the PLC idea must be informed by what is known about the fundamental features of schools as organizations. He subjects this latest trend in school reform to critical thinking, holding up a mirror to the evangelical zeal of school reformers and bandwagon consultants alike. He forces reflection on our own buy-in as PLC advocates, asking that we look at the hard question of why this idea has probably yielded less success than one might expect given its lure. At the same time, however, Johnson argues that effective schools model a culture of collaborative learning—they are organizationally structured in ways that both facilitate and institutionalize this learning dynamic toward the realization of desired outcomes. Included are steps for planning the creation of PLCs, in addition to an illustration and application.

Chapter 3, "Forming School–University Partnerships to Create Professional Learning Communities That Improve Schools," by Goduto, Doolittle, and Leake identifies essential elements (e.g., shared purpose, collaborative activity, collective responsibility) necessary for forming PLCs that work for all members. The authors cite research demonstrating that the development of a strong professional community

among educators is essential for improving schools. They view these learning communities as the vehicle for creating and sustaining school and university improvement initiatives. A context is provided for imagining a viable working partnership between K–12 schools and postsecondary institutions. The authors' ideas are anchored in a fictional scenario that draws on research findings and their own experiences working in schools. Drawing on key tenets, including school change, collaboration, and school–university partnerships, the case they invent should stimulate ideas about forming collaborative partnerships and problem solving. An exercise is included for the planning of PLCs.

Bullough and Baugh in Chapter 4, "Developing Professional Learning Communities in a University–Public School Partnership," present a case study of the long-term Utah partnership that is steeped in John Goodlad's *Agenda for Education in a Democracy*. This influential agenda has served as a moral foundation underpinning teacher education program development and leadership education. Drawing on data, the researchers describe three initiatives that support PLC development: (1) an associate's program that sponsors study groups composed of teachers, administrators, and university faculty; (2) conferences that enhance the learning of associates and strengthen their commitment to the partnership; and (3) two successful leadership programs focused on leadership preparation and the principalship. Described are steps for embedding PLC development in worthy aims and a reading exercise informed by Goodlad's democratic agenda.

Chapter 5, "Professional Development Schools: Learning Communities for Leaders and Teachers as Change Agents," focuses on authentic school reform and inherent challenges. Authors Sudeck, Doolittle, and Rattigan argue that the organizational innovation most suited to enact reform is reflected in the professional development school (PDS). They describe multiple challenges involved in trying to create and develop PDS cultures that are community-oriented. Creating effective partnerships requires time for establishing ground rules, understanding the tasks that lie ahead, identifying supports required for successful implementation, and ensuring that a shared mission and vision for educational change exist among partners. Utilizing questions for organizing such a collaborative venture and illustrating effective partnerships in a PDS within a professional development district, the authors describe strategies for creating synergistic P–12 PLCs. Data results from a PDS forum are shared along with reflections from PDS experiences.

In "Teacher Education Is Everybody's Business: Northern Guilford High School—A Professional Development Community" (Chapter 6), Lashley, Cooper, McCall, Yeager, and Ricci discuss their collaboration with the administration at Northern Guilford High School to develop a comprehensive professional development high school (PDHS). This PDHS includes faculty members from various colleges at a nearby university campus. Described are the organizers' efforts to bring together university teacher preparation faculty and high school faculty and staff to create a PLC focused on teacher preservice preparation, practitioner professional development, inquiry to enhance practice, and collaboration on improved student learning. A discussion of the initial phases of the project is supported by data and a description of the processes, opportunities, and challenges that can arise when university and high school personnel forge a partnership. Lessons learned from this project are shared and prompts are provided for encouraging reflection on comprehensive community development involving schools.

Chapter 7, "The University Connection: Transformational Learning That Enhances Professional Learning Communities," by Harris, Farrow, and Lowery-Moore describes a university connection with K–16 schools that enhances PLCs. The authors discuss transformational learning theory and how it has been embedded in higher-education coursework and activities. Three courses are rendered as separate cases, complete with description and analysis. Drawing from student data that were elicited through coursework, the collaborators report outcomes that lead to professional community development when students who are practitioners return to their schools. The authors make suggestions for developing university connections with K–16 schools and doctoral programs that incorporate transformational learning as a strategy for enhancing PLCs. They include a self-reflective activity for educators.

Finally, Hoyle and Kutka, in "A Vision for Linking Pre-K and Higher Education through Learning Communities" (Chapter 8), discuss social problems resulting from educational failure, with particular attention on disjointed reforms. They offer an overarching vision for addressing this widespread problem in America and argue that each state should create a single, unified education system from elementary grades through and beyond graduate education. Unifying educational systems would build organizational capacity for universities and schools, facilitating partnerships and broader constituent (e.g., policymakers) involvement. They believe these collaborations could become powerful learning communities that speak with one voice. The unified system model is presented as a viable alternative for addressing the growing numbers of at-risk students. An exercise is included to assist PLC members with creating unified systems.

Carol A. Mullen

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CHAPTER 2

Understanding Schools as Organizations: Implications for Realizing Professional Learning Communities

Bob L. Johnson, Jr.

As a school-improvement strategy rooted in the accountability ovement, *professional learning community* (PLC) is a popular idea that has captured the attention of educators. As a topic of conversation, rallying cry for reform and focus of research, it is currently au courant. Evidence of this can be seen in the professional and academic literatures that surround this subject and the healthy commercial industry that has materialized to facilitate the "authentic" realization of PLCs in schools and districts (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Stoll & Seashore-Louis, 2007).

Like other reform initiatives, the PLC idea has assumed a familiar pattern of diffusion across various educational communities (Cuban, 1990; Rogers, 2003). In broad strokes, this evolution can be described as follows. Excitement with the initial success of an idea leads advocates to conclude that they have indeed discovered a potent means for school improvement. Alas, the proverbial *silver bullet* for realizing high-quality schools has been found. Motivated to share this success, advocates generalize their experiences to other settings. "If it worked here," they conclude, "surely it will work elsewhere!"

Such assumptions function to initiate the process whereby the articulation of the phenomenon is undertaken. This process begins with the appearance of success "testimonials" from educators who as "true believers" describe *what* they did and *how* they did it. In so doing, these educators champion the idea. They are eager to sell, share, and promote their successes with all who will listen. These testimonials soon attract the attention of similarly situated educators who are also seeking solutions to the educational challenges they face. As these experiences resonate with others, the diffusion process develops a momentum that facilitates the expansion of the idea to even larger audiences. These testimonials are followed by a robust normative literature that has a definitive, recipe-quality to it, peppered with admonitions of what should, ought, and must be done. If the success is to be replicated, one "should" do these things.

Yet, as those who embrace the idea soon discover, the promises of the normative literature outrun the realities of experiences with the reform. As a result, frustration sets in and the reform-diffusion process moves into a stage of *problematization*. In this stage, the reform idea is subjected to renewed and critical inquiry. With the aid of the research community, systematic efforts are made to further define, refine, and understand the phenomenon. This is done by identifying its key elements and relationships, articulating the working causal-assumptions on which it rests, and assessing the validity of these heretofore unexamined assumptions. From these efforts, a scholarly literature emerges alongside the normative and professional literatures. Over time and with the aid of more systematic inquiry, the initial articulation of the normative idea is tempered and revised by descriptive realities. Simplicity in our thinking about the reform gives way to complexity, definitiveness to uncertainty.

A review of the multiple PLC literatures—the normative, professional, and academic literatures—reflects this diffusion process and current state of the PLC knowledge base. While there are many things we know about PLCs, there is much we do not know (Stoll & Seashore-Louis, 2007). Many claims can be substantiated by research, but many remain unsubstantiated. Rabid enthusiasts champion the PLC idea while others remain more guarded in their assessments of its merits.

Working Definition and Purpose

For those seeking greater understanding through clarity, serious conversations about PLC must take into account the meaning of the concept. Excessive and imprecise use has turned it into yet another educational buzzword with a life of its own. The cumulative effect has been to exacerbate its ambiguity and threaten its usefulness as a concept. What exactly does *PLC* mean? Various researchers suggest that PLC represents different things to different audiences (Hord, 1997; O'Neil, 1995; Stoll & Seashore-Louis, 2007). Moving from the general to the specific, PLC may be construed as a reform movement, a rallying cry for change, an organizational philosophy, a specific educational reform strategy, distributed leadership in schools, teacher professionalism, teacher collaboration, the primacy of student learning, and more.

While my purpose here is to neither explore nor refine the multiple meanings associated with PLC, it is important to delineate what I mean by the concept and to explain it. My working definition is based on the seminal work of Hord (1997) and DuFour and Eaker (1998) and reflects the organizational theory frame and my own bias. Emphasis here is placed on the adjective *working*, as in I offer a *working*—not a *definitive*—definition. Defining PLC with greater precision is a quest of the research community (Stoll & Seashore-Louis, 2007). As used in this writing, PLC is *a specific model of organizational development and learning for schools* that has as its ultimate aim *student learning*. Stated differently, PLC is a model of school organization designed to foster collaboration and learning among school personnel and to harness this organizational learning to enhance the learning of all students.

Unpacking this definition, it becomes apparent that many ideas are embedded within it. Among these are a defined organizational goal, an assumed organizational structure, a recognizable set of organizational processes (individual and collaborative learning), the strategic management of these processes, and the creation of organizational conditions that promote these structures and processes. Most, if not all, of these ideas are rooted in the well-known dimensions of PLC that Hord (1997) identifies.

Building on these seminal ideas, I view PLC as an *organizational* phenomenon consisting of an identifiable set of *organizational* structures, processes, conditions, goal, culture, and strategic leadership decisions.

Conceptualizing the school as a PLC has appeal. As reflected in the PLC literature, the working assumptions upon which it rests have a high degree of face validity. These assumptions can be stated as follows: *Effective schools are those that not only exhibit a culture of collaborative learning among the professional educators that work in them, but are led and structured in ways that both facilitate and institutionalize this group-learning dynamic toward the realization of desired educational outcomes*.

Like many school-improvement ideas, creating such schools is much easier said than done. While success is sporadically witnessed, the rhetoric and promises of the debate have outdistanced attempts to authentically realize the idea in schools. Much of this frustration is voiced in the PLC literature focuses on issues of *change*, specifically on the *challenges* encountered in efforts to change the structure, culture, and society's thinking about how schools have been traditionally organized (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 1997; Stoll & Seashore-Louis, 2007; Leithwood & Sharratt, 1998). Why is this? Given the power of the PLC idea, what might be done to facilitate the realization of such communities in schools?

Using these questions and the organizational theory literature as points of departure, I argue here that implementation failure is due in part to a superficial understanding held by enthusiasts of the fundamental character of schools as *human service organizations.* Perusal of the PLC literature and discussions with well-intended advocates reveal an inadequate understanding of schools *as organizations*. The cut-flower approach in which concepts derived from the organizational theory literature are used in the PLC community reflects this. What is it about schools *as organizations* that facilitates and/or hinders efforts to move toward a model of schools as PLC? What is it about schools as organizations that present challenges to those who seek to change them? Using three concepts informed by the organizational literature, I describe challenges associated with attempts to change schools and, as a result, to inform change strategies directed toward the creation of PLCs.

Organizational Theory and Understanding Schools as Organization

Organizational sociology involves the systematic study of formal organizations (Hall, 2002; Scott, 2000). This literature suggests that all organizations share a common set of generic features. All possess a sense of purpose (however vague), defining core task, division of labor, physical and social structures, and a culture. Likewise, organizational participants experience conflict and wrestle with change. Such features define the essence of formal organizations.

This literature also reveals differences among organizations on a number of dimensions, namely, differences in function and type. For example, organizations can be distinguished on the basis of the defining object of work. Is the object of work human or nonhuman, animate or inanimate? Work at an appliance factory is about the transformation of raw materials into stoves and other appliances. This focus contrasts sharply with that organization known as Woods Cross High School where the transformation of students is the focus of work. Organizations created to transform people are known as *human service organizations* (Hasenfeld, 1983; Scott, 2000). Whether through the definition, shaping or altering of personal attributes, those working at

the core of these organizations focus on transforming people. Organizations such as universities, churches, hospitals, and rehabilitation clinics share this feature. Nieman-Marcus, Burger King, and the IRS do not. Human service organizations tend to share a common set of structural, process, and institutional features, such as:

- *Diverse, multiple, and ambiguous organizational goals*. The goals of human service organizations are ambiguous, problematic, and contested. Toward what end should the organization seek to change the individual? This is a perennial question for human service organizations. Because disagreement exists over outcomes, the goals of human service organizations are typically multiple and vague. So it is with schools.
- *Ambiguity of the core task*. Organizations can be distinguished by the core task that defines them. For example, the defining task of Subaru is automobile production. As noted, the defining task in human service organizations focuses on transforming people. How people are actually transformed is a much more ambiguous than making an automobile. Human service organizations are plagued with ambiguities surrounding the core tasks they perform. Teaching is a task that is surrounded by ambiguity. What works with one student may not work with another. Success cannot always be predicted.
- *Predominance of client-control issues*. A third feature of human service organizations is the predominance of staff–client relationships and ongoing challenges associated with managing these relationships toward organizational success. Maintaining cooperation with clients who have the ability to resist is a key factor in this relationship. This challenge is particularly acute in organizations where client participation is mandatory, such as public education and prisons. Waller (1932) has aptly described this relationship as a *fragile equilibrium*. Education is mandatory in the United States. Students represent a "captive" clientele; hence, controlling and managing them is a defining issue in schools.
- *Decentralized structure and tendencies*. Noted structural features distinguish human service organizations from other types of organizations. The low level of clarity which surrounds the core task of these organizations, that is, teaching and learning, leads to structural decentralization. Because it is in the classroom that teachers interact consistently with students, instructional decisions are decentralized to this level.
- *Dual authority structure*. Human service organizations such as schools are also defined by a dual authority structure. On the one hand, human service organizations are *bureaucratic*. These structural mechanisms provide a means of coordinating and articulating the work done in classrooms across age-grade cohorts. On the other hand, schools are also *professional* organizations (Scott, 2002). Those individuals in the organization working at the core—in this case, teachers—have been professionally trained, comprise a professional referent group, and enjoy a measure of autonomy. The bureaucratic and professional character of human service organizations represent competing authority structures with countervailing influences. One structure has a centralizing, rationalizing effect, the other a decentralizing effect.
- *Institutional and value-infused entities*. Human service organizations may also be described as *institutional* entities operating in *institutional* environments. Institutions are those defining, historically rooted, value-infused social systems

found in society (Giddens, 1987; Scott, 2000). Examples of notable institutions include the family, government, religion, the media, the economy, and education. As venues of patterned interaction, institutions play a critical role in defining reality. The social reality that schools define is often a reified reality. The embeddedness of schools in American culture often means that the assumptions, structures, and processes on which they rest go unexamined. As institutional, value-infused entities, schools personify each of these.

Considered together, these defining features of human service organizations provide the context for understanding change in schools. While an exhaustive rehearsal of these features is beyond my purpose here, three will be used to illustrate the kinds of challenges that arise when planning change in schools. These features likewise highlight the *utility of organizational theory* for understanding the larger change process. These tendencies include (1) the tenacity of institutional structures and processes in school organizations; (2) the gravitational pull within schools *to* the classroom and *toward* teacher autonomy; and (3) the stimulus-overload environment that defines work in school organizations.

Institutional Tenacity of School Structures and Processes

The organizational structure of schools is as much the product of the hyperrationalized thinking associated with the scientific management movement as it is of the expediencies of the classroom (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Faced with the challenge of providing a mandatory education, today's schools were consciously modeled on what progressives of an earlier day identified as the most efficient of organizational forms: *the factory* or *batch-processing model*.

Although distinctions exist between elementary and secondary schools, the structural and process artifacts of this thinking are familiar to all former students: age-graded student cohorts, the egg-crate organizational structure, the one-teacher–one-class division of labor, and more (Corwin & Borman, 1988; Johnson & Kruse, 2009).

These and other features have come to define for most Americans what it means to *do school* (Eisner, 2003). Similar to other enduring mythical images that define U.S. national identity—McDonald's, Sears and Roebuck, the Stars and Stripes Forever march—these features of schooling have been *institutionalized* in the American psyche (Meyer & Rowan, 1978). The public school and other institutionalized entities are expected to *look* and *do things* a certain way. For example, the food served at McDonald's is expected to taste a certain way, and the Stars and Stripes is expected to be played at a certain tempo and setting.

Though many of these school structures and processes have outlived their usefulness, their imprimatur provides society with a set of criteria by which qualitative judgments regarding the effectiveness of schools are made. Despite evidence to the contrary, judgments regarding the effectiveness of schools are too often based on the presence (or absence) of these institutional criteria. In the collective mind of the public, if one is to build a new school, it must possess these features to be considered "legitimate." In a similar vein, if one is to significantly change a school, the success and sustainability of this change is often assessed in terms of the extent to which it deviates from this institutional model.

To many educators, discussions of the institutional features of schooling, structure, and process seem far removed from the challenges of leading and improving schools. Little relevance is seen between these abstractions and the realities of schools, much less plans to significantly change them (for example, the PLC model). But I would suggest that it is our failure as educators to seriously consider the power of these historically rooted institutional myths about schools that has doomed the fate of many proposed reforms, even before they are implemented. It is these unseen yet powerful social expectations that shape the perceptual realities of individuals and groups in society. These myths define society's expectations of what schools *should* look like, how they *should* operate, and what they *should* be doing. As such, these myths function as a mental prison, an entrenched way of collective thinking, a cognitive box, an iron cage out of which many are unable and at times *unwilling* to escape.

Educational leaders planning and implementing change would do well to remember the institutional nature of schools as human service organizations. These myths define in part the standards of quality many in society hold for educational organizations and therefore must be considered when planning change. To the extent that the structures and processes associated with PLC proposals significantly rearrange, disrupt, or deviate from this institutionalized mental image that defines American education, they will be resisted by the public and certain groups within the educational community—regardless of merit. Considerable planning and energy on the part of change advocates will be needed to overcome this resistance.

Having noted the relative power that institutional myths exert in shaping what it means *to do school* for the public, one should not conclude that changes that deviate from these historically defined patterns are necessarily doomed to failure. What the power of institutional myths suggests is that resistance to change from individuals and groups should be expected. Depending on the degree of novelty associated with the change, considerable thought and effort will be required to sell, fully implement, and sustain the change over time. Success in overcoming this resistance would appear to be a function of at least four factors: (1) the extent to which change agents are aware of these institutional myths and the subtle power they exert in shaping social expectations; (2) the ability of change agents to anticipate the source and nature of resistance that arise from changes that deviate from the institutional model of schooling; (3) the willingness of change agents to mount a sustained effort to overcome this resistance; and (4) the rhetorical and consensus-building skills possessed by leaders of the change to "sell" the proposed change and its merits to others. The institutional features of schools remind us that the logical merits of a proposed change are not always a sufficient basis for ensuring its success. To the extent that efforts to realize the PLC model in a school deviate from institutional expectations, PLC enthusiasts anticipate the challenges associated with such deviations.

Teacher Autonomy and the Gravitational Pull of the Classroom

A second feature of schools that appears to frustrate many PLC enthusiasts centers on the isolationist tendencies of teachers and the autonomy norm related to this. Failing to appreciate and address the organizational dynamics in schools that promote these tendencies, these enthusiasts often assume that the merits of the PLC model will readily convince teachers to shift a good deal of their professional efforts from the classroom

to the school level, thus channeling the autonomy norm that defines the profession into greater levels of collaboration.

To be sure, teachers in many schools are inordinately preoccupied with what occurs in their classrooms, at times to the detriment of the organization. Likewise, many exercise their autonomy at the expense of the needs of the larger school organization. Yet, much like flowing water that follows the path of least resistance in search of the lowest level, there is something inherent in the nature of teaching that promotes these dynamics. Both spring from the DNA of the teaching–learning process. The PLC literature overlooks and underestimates the power of these dynamics to work against attempts to create PLCs in schools. An examination of these defining challenges illustrates this.

The realities of working with multiple groups on a daily basis underscore the artistry and skill required of teachers. At the heart of the teaching lie two fundamental challenges (Brophy, 2004; Jackson, 1990). Both arise from the batch-processing approach that defines education and provide the focal point of teacher activity. The first is creating and maintaining an orderly classroom environment; the second is motivating students to learn. Ongoing efforts by teachers to reconcile and balance these challenges provide the context for understanding day-to-day instructional decisions and the preoccupation of teachers with their classrooms and work-autonomy. Both challenges are mutually reinforcing and highlight an identifiable tension in school organizations (Johnson & Owens, 2005).

As with other human service organizations, the relationship between the organization and its clients is of utmost importance in schools (Hasenfeld, 1983). For learning to occur, teachers must maintain an orderly classroom environment. The creation of this environment relies heavily on the quality of the student–teacher relationship, a relationship complicated by the fact that school attendance is mandatory and students are captive clients with immature tendencies (Johnson & Kruse, 2009). Many students attend school against their will and occasionally refuse cooperation. These factors make the creation of orderly classroom environments problematic. As a result, teachers must coax, negotiate, and occasionally resort to "strong-arm" tactics. Whether an appeal to the authority-status of the teaching role or to the bureaucratic rules of the school, these impersonal tactics are alienating for many students. If used in excess, passive student-resistance can easily escalate into overt rebellion. Hence, there is a need to establish classroom order if learning is to occur. This need represents a fundamental teaching challenge.

Teachers must also motivate students to learn. The effectiveness of human service organizations rests on the cooperative participation of the clients served. In the context of schools, effective learning requires the cooperation of students, which depends on the ability of teachers to energize and establish affective bonds with them. Given that teaching is a highly individualized and interactive activity, motivating students to learn is a function of close, warm relations. To maximize the learning experience, teachers must connect or bond with students.

The irony of these dual challenges is found in the countervailing tensions each creates, tensions that must be skillfully balanced. Whereas the need to establish classroom order rests on the use of impersonal bureaucratic tactics, the need to motivate students rests on the affective, individualistic, and personal appeal of the teacher. In dealing with students, the teacher must behave in ways that are simultaneously *personal* and *impersonal*. This tension highlights a basic dilemma in school organizations: the need to motivate students and solicit the cooperation of students to learn while creating an

orderly environment in which this learning can occur. Teachers vary in their ability to recognize and negotiate these daily challenges.

As previously noted, classroom isolation and teacher autonomy are often characterized by PLC enthusiasts as obstacles rooted in the stubbornness of teachers seeking to protect their own interests. Both, however, spring from their efforts to manage the challenges of teaching. The fundamental challenges of teaching a group of students whose motivations vary function to promote a classroom focus among teachers and autonomy in teaching–learning decisions. Not only do these challenges inform the way most teachers understand their work in school, they also frame teachers' perceptions and responses to instructional decisions or changes imposed on them. These challenges function as perceptual filters that assist in identifying and assessing those aspects of a change that would facilitate or hinder their ability to address these challenges in functional ways.

As threshold-guardians of their classrooms, teachers tend to assess changes at the school level along two dimensions: How will this change affect my ability to maintain order in my class (*teaching challenge 1*), and what effect will this change have on my ability to motivate and teach students? (*teaching challenge 2*). Proposed changes that undermine teachers' abilities to address these instructional challenges are typically resisted. However, changes that facilitate their abilities to address these two fundamental challenges of teaching are often embraced. These insights from the organizational theory literature suggest that teachers' resistance to the PLC model may be due in part to the problems the model presents for them in addressing these teaching challenges. In my view, the PLC literature does not adequately account for nor counteract the gravitational pull and ambiguities of these fundamental challenges of teaching. As a result, this literature underestimates the power of these challenges to negate attempts to foster PLCs in schools.

The Stimulus-Overload Working Environment That Is Schools

An additional feature that distinguishes human service organizations is the nature of the work environment that defines them. This environment is characterized by an abundance of face-work, intense personal interactions, and detailed and ongoing documentation. As human service organizations, schools typify these conditions. All former students are familiar with the character of educational work. In the day-to-day life of schools, educators find themselves subject to numerous interactions of short duration with multiple individuals. Many of these interactions are intense and personal. Time is a scarce resource and paperwork abundant. All students must be evaluated and their progress carefully tracked, creating meticulous paper trails across multiple years. Frustration is often near or at the threshold level. As a result, the frequency and length of meetings are minimized. In sum, school personnel find themselves working in *stimulus-overload, labor-intensive, high-hindrance-level* environments (Willower, 1982).

Managing this stimulus-overload environment in functional and efficient ways is a daily challenge for teachers. They tend to assess change in terms of this challenge. How will it affect me? Will it ameliorate or exacerbate the stimulus-overload I am experiencing? Will it require more effort, paperwork, and noninstructional time? These features of the working environment suggest that proposed changes that increase the stimulus-overload environment of teachers will not be supported or sustained by them over time.

Advocates of reforms often overlook the implications change has for the stimulus-overload environment of teachers. Driven by a hyperrational paradigm of organizations and change, many do not attend to *how* the change will affect the work environment of teachers, for better or worse. Will this proposed change become like other innovations, yet another *add-on* that contributes to stimulus-overload? For example, once start-up costs are addressed, how much time and effort will be required of teachers to ensure *the institutionalization* of the PLC idea? How will time be reallocated so that the realization of the model can occur? What will be removed from the already crowded schedule to make room for the collaboration and organizational learning that is required? While implementation of the PLC model may initially meet with great excitement, the costs associated with sustained attention to school-level processes will quickly temper this enthusiasm if stimulus-overload issues are not addressed. Most seasoned teachers are keenly aware of the costs associated with embracing new ideas and change.

An example of the working calculus that teachers use in assessing the costs of a proposed change can be seen in the authority structure of the classroom and how a given change affects teacher's authority over students. The nature of the working environments of schools suggests that changes that buttress rather than undermine the authority of the teacher are more likely to be adopted. Three prominent structural features underscore the authority of the teacher in the classroom and school. First, as densely populated social collectives, schools are structured to control student behavior. Personnel manage students using a variety of crowd-control policies and procedures, such as strict policies regarding in-class and out-of-class behavior. Second, attempts to manage and coordinate student movement within the school are exacerbated by the unselected and "captive" status of its "inmates." Because public education is compulsory, many students attend school unwillingly. Much like prisons and other "total institutions" (Goffman, 1961), this requirement promotes an adversarial relationship between school personnel and students (Hasenfeld, 1983; Waller, 1932). Third, the historical role of the teacher as the adult representative and pedagogical expert provides him or her with a level of authority that exceeds that of students. As a result, teachers exercise an array of constraints on student choices; teachers regulate how teaching will occur, the topics to be discussed, and on and on it goes. Such control is vital to creating an orderly learning environment. Hence the authority structure that exists for teachers in the classroom—and the desire to maintain it so that teaching can occur—provides an example of the working rubric seasoned teachers use to assess the costs of a given change.

Evaluative criteria such as these (i.e., *the stimulus-overload environment* and *threats to classroom authority structure*) constitute a working rubric some teachers implicitly use to assess proposed changes. Not only do these criteria reflect the complexities of teaching, they also reflect the collective response of the teaching profession to these complexities. As part of accumulated craft wisdom, these criteria are rooted in the rigors of classroom life and arise from the logistics required to address the working environment that defines schools. If, for example, fine arts teachers in a large high school are called upon to collectively engage in an extensive revision and realignment of departmental course-offerings and release- or compensation-time is not allocated for it, the chances of realizing, let alone institutionalizing an authentic collaborative effort will be greatly diminished. Will the proposed change represent an *added demand* on teachers or will provisions be made by the leader to reduce temporal demands on teachers in other areas? Will teachers be freed from other obligations to devote time to

authentic collaboration? Decisions that add to the stimulus-overload working environment of teachers will be rejected by them.

The question to ask of professional learning community advocates and the PLC literature is this: to what extent is the working environment of teachers described above accounted for and addressed in the PLC model? While much of the normative literature ignores and/or minimizes the logistical costs associated with these changes, researchers have yet to document the extent to which these costs exacerbate or reduce the stimulus-overload environment that defines schools.

Concluding Thoughts

Though my observations might lead the reader to conclude that planned change is an excessively difficult undertaking in schools or that efforts to realize the PLC organizational model are destined to fail, such conclusions are ill founded. My intent here is not to dismiss the positives of PLC as a means for increasing the quality of schools and their potential in this regard. The PLC model represents a set of ideas that its advocates use to harness the collective learning of school organizations in the interest of student learning. Rather, using ideas rooted in the organizational theory literature to describe organizational tendencies in schools, my intent has been to raise awareness of the rich yet undermined contributions this literature can make to our collective thinking about the change process. My reading of the PLC literature—and that which has emerged around other popular educational reforms—suggests that most educators, reformers, and researchers possess a superficial understanding of the organizational qualities of schools. One need only point to the concepts *loose-coupling* and *teacher autonomy* and the hyperrational assumptions regarding organizations and the change process as examples of this. The abstracted manner in which these and other organizational concepts are often used severs them from the rich theoretical roots from which they have grown. As a result, many efforts to change schools fail to account for the organizational realities that define them.

To the extent that the causal assumptions that undergird the PLC model are valid, an organizational theory perspective provides an indispensable means for assessing its viability and sustainability in schools. This perspective likewise provides a means for tempering the unrealistic expectations voiced by the most ardent champions *and* critics of PLC. It is in this spirit that I have offered my thoughts.

Next Steps

In the context of changes promoting the creation of PLCs consider the following steps when planning this change.

1. *Identify the implicit working assumptions on which the change rests*. Consider and articulate the working assumptions on which the proposed change—the PLC model—rest. Are these assumptions valid?
2. *Identify structures and processes of proposed change*. Consider the specific *structures* and *processes* called for by the professional community model being adopted. List these in separate columns: "structures" and "processes."
3. *Assess how the change deviates from the institutional model of schools*. Having identified these structures and processes reflect on *how each deviates* from the

traditional school model. What strategies can the leader employ to anticipate and address opposition to change from constituents as a result of this deviation?

4. *Assess the extent to which proposed change facilitates or hinders teaching*. Articulate how the new structures and processes of the PLC model might *facilitate* or *hinder* teachers' abilities to address the two fundamental challenges of teaching previously identified. What can be done to *minimize* these hindrances?
5. *Assess extent to which the proposed change increases or decreases stimulus-overload*. Articulate how the new structures and processes of the proposed change might increase or decrease the stimulus-overload working environment. What specifically can be done to address those aspects of the change that increase this stimulus-overload environment?

Illustration and Application

After a long, hot summer, the fifth graders at Linden Elementary were excited about their newly remodeled school. All 90 of them were sitting in a large room. At some point during the previous year, the board had decided that the upper grades of all elementary schools would move to the "open-room" model.

Most were excited to see their friends from other classrooms. Some were puzzled, even curious, about the new arrangements and talked among themselves as to what it all meant. It did not conform to their expectations of what a school was supposed to "look like" and what they had experienced in their short academic careers. There were times that year that things got loud and chaotic, even confusing. By the end of the year, portable, soundproof partitions were brought in to divide the group into manageable classrooms. The next year, things returned to "normal" at Linden.

With this simple example of reform in view, consider the specific issues and questions identified with each of the five steps noted above (see "Next Steps" above). How can these be used to explain why this "open-room" reform failed at Linden? What aspects of this change contradict what we know about the defining features of school organizations and fundamental challenges of teaching? How might these steps and questions inform a strategic plan to introduce the PLC model in your school?

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CHAPTER 3

Forming School–University Partnerships to Create Professional Learning Communities That Improve Schools

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For more than 25 years, government reports publicly declared the perpetual failure of schools across the United States. Of the many documents criticizing schools, two of the best known are probably *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and *20 Years after a Nation at Risk* (Hayes, 2004). Each report lists factors contributing to the failure to improve student achievement and highlights, a lack of adequate instruction, inadequate funding, too few qualified teachers, and high rates of teacher turnover. In addition, researchers have identified the low socioeconomic status of students as a major contributor to substandard academic performance (Orfield & Lee, 2005). The failure to make substantial gains in learning led to the current No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

The NCLB legislation has generated strong criticisms from field practitioners. They criticize its cumbersome reporting requirements, arguing that attending to its mandates had become a priority in schools rather than efforts aimed at improving teaching and learning (Doolittle & Rattigan, 2007). Further, Mass Insight & Restructuring (2007) calls attention to the inadequate resources given to schools to meet the high standards embedded in the legislation. Consequently, there is little evidence that NCLB has had the effect of improving student learning and that much of substance has changed with respect to the teaching and learning process in schools (Elmore 2002, 2004; Fullan, 2006; Murphy & Meyers, 2007).

The corrective action cycle creates significant and additional challenges to school leaders. As accountability measure benchmarks associated with NCLB increase, they trigger additional sanctions that, in turn, limit the flexibility of schools and districts to address and manage school improvement efforts (Doolittle & Rattigan, 2007). With a growing number of low-performing schools entering the NCLB corrective action cycle, it follows that without substantive and focused support, the likelihood of such schools

exiting corrective action status is relatively low (Mass Insight Education & Research Institute, 2007).

We posit that what is required, then, to improve student learning is an informed and ongoing collaboration between schools and university partners. First, most reform efforts target isolated parts of public schools' complex system and, even if partially successful, are short-lived (Heck & Weiss, 2005). Second, even reform efforts intended to impact multiple initiatives within a given district fail as funding sources run out and charismatic leaders depart for greener pastures, returning schools "to the status quo" (p. 2). Third, the state agencies charged with providing technical assistance to failing schools lack sufficient capacity and, thus, seek to "recruit recently retired educators as individuals" (Mass Insight & Research Institute, 2007, p. 50). Since these retirees generally do not have adequate training or structures for assisting stakeholders to implement change and with state agencies absent the expertise or staffing capacity for providing support and assistance (Goertz & Duffy, 2003), schools in corrective action flounder as they try to navigate technical and political challenges embedded in reform (Heck & Weiss, 2005).

With inadequate funding and too little political support, Mass Insight Education and Research Institute (2007) explains, most reform efforts focus only on programmatic change or shifts in personnel. Only a handful of school leaders attempt the reform strategies used by high-performing, high-poverty schools. Few school or district leaders have the capacity for tackling the second-order transformations practiced by effective high-poverty schools such as "changes in program, including changes in people" (p. 19). Thus, we contend that one potentially valuable strategy for responding to standards reform and for improving student learning is the development of school–university partnerships (Fullan, 2006; Fullan, Hill, & Crevola, 2006; Wiggins & McTighe, 2007).

With knowledge about effective reform and the technical expertise needed for improving schools specifically located within the academic community, institutional partners can merge resources and utilize their collective expertise. The goal here is to support the improvement of professional practice and, potentially, increase student achievement (Doolittle & Rattigan, 2007; Mullen & Hutinger, 2008). Organized around professional learning communities (PLC) that typically include faculty members, teachers, school leaders, community members, and other stakeholders, participants collectively examine and improve their own practice (Mitchell, Wood, & Young, 2001; Resnick & Hall, 2001) through collaborative inquiry and problem solving. Fullan (2006) argues that "without capacity building strategies that lead to the intrinsic commitment necessary for continuous improvement . . . [schools] can end up being all dressed up with somewhere to go but with no means of getting there" (p. 37).

Since collaborative efforts represent an important scaffold for school effectiveness, improvement, and development, helping teachers transform their isolated learning spaces into opportunities for joint work (Little, 1990) is important to the improvement process. A primary goal of a site-based learning community is to transform the pervasive culture of isolation many school practitioners experience (Mullen, 2000). The collaboration that characterizes PLCs has also been described as a systematic process where participants work together to analyze and improve instructional practices achieve better results (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005; Wiggins & McTighe, 2007). In our view, school–university partnerships are a natural conduit for creating PLCs.

Effective school–university partnerships have some prerequisites, however. Mullen (2000) reinforces the importance of this working arrangement in her call to create

"walkways" between colleges of education and university laboratory schools. She sees this collaborative connection as essential to the professional lives of teachers, administrators, and teacher educators, however, only if they

> become two-way paths for the researchers, administrators, and teachers who are engaged in collaborative research projects. When teachers are involved as equal partners, we find that they have cultural and local knowledge about schooling processes, social relationships, community needs, and reform initiatives. (p. 6)

When institutional partners focus on and address problems through collaborative inquiry, they integrate the knowledge and expertise of a wide spectrum of practitioners. Additionally, this collaborative inquiry creates a context for reflective practice. Establishing a trusting, reflective environment with critical friends (Fullan, 2006) is critical since school faculty often lack consensus on what they believe to be important learning outcomes (Mazzeo & Berman, 2003). Partners—by identifying and solving problems affecting the school, consulting the research, and identifying appropriate research-based solutions—can help school personnel identify key goals for improving student learning. Further, school–university partnerships expand participants' capacity for critical analysis. Such a partnership is potentially a win-win situation for all participants.

Moving the Partnership Forward

Joint steps that school–university partners may undertake to enact effective PLCs include conducting an organizational analysis; examining assessment data with the purpose of improving instruction; mentoring new and inexperienced teachers; building teacher capacity for curriculum innovations; and leading the school improvement process with school-level planning committees (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). More importantly, engaging in an embedded and ongoing process for building capacity increases teacher self-efficacy, and improves morale and retention, resulting in the ability to "reduce the distance between planning and action" (Fullan, 2006, p. 59).

At the same time, we must reinforce the message that merely establishing a partnership does not in and of itself guarantee a successful relationship. In a number of cases, K–12 practitioners and their university colleagues concurred on the parameters of the arrangement, but either or both sides invariably retreated from the agreements they developed for working together (Vozzo & Bober, 2001). Consequently, a more formal agreement should be reached between partners, and each partner must seek to understand the needs of the other.

Centering Efforts on Student Learning

Understanding the importance of creating new norms in a school building centered on student learning is an important first step of any school improvement process. School leaders must scrutinize the multiple layers of previous reform efforts in the school and district and determine which strategies were and were not implemented (Murphy & Meyers, 2007). School-level factors, especially teacher and classroom practices, have a stronger influence on students' academic achievement than a student's socioeconomic status (Fullan, 2006; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Specifically, partners first need to

consider whether their current instructional program reflects a "disconnected set of programs layered one on top of the other" (Housman & Martinez, 2001, p. 3) before selecting specific improvement strategies. Second, the strategies must be compared to identified current gaps in student achievement, instruction, personnel, finance, operations, and governance (Duffy, 2001; Lattimer, Schonyers, & Arons, 2006). Third, after identifying gaps in the school program, school partners can examine their capacity to identify, implement, or sustain reform efforts.

Availability of university partners familiar with the research on best practices can be valuable to a school in taking corrective action, especially if its leaders lack even the most basic capacity to accomplish critical leadership tasks (Goldstein, Kelemen, & Koski, 1998). Typically, school leaders work in isolation rather than as a collaborative community (Housman & Martinez, 2001). As Arsen, Bell, and Plank (2003) attest, "There is no reason to believe that most failing schools have the knowledge or capacity to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, even when faced with state sanctions" (p. 3).

In summary, school–university partnerships can provide the necessary structure and expertise to launch effective school-level planning committees that are cohesive. Utilizing a process of planning and acting in tandem with observation and reflection, faculty can benefit greatly from field-based learning and, at the same time, make classroom modifications that improve student-learning outcomes. Once a learning-community partnership has been firmly established, frequent efforts to monitor and evaluate continuous improvement efforts should occur, with the information gained becoming a scaffold for future actions.

Creating a Formal Arrangement

In collaboration between the Louis Armstrong Middle School and Queens College of the City University of New York, Trubowitz and Longo (1997) offer several suggestions when contemplating a school–college partnership. Most notably, they focus on the importance of gaining the support of top leadership at the participating institutions and of recruiting the best mix of people. Trubowitz and Longo remind us that our knowledge of one another's work environment is very uneven because K–12 schools and higher education institutions maintain diverse missions, organizational structures, reward systems, and consequently, different perceptions of faculty development. The organizations also have radically different governance structures and different educational cultures. Despite their differences, partnerships must be formed with a purpose clearly understood by all members. Schools and universities should work on building partnerships characterized by shared purpose, collaborative activity, and collective responsibility. Research demonstrates that the development of a strong PLC is key to improving schools because teachers become aware of curriculum gaps and the strategies needed to help students learn (Fullan, 1999; Langer, 2001; Wiggins & McTighe, 2007). Additional benefits of using case studies include greater connectedness to schools and the opportunity to reflect on real instructional problems.

A Case: PLC and University Partnerships

Case study researchers offer insight in the dynamics of bureaucratic organizations (Sosin & Parham, 2001; Trubowitz & Longo, 1997). One can learn more about how partner schools develop and function from case studies than deliberate exposition. The following case study was created by the authors as a fictional scenario (Hanson, 2001)

based on the current literature in the field and our own experiences working in schools. Drawing on key tenets, including school change, collaboration, and school–university partnerships, the case will afford those interested in complex educational issues an opportunity to engage in a process of forming collaborative partnerships and problem solving.

The Puddingstone School District in New Jersey has had a rich history of academic success. Located in an affluent suburb and categorized as a high socioeconomic district, Puddingstone has 4,200 students in the district, with one high school that includes grades 9–12; two middle schools, Jefferson and Lincoln, with grades 6–8; and 5 elementary schools, grades K–5. Predominately white-collar, the suburb is near a major urban center. Scoring well in the state's standardized testing program, 6 years ago the school district was recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School. Many students strive to attend top-tier colleges, which includes Harvey State University (HSU). HSU is a highly selective institution that has earned national recognition for its commitment to excellence. Founded in 1855, HSU is consistently acknowledged by *U.S. News & World Report* as one of the top comprehensive colleges in the nation. HSU's School of Education has received national recognition for its teacher and school leadership preparation programs (LPP).

During the past 3 years, some significant changes have occurred in Puddingstone. Due to an influx of students from a new high-density housing development and garden apartment on the west side, the Puddingstone Board of Education has expressed concern over the sharp increase in student population at Jefferson Middle School. In fact, Jefferson has recently more than doubled the number of students enrolled in its counterpart, Lincoln Middle School with 357 students. Lincoln students have historically scored higher on standardized tests than Jefferson. The reasons for this disparity have provided considerable fodder for the local media.

The most expensive homes are located on the Lincoln side of town; the class sizes are low and the curriculum is considered more rigorous. Teachers at Lincoln regularly collaborate on curriculum and teaching strategies with its strong commitment to the "middle school" philosophy, which had been adopted by the school district several years before. Conversely, at Jefferson, the program had become fragmented without a clear vision of middle-level practices such as instructional strategies and school organization. Due to the population explosion, class sizes at Jefferson are well above the policy limits as established by the Board of Education. As a result, the whole teaming concept has been severely compromised. Teachers had no time for common planning, and they had no interest in learning about integrated curriculum or differentiated teaching strategies. They are consumed with the state-testing mandates and meeting the standards as outlined in the state's core curriculum. Consequently, the decline in standardized test scores during the past 2 years has brought about an increase in discipline problems, causing parents great concern about the quality of education their children are receiving.

During the past year, the school district hired a new superintendent who replaced a veteran superintendent who basically "coasted" over the last few years without doing much in the way of providing instructional leadership. A principal was hired for Lincoln and began her new assignment in the upcoming academic year. At several recent board meetings, new members have expressed concerns about the "middle school situation." They agreed with the superintendent that the time had come for major changes. With a new principal at Lincoln and the announcement that the Jefferson Middle School principal would soon retire, the board deemed this an opportune time to address the

disparities between the two middle schools (i.e., program offerings, quality of instruction, disciplinary problems, and the overall commitment to the middle school philosophy). The Board of Education granted a year of planning and gave the superintendent full authority to move forward with a school reform and reorganization initiative. The superintendent thought it was time to invite the two principals in for a discussion on the future of both middle schools.

The superintendent also realized that this was the opportunity to act on other changes he was interested in making. He was adamant about changing the culture of Puddingstone from a closed, isolated system to a thriving PLC in which collaboration and open communication would become the norm. This vision needed to extend to the entire district. He knew that his vision could be realized if this undertaking was successful. He was confident that the newly appointed Lincoln principal would be excited and up to the challenge of facilitating this effort. In his former school district, he had established a successful partnership with a local university. With HSU within 10 miles of his old district, and given their recent collaboration regarding the placement of student teachers and educational leadership interns, the superintendent knew that there would be interest in working with the school district. He also realized that both the school district and the higher education programs could benefit from a reciprocal relationship, and was not so naive as to think it would be an easy task. He arranged a Monday morning conference with the Jefferson and Lincoln principals and spent the weekend thinking about how he would approach this issue with the two school leaders from his district.

During the meeting, the superintendent explained the issues at hand. Expressing his confidence in the two leaders, he relied on the Lincoln principal to take the lead in forming the learning community. The superintendent asked them to explore all the viable options and noted that it was imperative that the entire school community of both schools become engaged in undertaking the middle school reorganization. Further, he stated that he was committed to renewing the middle school concept in Jefferson and wanted a solution to the population disparity between the two schools. Building renovations, program development, and upgrades in technology and the science labs were also part of his plan. The PLC would make recommendations in all areas and guide the process of change.

The superintendent shared that he had previously worked as a member of a PLC that included a K–12 school–university partnership. He was particularly keen on the work of DuFour, Eaker, and DuFour (2005), who assert that collaboration among stakeholders can create a culture of open communication and ongoing innovation, which characterizes the work of a PLC. He realizes that it is a systematic process where participants work together to analyze and improve instructional practices to achieve better results (e.g., DuFour, et al., 2005). The superintendent made it clear that he believed in enduring collaborative practices and envisioned the work of the PLC continuing together after making their recommendations to the Board of Education. His goal was to create a new collaborative culture embedded in a systemic change effort that included all schools in the district and not just Lincoln and Jefferson.

Exercise

Using the work of DuFour and colleagues to guide your work as a future or practicing school leader, describe a PLC that includes, but is not limited to, university partners,

professional staff, parents, students, and members of the community. Considering that PLCs are outcome based, your responsibility, then, is to draft a plan of action. More specifically,

1. Develop a viable plan for creating a PLC that addresses the following: offerings, quality of instruction, disciplinary problems, and the overall commitment to the middle school philosophy. Be sure to plan for sustainability.
2. Address the overcrowding issue by reducing the disparity in the number of students between the district's two middle schools.
3. Create an instructional program that provides equity in the course offerings in the two schools. You cannot hire new staff.
4. Help renew the commitment to the middle school philosophy. Include strategies like team collaboration, integrated curriculum and instructional practices, exploratory curricula, and developmentally appropriate academic and social programs.

Steps to Take

1. Who will you include in the initial phase of the development of the PLC in the Puddingstone School District?
2. What resources will you recommend or provide to the PLC in the study of these issues?
3. What options will you explore to deal with the imbalance in enrollment numbers of the two middle schools?
4. What professional development will be needed to support teachers in implementing the selected changes at each middle school?
5. How will you ensure that you remain within the financial parameters established by the board and the superintendent regarding any building additions or renovations?
6. How will you assess the effectiveness of the PLC? Include a method of assessment of the partnership with HSU.

Summary

School–university partnerships can serve as a vehicle for developing PLCs. We have discussed ideas that provide a context for imagining a viable working partnership between K–12 schools and postsecondary institutions. Altering the isolated work culture prevalent in most schools is essential to the growth of schools, and it is within our reach. To build the capacity for productive and enduring partnerships, we must be committed to developing a common focus, continuous dialogue, shared decision making, planned action, and periodic reflection and feedback. Central to our thinking herein is that we have a knowledge base about the potential impact of university–district partnerships as a strategy for developing learning communities. It is time to initiate ongoing professional conversations about guidelines, technical assistance, and additional resources required to support and sustain quality partnerships. Toward this end, we hope this writing assists with such a discourse.

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CHAPTER 4

Developing Professional Learning Communities in a University–Public School Partnership

Robert V. Bullough, Jr., & Steven C. Baugh

Increasingly, educators committed to improving schooling are coming to appreciate the ways in which "reform entails learning" (Hubbard, Mehan, & Stein, 2006, p. 15). But learning is often considered as an individual cognitive accomplishment rather than a result of shared activity. In defense of learning as social participation, Hubbard and her colleagues (2006) echo Wenger's (1998) position: "Only individuals can contribute to an organization's learning; however, an organization's learning is distinct from an individual's learning because it inheres in the interrelated activities of many people, not in the heads of solitary people" (p. 263). The result of these processes is the formation of a culture, a shared way of life, and an understanding that opens (or closes) possibilities for engagement and learning.

Educative Experience and Professional Learning Communities

The social practices of cultures may or may not result in positive learning outcomes for those who inhabit them and give them life. After all, the Mafia undoubtedly has a culture and may function as a learning community. As Wenger (1998) suggests, communities of practice are "not intrinsically beneficial or harmful. . . . Yet they are a force to be reckoned with, for better or worse" (p. 85). Dewey (1938) made this point in these words: "The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative. Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other. For some experiences are miseducative" (p. 13). Similarly, not all learning communities are positively educative, in the sense Dewey meant, as tending toward members' greater openness, sensitivity, and responsiveness to experience and toward greater continuity and intelligence in experience.

Reviewing the origins and various definitions of professional learning communities (PLCs), Bottery (2003) identifies a similar difficulty. Locating the roots of PLCs in a concern for revitalizing stagnant Western economies, Bottery observed that "conceptions of 'learning communities' are built upon different social, educational, and political values" (p. 190). These values, he argues, need to be uncovered and explored, otherwise PLCs may become tools of manipulation where collegiality is "contrived" (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 17), and where conformity and "fabrication" (Ball, 2003, p. 224) produce a "culture of unhappiness" among educators (Bottery, p. 187).

It is only in a very peculiar and distorted sense that the word "professional" can be attached to communities that produce these sorts of negative outcomes. A distinctive feature of a professional is that when facing situations involving a degree of uncertainty and risk, the "professional learns from experience: The professional is a student of his or her own practice and development and, in studying that practice and development, is one who constantly grows in understanding and in ability" (Bullough, 2005, p. 22). Hence, avoiding the danger of miseducation requires that careful and consistent attention be given to the aims that animate action and that give a particular learning community its sense of being, the foundation of community belonging.

While clarity about ends is crucially important to institutional health, this is often difficult to achieve. Inherent in this challenge is that communities emerge through shared activity, and sharing activity and a group identity does not necessarily mean that an activity is either well understood or found to be life affirming. Often, communal purposes are tacit—simply lived out, taken for granted. To become fully educative and intelligently purposeful, aims must be made explicit, and they must become the objects of consistent deliberation. This said, even when an aim is explicit, like student learning, for example, difficulties may arise that underscore the importance of ongoing examination. In the flow of institutional life, and over time, hard-won and once-shared understandings may evolve in undesirable ways. Priorities may be unwittingly reordered and purposes confused.

Democratic Aims and PLC

The question of what aims ought to guide educational practice requires constant attention. It was in response to this question that the National Network for Educational Renewal (NNER) was launched in 1986. Composed of more than 20 school–university partnerships from across the United States, the NNER was organized to pursue the simultaneous renewal of teacher education and schooling. Underscoring the need for schools and higher education institutions to continuously work to improve educational practice, John Goodlad, the founder, recognized that renewal is quite different from reform: In contrast to reform, renewal is "self-initiated, involves learning from experience, and is a high-order educational endeavor of replacing or adding to behavior or circumstances that the individual or collection of individuals perceives as inadequate and less than satisfying" (Goodlad, 1999, p. xviii). While conceptually revolutionary, as an educational aim around which to forge learning communities, ultimately renewal proved inadequate. Hence, in 1991, the NNER was reconstituted. What emerged was a set of aims known as the "Moral Dimensions of Teaching," part of what is known as the Agenda for Education in a Democracy. Goodlad and his colleagues had realized that focusing on renewal begs the question, renewal toward what ends?

Reconstitution required original NNER members to reapply for admission and make a compelling case for inclusion. Goodlad (1999), it turns out, seemed to have become tired of "trophy" members (p. xxii); he wanted genuine institutional change. In its new iteration, the Network was to be bound by the Agenda, as Goodlad, Mantel-Bromley, and Goodlad (2004) asserted:

> At the heart of the NNER was an effort to draw attention to the unique role of education in a democratic society and the need to foster sound educational policies and practices that would not only support the broad purposes of democratic schooling but would also make possible the ongoing process of renewal. (p. 25)

The Agenda has three components: a mission (the four Moral Dimensions of Teaching), a strategy (simultaneous renewal), and a set of principles or institutional conditions (20 postulates). The Moral Dimensions of Teaching are (1) to facilitate the critical enculturation of the young into a social and political democracy; (2) to provide to all children and youths disciplined encounters with all the subjects of the human conversation (access to knowledge); (3) to engage in pedagogical practices that forge a caring and effective connection between teacher and student (nurturing pedagogy); and (4) to exercise responsible stewardship of our schools (Fenstermacher, 1999, p. 11). The postulates, representing the institutional conditions necessary for achieving the mission, might best be thought of as intermediate objectives. Postulate 12, for example, states,

> Programs for the education of educators must involve future teachers in the issues and dilemmas that emerge out of the never-ending tension between the rights and interests of individual parents and interest groups and the role of schools in transcending parochialism and advancing community in a democratic society. (Goodlad, et al., 2004, p. 185)

And Postulate 13 reads, "Programs for the education of educators must be infused with understanding of and commitment to the moral obligation of teachers to ensure equitable access to and engagement in the best possible K–12 education for all children and youths" (ibid.). Thus member institutions of the NNER are committed to the Agenda, to the strategy of simultaneous renewal, and to the postulates. Along the way, a variety of interrelated learning communities have emerged—planned and fortuitous—with each seeking to enhance professional growth in the direction that the Agenda set. Shared purpose, distributed leadership, trusting and positive working relationships, space and time to work, external support, and an infrastructure supportive of interaction across traditional institutional boundaries (Stoll et al., 2006) characterize these communities in varying degrees and define partnership participation.

Conversation and Partnership: Reaching Across Learning Communities

The challenge facing the NNER partnerships is to support adult learning in many and diverse ways, across professional activities, and in this effort, sustained conversation is perhaps the most important practice. According to Goodlad et al. (2004), "The late

historian Lawrence Cremin once asked and then answered the question, 'What do we do when faced with tough problems? We talk'" (pp. 153–154). The emphasis on conversation within the Network is altogether fitting, for, as John Dewey once remarked, "Democracy begins in conversation" (as qtd. in Lamont, 1959, p. 58), and good conversation is at the heart of PLCs that are educative.

Building and then sustaining continuous conversation across multiple learning communities as required by a commitment to simultaneous renewal—teachers and principals talking with faculty members in higher education—presents a major challenge. The values embedded in the four Moral Dimensions of Teaching are crucial in bringing individuals into the conversation, but once included, they must become convinced of the importance and worth of their ongoing participation and commitment. This conviction requires learning about the Agenda while having experiences that both build appreciation for the contributions others (individuals and groups) are making to its realization and enable recognition of the value of one's own particular contribution. Positive interactions and relationships are crucial here, but just as important is building on strengths—honoring and extending the contributions each participant already makes to providing quality education to the young. This "strengths-based philosophy" (Peterson, 2006, p. 196) promises development of greater competence and deepens commitment as increasingly both interests and problems come to be recognized as shared.

Brigham Young University–Public School Partnership

An original and continuing member of the NNER, the Brigham Young University (BYU)–Public School Partnership was first organized in 1984 to include the McKay School of Education and five school districts, enrolling approximately one-third of the students in the State of Utah and over 7,000 teachers. University–public school partnerships are "organized collaboratives that bring university and public school teachers and administrators together to promote more effective preparation of preservice teachers and, at the same time, to renew conditions and curricula in the public schools" (Osguthrope, Harris, Black, Cutler, & Harris, 1995, p. 3). Organizationally, the BYU–Public School Partnership is governed by a board composed of the education dean, the five school district superintendents, and the director of the Center for the Improvement of Teacher Education and Schooling (CITES), a center of pedagogy established in 1996. While the governing board meets monthly, the day-to-day operation of the partnership is managed by CITES. Housed on the BYU campus, CITES supports several initiatives dedicated to the simultaneous renewal of teacher education and schooling, among them the Associates Program, the Principals' Academy, and the Leadership Preparation Program (LPP). Grounded in the Agenda, each initiative is supported by the university and partnership school districts and represents an effort to respond to shared concerns and interests. While the initiatives have resulted in the development of a variety of PLCs, some of them broadly overlapping—all interdependent—just these three will be highlighted in this chapter (Bullough & Baugh, 2008).

The Associates Program

The Associates Program traces its origins to 1992 when, under the guidance of John Goodlad, his colleagues in the Institute for Educational Inquiry (IEI) in Seattle, Washington, established the Leadership Associates Program. The aim of this program was

to advance the Agenda for Education in a Democracy among members of the NNER. Leaders of the IEI asked: "What support could we at the IEI offer [to member institutions to further our shared aims]? We decided early in our deliberations that providing an intensive program of study, conversations, reflection, and critical inquiry would be an effective approach" (Smith, 1999, p. 29).

The model developed proved powerful. In sessions spread across the academic year, groups of about 20 school and college educators representing the various NNER member institutions came together at the IEI headquarters and joined the IEI staff to study and talk about the Agenda. Each session focused on one of the four Moral Dimensions of Teaching. In addition to reading and conversation, participants were involved in an inquiry project, simulations, and role-plays. All expenses were paid, and participants were given more than a dozen books to discuss. Through the Leadership Associates Program, participants were given opportunities to become well educated in the Agenda, to make it personally meaningful, and to begin exploring what commitment to it would mean for their specific work context. Additionally, the activities and the time spent together enabled participants to form new friendships and deepen existing ones, develop a shared language, build trust, and identify and extend common interests. Although *PLC* was not then a concept in wide use, every element essential to such communities was present. Representatives of all the NNER sites participated in the leadership program, and in a relatively short time, a flexible curriculum built around the Agenda was in place.

Several leaders within the BYU–Public School Partnership participated in the IEI program, describing it as "transformative." From conversations with those from BYU who had participated in the Leadership Associates Program, then dean, Robert S. Patterson, recognized its potential and became committed to developing a parallel local program. He concluded the model was the best available means for increasing "the number of well-informed, committed supporters who would be both able and inclined to assist in advancing the agenda of renewal" (Patterson & Hughes, 1999, p. 271). The dean was concerned that "although we had been functioning for over a decade, relatively few people within our partnership could articulate the central ideas and purposes undergirding our activities" (Patterson & Hughes, 1999, p. 271). A proposal was made to the partnership governing board, and with the strong support of the five district school superintendents and the financial backing of the university, a local version of the IEI program was planned and then launched in September, 1995: the BYU Associates Program.

Closely following the Seattle model, including emphasis on the Moral Dimensions of Teaching, the first BYU Associates group was composed of 36 participants representing all five school districts, the university, and the State Office of Education. For financial reasons, the number of sessions was reduced. Another consideration leading to this decision was the difficulty encountered when freeing teachers from their classroom responsibilities for extended periods of time. Even with strong administrative support, teachers found leaving their classrooms for 3 consecutive days multiple times during the year difficult, if not unethical. Though reduction in the number of meetings may have sacrificed some depth of experience, the promise of greater educator participation was considered worth the compromise since the intended purposes would still be accomplished. Meetings were held at a nearby winter sports resort, and all expenses were paid.

Assessments of this early program revealed common themes: Knowledge of the Agenda was gained or deepened, friendships formed across institutions and roles, trust

grew, conversations became more open and honest over time, appreciation for differences in work responsibilities and challenges increased, and commitment to the work of the partnership strengthened. Participants were energized by the ideas and also by the process: time away from day-to-day work pressures to read, reflect, and converse. Such outcomes also characterize subsequent program iterations.

From this large ambition but ever so small beginning, the Associates Program has grown dramatically. Each partnership district now has its own program coordinated by facilitators from the schools and the university. The first of the district associates programs was formed in Alpine School District, a large district with over 50,000 students. Superintendent Steven C. Baugh returned from his participation in the Seattle program committed to continuing and extending the conversation begun with Goodlad and his associates. With the encouragement of the governing board of the school–university partnership, he invited his administrative team to create a parallel program, believing that the model held potential for building and strengthening shared values and forging a shared vision of the district's future. He too believed in the value of study and conversation to building then sustaining PLCs.

Like the other programs, the Alpine Associates embraced a curriculum centering on the Moral Dimensions of Teaching that provided both the content for study and the underlying values. As in Seattle, readings and discussions proved effective in building trusting relationships, including across the lines separating administrators and teachers. Now, after 10 years, over 360 teachers, principals, district office staff, school board members, and some university faculty have participated in the Alpine program, some multiple times. This program has had a profound influence on individual schools within the district, virtually all of which have begun their own associates-type programs, involving hundreds of teachers yearly. Lacking resources needed for overnight retreats, school-level programs typically meet from four to six times a year for a day away from school to discuss readings and, with the rise in understanding of PLCs, to explore ways of better functioning as communities in support of the Agenda.

Results of surveys conducted in both the school-level and district-level programs are consistently very positive. Recognizing that renewal depends on the involvement of teachers, principals are especially enthusiastic about emerging teacher leadership. As one principal wrote, "Possibly the most valuable result of our experience with the Associates Program was the formation of a powerful teacher leadership team." Principals consistently comment favorably on the emergence of teams of teachers who collaborate to improve student learning and who, in taking the Agenda seriously, have developed a broad, school-wide, vision of renewal. Against a backdrop of traditional isolation, teachers consistently comment on the value of the new relationships that form through participation.

Over time, special effort has gone toward involving university faculty members from the arts and sciences, and, indeed, their participation has dramatically increased. Since the 2002–2003 school year, over 600 teachers, principals, and university faculty have participated in the five district-wide programs, and 50 of these have been from the arts and sciences. Participation of these cross-campus faculty members is crucial to realizing simultaneous renewal, not only because so much of a teacher candidate's preparation involves coursework in these areas, but because differences in understanding and expectation between these faculties and those in teacher education need resolving. Additionally, university faculty and public school teachers and administrators come to appreciate one another's work and to recognize their interrelated and sometimes overlapping responsibilities.

At their best, the associates programs represent fully purposeful PLCs. That they are purposeful, speaking to genuine issues and concerns and embedded in a compelling social vision, is supported not only by survey results but by the growing levels of participation. Evidence suggests that the associates programs at the district and school levels have become part of the institutional fabric—not add-on programs requiring justification, but opportunities widely understood as educationally valuable. But saying this does not mean that the programs are self-sustaining, for they are not. To remain vital, they require constant nurturing, just as one would expect when the aim is renewal. The challenge is to keep the conversations going. These programs require constant nurturing because of the dynamic nature of public and higher education workforces. Access to the conversations must be easy, and knowledge of their existence and purpose must be widely diffused.

To keep the conversations going and to preserve and strengthen relationships initially formed in the district-wide cross-institution associates programs, an annual daylong conference has been held since 1999. Sometimes seeming more like a family reunion than a professional meeting, the conference, in the morning, enables participants listen to and interact with a nationally notable author who speaks about his or her work in relationship to the Moral Dimensions of Teaching. The afternoon consists of breakout sessions focused on one or more of the Moral Dimensions. Thus participants renew friendships and encourage each other to continue working toward educational renewal. Freed from work responsibilities, typically about 350 teachers, district administrators, and university faculty and administrators attend the conference. Having participated in the associates programs, participants share a common language, a common understanding, and a common commitment to educational renewal and to the Agenda.

To increase awareness of partnership accomplishments and to identify and better focus on issues, a retreat for leaders is held twice a year. During these 2-day sessions, senior leaders from the school districts, the State Office of Education, and the university learn from one another and build relationships that enable them to work more productively together to achieve their shared aims. As one participant stated,

> Think of it. The dean of the School of Education invites the deans and associate deans of eight colleges of arts and sciences across the university to participate in two days of conversations twice a year regarding renewing public schools and teacher education, and they come! They actually attend! And they are engaged. . . . It is truly remarkable.

The five superintendents rarely miss these meetings. They feel that they are a part of a PLC—a community of shared vision and values.

Educating Leaders

Developing and then sustaining PLCs that support the Agenda for Education in a Democracy, building to individual strength while facilitating organizational learning, and extending conversations across institutional boundaries require new forms of leadership. Administrators both in higher education and within schools need help and encouragement to reconsider established assumptions about power and authority so that leadership becomes more widely distributed. Such changes are essential to meeting the challenges of simultaneous renewal of teacher education and schooling.

Recognizing the need for rethinking leadership, a steering committee was formed composed of a principal from each of the five partnership districts, two university faculty, and two members of the CITES staff. This group met for a year and studied the literature on school improvement. Participants were not surprised to learn that principal leadership had been identified as a key element to school improvement. Based on this study, a new leadership program was designed: the Principals Academy, launched in 2002. In this program, a cohort of about 25 principals from partnership schools meets monthly over a 2-year period. The first year, the principals study PLCs and begin their efforts to connect what they are learning to their practice. The second year, they continue working with their own school faculties to create learning communities, with ongoing support from university faculty along with opportunities to engage in conversation with nationally recognized authorities who are well experienced in the problems and opportunities associated with forming and sustaining PLCs. The explicit intention of the program is to encourage participants to gain both understanding of and skill in the development of PLCs, so that the principals might more effectively lead and support efforts to realize the Agenda and improve their schools.

Experiences of those who have completed the program—35 to date—suggest that participants in the Academy are able to form a PLC, even though only a few of them have known one another previously. Even those who have worked within the same school district and attended some of the same district-sponsored meetings find their relationships changing because of the academy. They may be acquaintances, but rarely have they studied and worked together to realize shared aims. In end-of-program surveys, principals report coming to understand the value and potential of PLCs for improving the quality of schooling and for enriching their own professional lives. Also, they become committed to collaboration: "There is an overwhelming body of research now supporting [the value] of collaboration [among] teachers. It is best for students and for teachers. It improves learning and teaching. Why would we choose not to embrace it?" Preliminary analysis of data from 800 teachers from 15 schools also shows positive program results. The concepts and practices associated with building PLCs appear to be spreading throughout districts, and commitment is increasing among teachers working with principals who have completed the Academy.

Complementing the Principals Academy (for practicing principals), LPP enables teachers who wish to become principals to pursue a Master of Education degree and become eligible for administrative licensure. LPP has been in operation since the partnership began, but its focus has changed. Like the Academy, it is a collaborative program between the university and the public schools. After being granted sabbaticals by their school districts and going through a rigorous admissions process, participants begin this intensive 15-month program with a summer of course work followed by a carefully supervised internship coupled with more course work. During the school year, the 18 to 20 participants in a cohort work as interns 4 days a week, spending all of the fifth day in classes. This pattern allows for a careful integration of theory and course content with practice and encourages flexible responses to problems as they arise.

Much like members of the Principals Academy, over time the participants of the LPP form a PLC that becomes increasingly self-conscious. Since they come to the program having either taught or served as school counselors, participants share a broad base of experience upon which to build relationships and shared understanding. In addition, they often come to the program in groups from the same districts, which encourages investment in one another's professional development.

The goals of the LPP program reflect a programmatic commitment to the Agenda for Education in a Democracy and, like those of the Principals Academy, stress both understanding of theory and development of skills associated with the formation of PLCs to further the Agenda. Specific goals for the prospective administrators include

1. Help their schools function as PLCs, with the following practices: (a) use collaborative processes to facilitate staff in crafting a common mission and goals that guide the work of teaching and learning in their schools; (b) use diverse data (e.g., assessment, demographic, archival, etc.) to identify student learning needs and set goals and objectives to improve learning; (c) use leadership practices that promote collaboration and collective action among teachers, focused on improving teaching and student learning; (d) develop a school culture in which teachers collaborate formally and informally to improve teaching and student learning; (e) increase academic success for all students by maintaining systems of prevention and intervention; (f) strengthen teachers' core instructional practices in order to address the learning needs of students more effectively; (g) use data from diverse and continuous assessment measures to promote and document student learning; and (h) promote cultures of trust and interdependence that are focused on improving teaching and learning
2. Manage the organization, daily operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment
3. Know and understand education law and surrounding issues in order to promote practices that afford all young people a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment and accord all faculty and staff their constitutional rights
4. Know and apply the principles of policy making in a political environment in order to develop and implement effective education policy
5. Discriminate, consume, and apply educational research to improve teaching and learning in schools

Throughout the program, data are gathered and feedback is given to students to assure they are accomplishing the intended purposes. The Principals Academy and LLP are like a hand in a glove. The Academy serves practicing principals; LLP serves prospective principals. PLCs provide the content for both programs as the school led by each principal strives to become a PLC.

Looking Ahead

For more than 20 years the BYU–Public School Partnership has been evolving as a work in progress. The challenges are dizzying, but the opportunities are energizing. We are reminded of a statement made by John Dewey (1929) about the human tendency to quest after certainty when facing a "precarious and hazardous world" like that found in the schools. "[T]he cultivation," he wrote, "of the feeling [of certainty gives] man courage and confidence [to] enable him to carry the burdens of life more successfully" (p. 33). But, he observed, the feeling is an illusion. There are no certainties, no guarantees of student learning and no permanent fixes to educational problems. But we do find an abundance of goodwill among educators, an impressive body of knowledge and

experience, and often a deep longing to improve practice and to engage in meaningful interaction about teaching and learning.

Steps to Take

When embedded in worthy aims, like the Agenda for Education in a Democracy, PLCs offer an alternative to the programmatic imperatives and forms of motivation that flow from the existing "excessive direction and punishment regime" that Bottery (2003) discusses (p. 200). As Wenger (1998) observes, learning takes place at the point where experience meets competence. Limitations in understanding and ability are best overcome when conditions for success are in place and when, as literally thousands of studies of efficacy suggest, there is good reason to believe success is possible, even likely. Building to strength is one key; publicly celebrating success, which is an important part of any partnership-sponsored gathering, is another—as is learning from failure. Still another comes from the power of the Agenda to encourage reimagining the nature of teaching and learning as cooperative social practices. And, of course, it is important to keep talking—to build and maintain institutional conditions that inspire and enable engagement. While the challenges are many, a determined and proven partnership-wide commitment to create, nurture, and extend PLCs builds confidence and trust and encourages development of individual and collective competence. This is a message consistently sent by participants in the Associates Program, the Principals Academy, and LPP.

Exercise

Form your own Associates group by inviting colleagues to join with you to read, study, and discuss *Education for Everyone.* Based on this reading, analyze the purposes of your work and in relationship to Goodlad's Agenda for Education in a Democracy. Explore the 20 postulates and identify how and to what degree your institution embraces these conditions for institutional renewal. Identify additional works for study and continue meeting and talking. Invite others to join the discussion.

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CHAPTER 5

Professional Development Schools: Learning Communities for Leaders and Teachers as Change Agents

Maria Sudeck, Virginia Doolittle, & Peter Rattigan

Coping With the Challenges of Change

What Gets in the Way

Public school personnel often lack the capacity to implement practical, collaborative strategies for improving instruction or articulating priorities (Doolittle & Rattigan, 2007; Fullan, 2007). Similarly, researchers have noted the absence of skilled leaders to guide the teaching and learning process in schools (Fullan, 2007; Reeves, 2004). With competing views of teaching and learning intruding on classroom operations (Elmore, 2004), multiple sets of standards—namely, national, state, and even Professional Development School (PDS) standards—impede progress toward achieving learner outcomes. Further, national and state standards do not always align with each other, thus creating confusion about what is expected of learners. Consequently, lack of clarity about what is important often results in efforts to simultaneously attend to multiple innovations (Elmore, 2004). Based on our experience working with teachers, although they are knowledgeable about content and curriculum innovations, they are not proficient in implementing them. Further complicating effective instruction is the lack of adequate common planning time and support for professional development (Doolittle & Rattigan, 2007).

Absence of effective teaching practices results in a failure to identify or confront poor teaching (Little, Gearhart, Curry, & Kafka, 2003). Little (1990) observes that a school's culture impacts faculty and can "mediate against meaningful improvement by maintaining norms of privacy and isolation" and that the resulting "isolating and compartmentalized structure" (Darling-Hammond, Mullmaster, & Cobb, 1995, p. 103) discourages meaningful interaction among teachers. With many school officials unfamiliar with how to create partnerships capable of promoting authentic collaboration and joint work (Little, 1990), we must acknowledge that expertise to build capacity is

necessary for meaningful collaboration (Murphy & Meyers, 2008). It is fairly common, however, for faculty groups to engage in improvement activities without first acquiring the necessary skills, knowledge, and dispositions for collaborative work.

Modifying school practices is not for the inexperienced. Fullan (1993) explains that the current focus on standards has left schools to overrely on "solutions" that resemble first-order change, which is something that initially appears to be change but occurs only on the surface and is neither embedded in daily practice nor systemic within institutions. Characterizing this as tinkering, Fullan notes that second-order change, or institutionalizing how educators perceive and interact with students in a positive and constructive manner, is required to raise achievement levels for a growing and diverse population of learners. In addition, sharing concrete strategies for implementing best practices can provide the necessary scaffold for carrying out other recommendations. Acquiring sufficient knowledge of the how-tos can help avoid the fragmentation that is typically associated with recipe-like strategies for change.

Regardless of whether a change is voluntary or imposed, it involves some unpleasant emotional responses, such as loss, anxiety, and struggle (Fullan, 2001). He describes "zones of uncertainty" within which these responses to change take place. His research, along with Schön's (1971), suggests that real change involves working through these zones, confronting them, and being able to move forward in a systematic way. For faculty, understanding any change initiative involves a learning curve from the outset. Initially, participants often experience a sense of being "lost at sea," combined with the frustration of confronting more information than the group can handle. By allowing sufficient time for conversations about the sources of their discomfort, stakeholders were better able to develop a sense of the purpose and goals of the initiative.

What Is Needed

Preparing school leaders and teachers to become change agents capable of leading second-order change implies that they have sufficient capacity to diagnose the nature of the academic challenges to be met. More importantly, somewhere along the way they have acquired the skills and competencies for meeting them and are prepared to lead change initiatives. More specifically, with the bulk of challenges aimed at improving instruction residing with classroom teachers, they can serve as change agents who are catalysts to innovations and new practices. Thus, faculty acquiring the capacity for modifying and refocusing school culture on the core mission of schools—teaching and learning—becomes the major challenge.

While it is likely that most partner schools lack appropriate structures for supporting joint work, Newman and Wehlage (1995) raise a valid point regarding school change, namely, that the mere presence of a formal structure is inadequate for accelerating student achievement as noted at the retreat:

> We saw examples of teachers being organized into teams, committees, or departments but having no significant periods of time to work together. In the SRS [school restructuring study], professional community was higher in schools that had more time for planning in smaller groups, such as teams and committees with major responsibilities for instruction, curriculum, and assessment. (p. 38)

Although teacher preparation programs are important in developing the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions for systemic change, accomplishing the second-order

changes required by standards-based reform requires multiple organizational structures supporting the critical work of teachers. Such critical change requires a mission and vision centered on student learning. Teacher contracts must allow for common planning time dedicated to ensuring vertical and horizontal articulation, building curriculum scaffolding, and reviewing student assessment data. It also requires that university faculty, teacher candidates, and school practitioners engage in regular dialogue about best practices.

In order to create an environment that supports professional learning communities (PLCs), a general understanding of the change process is a key element. Group process is one through which two or more people join together to accomplish agreed-upon goals or tasks. Researchers suggest that four critical components must be examined and infused in the process for it to be successful, namely, a clear understanding of the communication process; a clear mission, goals, and objectives; a strategic plan; and group membership and group decision-making (Napier & Gershenfeld, 2001). This process assumes the presence of effective leadership (Fullan, 2007).

Clarity of mission with an established written set of goals and objectives is another critical component of group process. These are essential as the group begins to ask, "Why are we here and what are we doing?" The mission provides the vision and the "heart" of the group. The goals then become specific, quantifiable, and outcome based. As the group members analyze the goals, they can develop objectives as tools to achieve the group goals. The strategic plan answers the group's question, "How will we achieve these goals and objectives?" In an educational setting, the plan should provide functional strategies that incorporate day-to-day activities. These activities are designed around the overreaching implementation of the plan and focus on achieving the goals (Napier & Gershenfeld, 2001).

Embedded in a clear understanding of the group communication process are many factors that must be considered in order for this process to be effective. There are two, however, that we believe are essential elements for success: opportunities for meaningful feedback and a mechanism or strategy to deal with group tension and defensiveness.

Group membership and group decision-making involve cohesiveness and productivity. In order for the group members to believe that their voice is important, the group process must include a mechanism for joint decision-making that involves all stakeholders. Top-down decisions do not increase productivity and they erode group cohesiveness (Fox, 1987). In addition, the group must establish its own system for solving problems. Hirokawa's (1983) research suggests that successful problem-solving groups tend to develop a systematic procedure that helps them analyze a problem step by step, reducing the tendency to leap to premature solutions (Fullan, 2007).

The Potential of PDSs

We believe that the organizational innovation most likely to create the knowledge, skills, and dispositions for creating schools that are able to enhance student learning is the PDS. A PDS is a P–12 school that has a formalized, often contractual, partnership with a division or college of education to serve as a "laboratory" for best practices and field research (Mullen & Lick, 1999). With its mission centered on "professional preparation of candidates, faculty development, and inquiry directed at the improvement of practice" (NCATE, 2001, p. 1), the members of a PDS endeavor to develop cultures that benefit teaching and learning processes.

Equally important, the PDS model provides an important organizational structure with great potential for shared leadership, allowing for critical elements of the learning community (Schwab, 1976) to replace the traditional private practice of teaching. In short, the mission, vision, and purpose of a PDS, as it relates to K–12 teaching and learning, teacher education, and educational leadership, translate into a workable framework for creating cultures aimed at improving student learning.

In 1999, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Educators (NCATE) developed standards for PDSs based on four core tenets. The standards acknowledge the potential of PDS partnerships to improve educational outcomes interactively in K–12 and higher education. Recognizing the existence of a dichotomy between the promise underpinning PDS partnerships and the tendency for these partnerships to exist in name but not necessarily in practice, one standard articulates supports needed for developing PDS partnerships. In addition, the standards function as a framework for assessment that in turn enables PDS partnerships to receive feedback regarding the work undertaken.

Improving teaching and learning through the medium of the PDS requires a symbiosis of teacher education programs and PLCs. Focusing on student needs, PDS members recognize that learning, grounded in research and practitioner knowledge occurs best in a real-world setting. With the ability to generate new knowledge, school–university partnerships benefit multiple stakeholders and potentially impact policy. Blending expertise and resources through redesign and restructuring and supporting their complex mission, PDS partners are intentional and transparent in meeting the needs of a diverse body of students through their focus on building learning communities. This becomes critical in bridging reform strategies that close the research and practice gaps identified in teacher preparation programs. In order to avoid the "in name only" status of many partnerships, NCATE provides standards to ensure rigor and accountability.

In fully matured PDSs, university faculty members exercise a significant role in the school, acting as change agents by developing deep relationships with faculty and staff. Teacher candidates can spend considerable time reflecting with clinical teachers on their observations and experiences, as well as attend regular onsite meetings, such as Brown Bag Lunch seminars. Additionally, K–12 teachers may co-teach or be in charge of college teacher preparation classes, and college courses may be taught at PDS partner sites. Thus teachers learn from college faculty; college faculty members learn from teachers; teacher candidates learn from both college and school faculty; and everyone, including students, potentially benefits (Teitel, 1997).

Case Study I: A PDS Retreat

In May 2006, the University Professional Development Network located in the southern tier of a mid-Atlantic state sponsored by a local comprehensive university with its 12 partner schools (one high school, one middle school, and 10 elementary schools) participated in a daylong retreat to build and model learning communities. A learning community is an organization or group of people in which the capacity to create desired results occurs through multiple opportunities for continuous learning. In a learning community, we see peers as colleagues who advance the group toward positive growth and change. In addition to engaging in joint work (Little, 1990) involving the university and its partners, examining what works, and discovering ways in which

improvements could be made; the groups of faculty, teachers, and school administrators were charged with addressing these four goals:

1. Building and modeling learning community consistent with PDS standards and Rowan University's College of Education conceptual framework
2. Building capacity for inquiry by engaging in joint work (collaboration)
3. Examining what members were doing, how the PDS was working, and how it could be improved
4. Recognizing PDS/Professional Development District partners for their efforts and contributions

More specifically, retreat participants were questioned about whether their PDS had a shared vision, mission, and beliefs related to teaching and learning. University faculty then requested that participants consider how the core mission of teaching and learning was addressed in their school or district and which current teaching and learning practices supported the school goals. Next, participants were invited to list the instructional practices currently in use, and to examine how these strategies were selected and assessed. Further, participants were invited to describe how planning time was utilized and whether the partnership provided opportunities to integrate the teaching, learning, and assessment. The intent of the questions posed by the retreat facilitators centered on establishing a baseline for improving student learning in fall 2007 by examining what practices were in place, what gaps existed, and what needed to be done in order to move forward.

Enacting PDS Cultures

With over 70 participants including principals, supervisors, teachers, parents, and PDS liaisons, retreat goals centered on building both individual and collective capacity for improving the classroom teaching process back in their districts. Stating their desire to understand what specific strategies or programs comprise best practices, retreat participants identified a need to go beyond the typical standards-based, capacity-building activities toward targeted professional development. Groups were constructed on a building-by-building basis with smaller buildings faculty grouped with sister schools also reporting a need for more collaboration by visiting other classrooms and observing their peers. They believed that seeing what other PDSs were doing was critical for helping them improve student achievement. Uncertain about what constituted best practice(s) in the classroom, participants theorized further that "field trips for research" and "study groups that include both school site personnel and university liaisons" were likely to improve classroom instruction. Partners also called for increased availability of graduate courses.

In general, the experienced classroom teachers identified a need for additional focused professional development. They were ready to learn more about how to deliver more effective instruction and to enhance student achievement. Newer teachers, however, reported less clarity about their professional development needs. Both believed that having study groups at the partner sites should involve university faculty who can interpret what the research about improving student achievement in core content areas was actually saying and help determine if the strategies the research advocated were likely to improve student learning. Teacher academies were mentioned

again as a more advanced way to learn about, discuss, and reflect upon best practices and to understand how one would identify a good idea for the classroom if one came across such an idea. Interestingly, participant comments pointed to university faculty as the experts and absent were references to their own expertise and potential contribution to advancing learning, an issue identified but also transcended in Mullen and Lick's (1999) earlier study.

The importance of organizational coherence emerged as participants reported how school structures and organization mediated against collaboration, largely because there was no common planning time or appropriate space to engage in dialogue about their PDS experience. Our partners recognized that they needed to create extended opportunities to regularly confer with each other. Several teams indicated that they would even "welcome the opportunity to meet after school" to consider appropriate strategies for improving instruction. One teacher confided:

> Basically, we don't have planning time. . . . It's doubtful that anyone in the district sees this as a need. . . . We don't know who we can talk to about this. . . . Where [and whom] do we go to get this kind of support? We'd even be willing to meet after school. We need to be able to talk about what we're doing.

Framing their concerns about their overall lack of capacity for teaching, teams also identified, as an obstacle, the large number of teachers not currently involved with the PDS. Their lack of understanding about the purpose of the PDS and their subsequent lack of commitment to its goals made it challenging for institutionalizing PDS practices. Wanting to know what they could do to "bring others into the process" was a common refrain among participants. More specifically, an elementary principal observed:

> What's clear to us after reviewing the questions you've posed is the influx of new faculty. . . . We've had a huge turnover and so we have a lot of new faculty who know very little about what a PDS is. . . . They also don't know what we've tried to do [or have done] in the past. We need to bring them up to date . . . bring them onboard. That means we need to pretty much start again at the beginning with reviewing the purposes of PDS and why we do it.

While collaboration was clearly the preferred strategy for improving instruction, participants also recognized the value of developing or expanding opportunities for peer coaching and mentoring. In listing strategies "worth engaging in," teams specifically called for university faculty and teacher candidates to become "a more integral part of the collaborative process." Partners wanted university faculty to actively participate in their efforts to learn. They wanted "critical friends" whom they could trust to tell them when they were doing things well and when they were not. This could only occur, they stated, if university faculty took the time to engage in what schools believed to be "meaningful work" and avoided the superficial role of "PDS liaison." One local administrator believed that "building people need to meet regularly [with university faculty] to discuss and develop plans to implement improved strategies for learning."

At the conclusion of the day, participants were asked to identify any additional barriers that might mediate against their accomplishing the desired outcomes for their school. Many of the identified barriers involved the lack of adequate communication between school personnel, especially to the benefit of new faculty members. The

participants identified the constant teacher turnover in urban and rural sites as a significant barrier to both the effective implementation and institutionalization of PDS tenets. School personnel also wanted to have more time with the university partners, suggesting the need for a bona fide partnership rather than a few scattered opportunities for exchanging information about preservice teachers.

Other structural problems related to the relationship between the university and the PDS partner sites included a perceived lack of support for beginning teachers in several of the schools. The absence of an available faculty member to serve as the university liaison limited the communication between the university and the school. Frustrated because there was no one with whom they could communicate their frustration to or report problems that emerged during the year, they appealed to the university to provide more support for partnership teachers.

While this exchange between university faculty and school partners probably represented a defining moment during the retreat, as we continued to analyze the data, of greater concern was the concern expressed by both university and P–12 faculty that they lacked confidence in knowing what constituted best practice. Uncertain how they might secure implementation of these new best practices once they were identified, participants were even less certain what the new strategies would look like. In turn, this part of the discussion raised questions about the possibility of visiting high performing schools. Closely related to this issue were more specific questions about how to engage others in refining the instruction process and subsequently engage different stakeholder groups such as parents and community members in improving the teaching and learning process.

We believe that the outcomes from the retreat point to strategies for improving future PDS efforts. For example, the PDS research largely concentrates on teacher preparation rather than the implementation of partnerships and school improvement efforts cite a key source. As a result, partners often attempt to promote improvements (instructional, curricular, and cultural) that emerge from their existing knowledge base and the experience of partners. It follows that schools with high teacher turnover have a lesser knowledge base from which to draw.

It is evident to us that teachers must acquire the skills for implementing school reform in order to emerge as leaders. Without this critical skill set, innovations with enormous potential for improving learning will likely amount to little more than tinkering. Likewise, university faculty must acquire a greater understanding of effective teaching in the classroom, school, and district. Finally, one may argue that what effective school leaders do makes more of a difference in the teaching and learning process than what teacher preparation programs do. Teachers and administrators at the retreat, on the other hand, believed that student academic success relied heavily on their commitment to collaborate with each other, share experiences and effective practices and ideas, and explore ways of solving various problems cooperatively with colleagues.

Summary

Herein we have described change and group decision-making processes that effect real improvement in teaching and learning in P–12 education. We contend that the PDS partnership model provides a compelling venue for accomplishing coherent second-order change in schools. Effective PDSs emphasize collaboration, building capacity, and providing equitable opportunities for all students and allow PDS partners to experience a professional learning community as they navigate the winding and often confusing path to school improvement.

The case study illustrated combines theory and practice to benefit PDS partners. It is an example of using grounded theory and critical friends in universities to identify barriers and explore avenues leading to school improvement. Understanding the theory and practice of school change, and applying them in a PDS setting with stakeholders of equal status, allows PDSs participants to act as change agents in accomplishing real improvement in teaching and learning.

Discussion Questions and Activities

1. Why are PDSs good venues for developing learning communities?
2. Consider the school culture in which you work, or a school culture that you have most recently experienced, such as a field-based practicum. What are some of the obstacles or challenges that you would face if you chose to initiate a change?
3. The concept of teacher leadership is discussed in the chapter in the context of PDSs. However, teacher leaders can be developed and encouraged in all school settings. Do you see yourself as a potential teacher leader? Why or why not?

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CHAPTER 6

Teacher Education Is Everybody's Business: Northern Guilford High School—A Professional Development Community

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Teacher preparation has come under serious attack in recent years (Cochran-Smith, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, & Gatlin, 2005; Tierney, 2001). Closer relationships between schools and universities have been advanced as a solution to improving preservice teacher quality, empowering teachers to enhance their classroom practice, and merging instructional theory and practice in schools (Burton & Greher, 2007; the Holmes Group, 1990, 1995; Levine, 2002). The creation of Professional Development Schools (PDSs) in which university faculty, school administrators and teachers, and teacher education students work together to learn and grow as professionals is representative of best practice in educational reform (Levine & Trachman, 1997; Shroyer & Yahnke, 2007; Teitel, 1997). However, addressing the curricular, instructional, and socioemotional problems engendered in the American high school has proven to be particularly difficult and complex. In addition, the organizational governance of high schools and universities continues to burden their capacity to prepare secondary school teachers and to develop secondary school personnel.

In this writing, we describe our efforts to bring university teacher preparation faculty and high school faculty and staff together to create a professional development community focused on teacher preservice preparation, practitioner professional development, inquiry to enhance practice, and collaboration to improve student learning. We have collaborated at Northern Guilford High School (NGHS) in Greensboro, North Carolina, to develop a comprehensive Professional Development High School (PDHS). We call this project a comprehensive PDHS because faculty from the Schools of Education, Music, and Health and Human Performance as well as the College of

Arts and Sciences at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) have been working with high school faculty, staff, and administrators to improve teacher preparation, professional development, and K–12 student performance. Description of our experience as faculty members and school personnel who are involved in the school's planning team should ideally advance the national conversation about school–university partnerships while encouraging collaboration of university community with public school faculty and staff.

Context-Setting: Nation, State, and Site

One of the most pressing issues in public school education is high school reform (Achieve, Inc., & National Governors Alliance, 2005; Alliance for Excellent Education, 2003; National Association of Secondary Principals [NASSP], 1996, 2002). The federal government's No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) (Public Law 107–110, 2002) mandate in addition to state-generated accountability measures require that K–12 students perform at predetermined levels of academic proficiency. High schools have been particularly resistant to the curricular, instructional, and assessment changes necessary to meet these demands.

Another area of high school reform relates to improving teaching quality through scientifically based research methods (NCLB, 2002) and aligning teaching with the academic standards established for students. The notion of "rigor, relevance, and relationships" (Gates Foundation, 2008) has been heralded in reform efforts, suggesting "what teachers know and can do makes the crucial difference in what children learn" (National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, 1996, p. 6; see also Darling-Hammond, 2006; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). One cannot but agree that teachers are crucial to school improvement, thus candidate training in teacher education—in this case preservice teachers who plan to teach in high schools—is of utmost importance. While the placement of interns and student teachers is one way to provide the best training and professional development for candidates, the locations of placements can, at times, be problematic, particularly when a relationship with the public school and the university has not been secured. A promising bridge in these relationships is the site-based professional development partnership that links higher education institutions and secondary schools.

PDSs are partnerships linking schools and universities for the purpose of enhancing (1) candidate preparation; (2) teacher professional development; (3) inquiry-based collaboration (specifically aimed at the improvement of pedagogical practice); and (4) improved K–12 student achievement (Holmes Group, 1991; NCATE, 2001; Teitel, 1998). Research is still lacking concerning the particulars of creating and using a PDS partnership to prepare high school students *and* as an environment for the achievement of the multiple purposes just outlined. Furthermore, research is also scant regarding the formation of a comprehensive PDHS. At these schools, not only do educators within schools of education express value for and recognize the preparation of preservice teachers and the continuing professional education of inservice teachers, but so do faculty members at other colleges (e.g., arts and sciences, music, health and human performance). Additionally, through the structure of a PDHS, the strength of the collaboration is twofold: Collaboration occurs among faculty, public school administrators, high school faculty, students, parents, and community members, and collaboration also exists among faculty within and outside the school of education.

A Case Scenario: Getting Started—How the PDHS Began

The NGHS project began with the passage of a school bond referendum in 2004. Shortly thereafter, coauthor Joseph Yeager was asked by Dr. Terry Grier, then superintendent of Schools for Guilford County Schools, to serve as principal designee for a new high school being planned in the district. Yeager accepted this leadership challenge and began the planning process by creating his instructional team, a group of practicing teachers from across the district. The teachers, along with administrators who were selected and parents and community members, have worked closely together since 2005 to develop a vision for the new school and to find ways to operationalize it. Additionally, these constituent groups collaborated to create a culture of teamwork and, among numerous other tasks, began exploring what supporting structures would be necessary to implement the creation of a school reflecting the needs of students and communities in the new millennium.

During 2005–2006, dialogue among members of the Secondary Teacher Education Program Committee at UNCG indicated the desire for secondary-level, preservice teachers to be clustered within a smaller number of public schools, known as modified professional development school sites. The purpose of the clustering was to assign interdisciplinary teams of preservice teachers to one school so that university supervisors would have greater access, thus increasing their ability to assist more effectively. Also, national-level, teacher education publications (Levine & Trachman, 1997; Shroyer & Yahnke, 2007; Teitel, 1997) have advocated that teacher education become everybody's business in universities. To accomplish this, university departments outside of schools of education that provide teacher preparation coursework need to work closely with their counterparts inside schools of education. This is particularly necessary in secondary education where content preparation is more intensive and occurs in colleges such as those previously identified.

The creation of this PDHS was spurred on because state and federal accountability systems have caused internship and student teacher placements to become increasingly hard to find. Teachers were less likely to be willing to take on a student teacher and cede responsibility for instruction since the results of annual student tests could affect employment status and were made publicly available. In addition, the teacher shortage, exacerbated by accountability pressures, has resulted in the availability of fewer accomplished, veteran teachers to mentor teacher preparation students properly.

The formation of Northern Guilford High School provided a unique opportunity for the development of this PDHS. NGHS was the first new high school built in the district in over 20 years. When Yeager was named principal, he was serving as an administrator in a central office; he was permitted to remain in this position while planning for the development of the school. These circumstances gave Yeager, in his role as school principal, the opportunity to begin planning and recruiting teachers well before the school was built. He invited university faculty to join with the high school faculty to plan for an innovative high school that would create opportunities for collaboration on teacher candidate preparation, as well as improving teacher practice and professional learning, school improvement, and research on teaching and learning.

As the coauthors and teachers undertook creating a vision for the school, the most compelling desire became to develop a site that would be responsive to the needs of all students while preparing them for the challenges of the new millennium. As a

planning team, we placed special emphasis on preparation for success in postsecondary education. Our values about education are captured in this statement of beliefs. *We believe* that

- our school is a community of learners;
- our curriculum is rich, rigorous, and relevant;
- our school fosters responsible citizenship and service;
- our school values the individual and fosters personal growth;
- our school is dynamic, hospitable, and safe;
- our school maintains high expectations;
- our teachers are dedicated to inspire and challenge;
- our teachers engage our students in subject-focused, high-quality work;
- our school is a source of hope and optimism for our students, community, and the world; and
- our school supports creativity and innovation.

The major problem the planning team confronted involved determining what kind of change needed to occur in order for us to reform the traditional high school model. Our desire was to create a high school program that would address the goals of meeting the needs of all students, thus satisfying the educational challenges of the 21st century. In addition, we focused on steps needed for developing the structure, processes and culture that would allow these changes not only to occur but also to be sustained over time.

The planning team quickly came to the realization that the implementation of the PDHS model would provide an opportunity to integrate two elements essential to reform: (1) better preparation of students for the challenges of the current century, and (2) improvement of the preparation of both preservice and inservice teachers to help perpetuate best practices around the continued improvement of teaching and learning. Our preliminary study results indicate that there are no more than a handful of *comprehensive* PDHSs throughout the United States and that their influence on secondary school reform in general has been limited. Although a PDHS may not be a reform model that works for all high schools, partnerships between teacher preparation programs and high schools could contribute significantly to secondary school reform.

A New Model for Student Teaching

In the traditional student teaching model, candidates are taught to expect a "lone wolf" approach in which they experience a short phase of classroom observation followed by a gradual takeover of classes. As they assume teaching duties, they are generally expected to write their lesson plans in isolation, have them approved by their supervising teacher, and teach with little or no feedback. In some schools, they may be presented with a pacing guide or canned lesson plans. Regardless of the situation, in the traditional model there is usually little time spent planning, especially around the need to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of individual students. In addition, little time is spent on common planning by curriculum area. The student teacher's plan is rarely critiqued for content, strategies, or effectiveness. As a result, student teachers rarely ever build the necessary relationships or learn from the experiences and modeling

of the senior teachers (Bullough et al., 2002; Bullough et al., 2003; Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998; Wilson & Saleh, 2000).

The coteaching model adopted under the PDHS at NGHS is different. On their first day at the school, student teachers interact with students. They are introduced as a coteacher with the expectation that students will begin to build a relationship and count on their support. They are not relegated to observing at the back of the room but are instead encouraged to move around the class, helping with on-task behavior, assisting students and/or the teacher where needed, reviewing assignments with students and working to generate solutions to problems. They also actively plan lessons with their cooperating teachers. They observe as the teacher models a strategy or classroom expectation. Through all such actions, they become an integral part of the classroom, as if they were partner teachers. They also begin working with other faculty members in the department. When students need a "pull out" for remediation, for example, the student teacher teaches a manageable part of the formal curriculum. When modifications are required, the student teacher assumes those responsibilities. Each day, integration of the student teacher into the instructional process increases until gradually the two teachers becomes coteachers in the classroom. The lead teacher sometimes assumes the role of the assistant, offering help to students where needed, assisting with student behavior or targeting the needs of a small group.

This coteaching model might be explained as a "ME, WE, 2, YOU" strategy. First the lead teacher models the teaching strategy, then s/he and the student teacher work together to plan how the latter can produce the same effect. Together they teach a similar lesson. And finally, as the student teacher feels more comfortable, s/he leads the teaching of the lesson. The time involved may be short or extended, depending on the degree of difficulty inherent in the instructional strategy or the comfort level of the student teacher. As the process unfolds, the lead teacher and student teacher are expected to build a relationship of trust and comfort that stimulates collaborative reflection as a natural part of the process.

The UNCG–NGPDHS Conceptual Framework

The collaboration between UNCG and NGHS has as its foundation shared goals and a conceptual framework; these were developed through our joint work in this school–university partnership project. Figure 6.1 illustrates the UNCG–NGPDHS (Northern Guilford Professional Development High School) conceptual framework. Our partnership is designed to improve K–12 student performance by focusing on preservice and inservice teacher performance. The supports in place emphasize professional learning for the improvement of educational practice. Our research and service agendas for both university and high school faculty include conducting research into the role of relationships in student and teacher performance.

In summary, the goals of the UNCG–NGPDHS project are to

- articulate an understanding of the institutional relationships and arrangements necessary for establishing a genuinely collaborative PDHS;
- develop collaborative models of practice that improve candidate preparation, teacher professional development, inquiry-based collaboration, and enhanced student achievement;

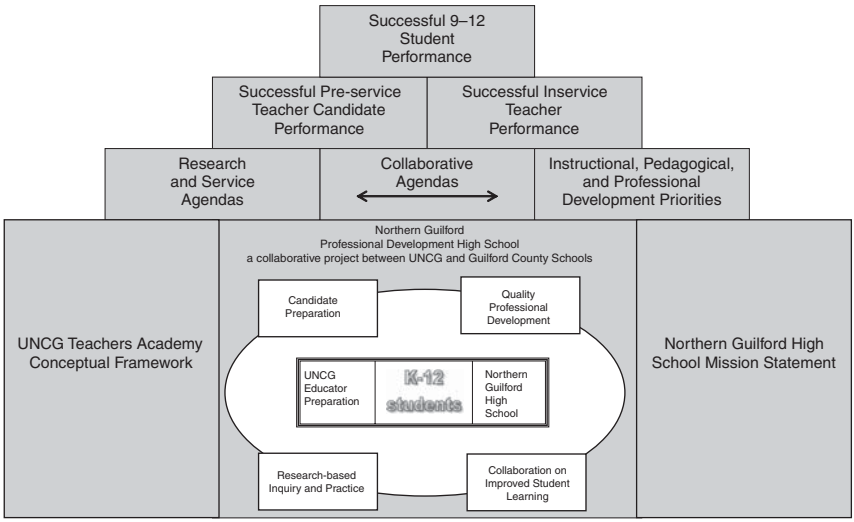

Figure 6.1 UNCG–Northern High School: A professional development, teaching and learning community

Source: Lashley, Cooper, McCall, Yeager, & Ricci, 2008

- establish UNCG–NGHS relationships that inculcate inquiry-based collaboration into the culture of candidate preparation, professional development, and enhanced student performance; and
- plan for UNCG–NGHS partnership activities that focus on inquiry-based collaboration, candidate preparation, professional development, and enhanced student performance.

Although we have already experienced some success during our first year of implementation (2008), as in any highly complex schooling venture, the school and university partners agree that much is yet to be accomplished. Those of us faculty members who are involved as partners with the school are convinced that lessons can be learned from our work that could help others in their efforts to reform high schools and teacher preparation. We recognize that high school reform has not been pervasive or successful. Needs illustrated in the research focus on student failure, dropout rates, and lack of student engagement. Isolated efforts throughout the country have been made to restructure the high school. Because of the requirements of selectivity and the need for partnerships, we understand that the PDHS framework will not be applicable to all high schools. However, what we and other school reformers have discovered is that the act of initiating change and restructuring high schools can provide valuable insight to others interested in both spearheading and improving schools.

Why Community?

Many scholars have encouraged greater emphasis on community at the high school level, explicating numerous intellectual and emotional benefits that often evolve from

a strong community experience (e.g., Christiansen & Ramadevi, 2002; Dewey, 1916; Sizer, 1992; Wood, 1992). Wood (1992) recognizes that developing a school community requires work and nurturing, and that "building institutions is easy, [but] building communities is not" (p. 101). However, it is community that enables learning and growth in addition to providing the necessary security and belonging for which all human beings long (Christiansen et al., 2002; Wood, 1992). A common concern surrounding high school education is students' lack of devotion to and understanding of community. Richmond (2002) recognized that

> students today want to be active learners but they feel very stressed and disconnected both from their peers and their faculty. Students express a greater sense of loneliness, and they seem less skilled in making the connections that would have them feel like members of a community. (p. 66)

What is Community?

According to Wood (1992), three basic principles can be used to guide the development of community. First, educators and students must be surrounded by an open, comfortable space. Second, educators must help students to become actively involved in their own education, and thus to gain control over not only their learning but also their lives. Finally, students must understand the value and experience of being "part of something greater than themselves, realizing the strength that lies in working together for a common goal" (Wood, p. 118). Community building provides all community members with an appreciation of the memories developed and hope for future community engagement.

Many scholars think of community as that which involves and promotes both belonging and bonding (e.g., Christiansen, 2002; McDill, 1973; Wood, 1992). However, it is important not to forget that community shaping and maintenance must also include an individual's understanding of the Other and an appreciation for personal narratives (Christiansen, 2002). While we must work toward "likemindedness" in any community (Dewey, 1916), we must also care for and support members to gradually share their stories and ideas. While community undoubtedly shapes its members, members are also shaping the common beliefs, interests, and values of their communities (Christiansen, 2002). Even in the most ideal environments, these norms and behaviors cannot guarantee community, but they can lead school constituents toward working together to develop a strong school ethic and the "connections [that] make community in the larger sense possible" (Wood, p. 119).

Study Description

To better understand existing meanings of community for the faculty and administrators of NGHS, coauthor Jessica McCall performed a qualitative study involving eight individual interviews and participant observation. Because the incoming staff and faculty of NGHS had undergone numerous and diverse experiences with community, and because they would all be instrumental in building this school community, it was important to hear their voices to give meaning to their "experiences and lives" (Christiansen et al., 2002, p. 93). As individuals shared their perceptions, we were able to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the expectations and requirements for NGHS

to become a community of learners that benefits all involved. This study provided a foundation to negotiate a common narrative for Northern Guilford that is continuously "shaping and being shaped by each other in a community" (Christiansen et al., p. 95).

Coauthor McCall (2007) gathered information from eight teachers, through in-depth interviews, concerning their thoughts regarding community characteristics and development, in addition to behaviors and philosophies that both create and harm community; potential benefits of school community on teaching and learning; and the overall importance of and possibilities for community in a comprehensive PDHS. Individual interviews were scheduled at the interviewees' convenience and lasted approximately 45 minutes. An open-ended interview structure was used for flexibility and the opportunity for reciprocal interaction between the participant and the researcher (Maxwell, 2005; Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). The interview protocol followed the design of Schensul et al. (1999) and included demographic questions, followed by work-related questions, and then more general questions that merged into more specific prompts. The interviews were audiotaped and the researcher transcribed them.

Study Results

The results of this study were fairly consistent with previous research and suggestions from numerous scholars (e.g., Christiansen, 2002; Dewey, 1916; McDill, 1973; Sizer, 1992; Wood, 1992). In defining community, participants' understandings of their relationship and purpose differed somewhat; however, all interviewees noted the involvement of a group of people. One interviewee believed that the members of a community must work together for the good of the whole, while three others focused on the importance of working toward a common goal or purpose. Three other interviewees focused specifically on the culture and belief system to which one must be connected or committed.

According to almost all participants, positive school community occurs through providing support and comfort, and intentionally helping others feel valued. Six interviewees mentioned all or most of the terms cited earlier for the description of community. The participants believed that all members of a community need to feel that their voices and contributions are important. In addition, four mentioned the safety that a community member should and often does feel when s/he belongs to or is part of something larger than the self. To illustrate, one participant had experienced a strong sense of community in a previous teaching position. The teachers "felt very safe"—they would "bounce ideas off of each other" and "were all very willing to listen" to their colleagues. The students in a school may also begin to feel safe and experience a sense of belonging as well, as another interviewee pointed out: "Some kids never belong to anything and [this school community] may be the first thing that they are a part of, which is a big deal." Ultimately, the "more safety you build into the classroom and the school, the free-er people will feel to try things." Community members seem to desire as well as need the safety of the community. As one of the teachers stated, "I will strive to reach any level that's there because I know that it's going to be alright if I don't make it."

Another common theme identified as a critical element of community is the need for strong relationships to be built and continuous interaction to occur with students. Five of the eight interviewees emphasized the need for student engagement and support. Relationships, communication, and collaboration were seen as important among faculty as well. These terms were the most frequently mentioned characteristics of and

strategies for developing community. It is worth noting that interviewees believed these factors were vital, both among the faculty and between the faculty and students.

Even with strong relationships in place, the NGHS faculty recognized the importance of continuous evaluation and improvement. Several interviewees noted the importance of support. They mentioned that community members should share what they know works and support each other with various ideas; however, the participants also believe that members must ask for support when it is needed and be open to new ideas. In addition, all community members must recognize their role as learners and be "willing to grow." Participants stated that the community members should continuously evaluate what works and what does not, and assess "where we are" and "how to get better."

As Greene (1993) suggests, educators must be cautious in seeking to establish school community, as many challenges exist to building a school community. One such example is the exclusion of those not invited or able to participate in the community. It is critical, then, to consider possible obstacles and difficulties that NGHS may face. First, we must recognize that the students in the school's district will be coming from two separate campuses in the school's districts and will have moved into the new school building in January 2008—the middle of the school year. Three of the interviewees mentioned the stigma already attached to the students' campuses and the difficulty of building and maintaining affability. Someone mentioned: "It will take a lot of work and get-togethers on neutral territory." In addition, because of the geographic and possibly socioeconomic differences, it may also be difficult to "get buy in from some parents."

Communities are connected by common interests and conditions. In addition, Shields (2003) reminds us that school personnel should not overlook the differences that students bring to the school community. As one NGHS participant recognized, it will be important to help students to maintain individuality in a large community. Unfortunately, within a community, the individuality of students can be misrepresented and community members can begin to fall into the trap of "groupthink" if differences are not recognized and appreciated. As one teacher stated, "We're creating a culture. You have students and parents coming from a different culture, that's why it's going to so important to build that sense of community which starts to establish the culture of the school."

Because difference is just one of the challenges encountered when building a school community, educators must also consider sociocultural expectations and experiences. One interviewee reminds us that "high schools are often divided by separateness and isolation" and that it will be difficult to break the habit being in "survival mode" because "that's what we've done for so long." In addition, many students, parents and grandparents are accustomed to competitiveness in schools, which may make it difficult to create a culture that highlights community and support.

Emphasis on community and support is exactly what NGHS plans to focus on as members of the school and UNCG work together to build a community that features a diverse population of faculty and students, parental support, a strong sense of purpose and community, and high academic expectations. This building process will undoubtedly continue to require hard work, commitment, resources, and extra help and time, but, as one interviewee stated, "Northern can be an outstanding school. It can be one of the top schools in the country." The structure of the new school building, advisee–advisor program, rural location, and opportunity for all students to

join clubs and activities are just a few of the promising aspects of NGHS that may very well lead to a strong community and, consequently, enhanced educational and communal experiences for students. One of the most promising aspects of NGHS is the unique opportunity to build a foundational school culture. As one participant noted, the students and faculty are "starting out on an adventure together."

The Northern school community is not an entirely new concept. As a teacher mentioned, "there are schools out there that have a really strong sense of community, a real strong sense of purpose; it's not something we are trying to invent, but I think it is rare." Many of this school's faculty members are excited to be a part of the development of its community, as another teacher confirmed, "teachers want to be here [and] for all the right reasons."

The NGHS faculty seemed optimistic about the professional development partnership as well. One participant specifically mentioned a few benefits that the partnership is expected to yield for student teachers: Northern plans to "bring interns and student teachers into [the] community" and "make some shifts in how student teaching occurs." The partnership will also benefit the teachers by providing them with more resources and an experience "they will take with them into the classrooms." As another participant stated, "We'll be able to access the latest research or information about how to excel and how to help kids. We won't have to do the same old thing over again; we can do some new things." Yet another teacher also saw advantages to having "an outsider looking in." S/he believed that having a third party present when foundational decisions were being made about NGHS's mission and vision could increase faculty awareness and openness. Finally, the partnership should benefit the students, participants believed, as they will "see other people as role models and meet potential employers." They will also gain "a more diverse perspective and involvement and I think our kids will learn more."

Overall, the majority of the teacher participants expressed confidence about the role that the partnership will play in the school's development and the potential outcomes of a strong school community. A participant reminded us that "having a community will always keep us on the forefront of what our goals should be." Most of the teachers seemed to believe that a strong community may result in little teacher turnover, increased student confidence and success, and overall excitement and engagement. Through community, "kids will learn more; teachers will be better teachers; kids will be better students; principals will be better principals." The engagement and commitment that such a school community requires enables many to attain higher levels of learning and encourages all members to learn: "Register for honors classes without hesitation" and they will want to come to school. In a strong community, students will be better able to self-regulate bullying and any mistreatment of peers and teachers, and begin to recognize the power of "we" over "I." Ultimately, the formation and feeling of community will "begin to move the school forward" and "people will start talking about why NGHS is different."

Steps to Take

Improving current high school conditions across the United States and developing a strong community that is inclusive of and meaningful for all involved (Sizer, 1996; Wood, 1992) will continue to be challenging. However, from the initial research undertaken, it is evident that NGHS educators are passionate about creating a community that welcomes and values all students. We believe that the lessons learned

through study of this school's development could help inform others as to how to go about implementing the vision and work of a PDHS while bringing about significant change within any high school.

It is our hope that time and effective implementation of community practices and behaviors will enable the NGHS educators to empower students to learn through collaboration and ultimately to enhance individual and communal growth. To ensure the continued development and growth of both school community and the university–school partnerships, the following steps can be considered;

1. Provide opportunities for university faculty and school personnel to meet together to discuss purposes, programs, and procedures
2. Offer coursework at high schools to allow faculty, teachers and administrators, and teacher candidates to interact regularly and to implement course content
3. Create research partnerships in which faculty, candidates, and school personnel engage in inquiry focused on school improvement
4. Foster a climate and culture in which faculty, candidates, and school personnel understand their joint responsibilities for K–12 student performance and
5. Articulate how the various roles and responsibilities of teachers and faculty improve job and program performance.

Exercise

Redesigning and reconfiguring the American high school is a challenge that 21st century educators must face. The case of NGHS offers a model for preparing preservice teachers, developing the capabilities of inservice teachers and administrators, and improving student performance within a context of professional community development and collaborative research. Through individual reflection, discussion, or experiential activities, these prompts could be used to encourage teachers (preservice or practicing) to reflect on community development in and between schools:

1. How can an emphasis on community facilitate efforts at reconceptualizing and redesigning the traditional high school?
2. What barriers to community exist in the cultures of American high schools?
3. What policy and practice norms stimulate (or discourage) professional community development?

Authors' Note

The UNCG Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants in Research and the Guilford County Schools' Research Review Committee approved this research in 2007. Approval included using the name of the school and the district.

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CHAPTER 7

The University Connection: Transformational Learning That Enhances Professional Learning Communities

Sandra Harris, Vicky Farrow, & Hollis Lowery-Moore

How do doctoral students apply learning experiences in the university classroom to create professional learning communities (PLCs) on their K–16 school campuses? We investigated this question with doctoral students in an educational leadership program that emphasizes transformational learning. For the purposes of this writing, we focus on student programmatic university experiences that promote PLCs within campus workplace settings.

Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical frameworks for this discussion are transformational learning and PLC.

Transformational Learning

In recent years, the focus in the educational literature has changed from learning for information ("what we know") termed *transfer learning* to learning for transformation ("how we know") (Baumgartner, 2003, p. 18). Freire (1970) provides an example of transformational learning in the form of emancipatory learning, noting that this type of learning has the goal to *transform* the world toward social justice. Mezirow's (1991, 2000) transformative theory is a recursive process that emphasizes discourse and self-reflection by critically assessing assumptions about the world, revising and exploring new belief systems, and planning a course of action to implement the new role. Brown (2003, 2006) further addresses the need for learners to participate in critical reflection through self-awareness and discourse.

Robertson (1996) argued that the one-dimensional, learner-centered approach to education that is traditional should instead be a two-dimensional, teacher-learner-centered

approach. Creating this teacher-learner-centered focus is necessary because the relationship between the teacher and the learner is based on trust and caring, necessary dynamics for transformational learning to occur for most learners. Brown (2003, 2006) posited that teachers must be active facilitators in the learning process and assume responsibility for student growth. Both teachers and their students must be engaged in implementing activities that require them to explore and examine their own assumptions, values, beliefs, experiences, and worldviews. In this way, educators' personal and professional leadership perspectives address student learning and equity in a more inclusive manner.

Transformational learning implies that schools are changed as people critically revise and replace old ideas and practices for new ways of educating students (Harris, 2005; Harris, Lowery-Moore & Farrow, 2008). Southworth (2005) noted that a critical element in changing a school's culture is that of continued learning. Schools today should be characterized by collaboration, shared leadership, responsibility for continued learning, and responsiveness to alternative ideas and approaches, all of which are components in PLCs (DuFour, 2004; Giancola & Hutchison, 2005; Southworth, 2005). This emphasis on continued learning suggests that a goal of leaders engaged in transformational learning and leadership is to develop school cultures where PLCs flourish.

PLC

PLCs are defined in a variety of ways. Hord (1997) conceptualizes PLCs as schools where all levels of leadership are committed to improving student learning through supportive and shared leadership, shared values, collective learning, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice. King (2002) defined PLCs as a group of professionals learning and developing together to improve practice associated with teaching and learning. Piggot-Irvine (2006) referred to a PLC as a "discourse community" where the focus is on "real work" (p. 2). In this way, PLCs become the supporting structure for schools to continuously transform themselves.

Several researchers have delineated characteristics of PLCs. Louis and Marks (1998) distinguished five variables characteristic of strong PLCs: (a) they have shared values and expectations linked to teaching, learning, and the role of the teacher; (b) they focus on improving student achievement; (c) they collaborate to share expertise; (d) they share through observation and coaching; and (e) they reflect on dialogue and examining assumptions around best practices. Thus, strong PLCs have resulted in improved student learning (Bryk, Camburn, & Louis, 1999; Hord & Rutherford, 1998; Reyes, Scribner & Paredes Scribner, 1999) and increased faculty morale as well as improved teaching skills and subject matter knowledge (Marks & Printy, 2003; Shellard, 2003). Additionally, DuFour, Dufour, Eaker and Karhanek (2004) have found that both adult and student learning increased when collaborative teacher cultures have focused on identifying student-learning needs and taking action to meet those needs.

Yet, the challenges of creating a campus culture for PLCs are demanding and can result in weak PLCs, due to issues such as teacher reluctance to collaborate, ineffective use of time, nonavailability of resources, and school size (Bezzina, 2006; Fullan, 2007; Giles & Hargreaves, 2006; Hord, 1997; Wells & Feun, 2007). Piggot-Irvine (2006) identified characteristics of weak PLCs as including dialogue that supports traditional norms and practices, shared low expectations, reinforcement of ineffective

practices, inappropriate understandings of collegiality, and collaboration without critical examination.

Additionally, Bezzina (2006) illuminated several important considerations for schools to consider in establishing PLCs. For example, leadership should be shared throughout the school among members at all levels. In this way, teachers are both leaders and supporters of leaders, and all play an important role in the effectiveness of PLCs. Fullan (2001) also noted that direction and leadership are essential for PLCs to function wisely and cannot be left to function serendipitously. The leader must assure that a shared vision and purpose are in place that allow for democratic sharing of different opinions. DuFour (2004) identified three principles that must become deeply embedded in school cultures in order to sustain the PLC model: ensuring that students learn, creating a culture of collaboration, and improving academic achievement.

Description of Our Study

The three authors teach in an educational leadership doctoral program (EdD) designed for practitioners interested in bringing change to their current or future P–16 campuses. This study identified student university experiences that led to changed practices resulting in promotion of PLCs in schools where doctoral students work. We examined student reflections written while enrolled in three of our program's courses: Cultural Influences in American Education, Teaching and Learning Theory and Practice, and Leadership in Higher Education.

Program Profile

The cohort-based doctoral program at this Texas institution offers cognates in higher education, multiculturalism/diversity, and effective schools and stresses outcomes that emphasize transformational learning. Learning activities include an emphasis on critical inquiry, dialogue, and reflection. Field-based activities and action research projects encourage students to engage in problem-based learning in diverse settings for the purpose of understanding transformational leadership capacity.

Student Profile

This study drew from the experiences of the 60 students enrolled in three cohorts who participated in the three courses from 2006 to 2008. Ten students were African American, two students were Hispanic, and 48 were Caucasian, and 28 were female and 32 were male. All students were practicing educators serving as superintendents (9), principals (19), central office educators (9), K–12 teachers (7); in addition, 16 held a variety of positions in higher education.

Data Collection

Data were collected from written student reflections submitted to professors as weekly assignments. Written reflections, required of students after each class session, were not specific to this study regarding transformational learning and PLCs. Instead, students

were asked to consider the in-class readings, discussions, and activities and critically reflect on an observed event, thought, or conversation that stood out for them and that related to the topic of discussion. Students were guided to consider what they had learned about themselves and others through this experience. The next consideration was to translate this learning into a related experience or understanding at their school, with children, teachers, community, and others. Finally, students were asked to critically reflect on how the experience at their school could be applied to learning in their personal and professional life. In the sections that follow, the higher education courses are discussed as separate cases.

Case 1: Cultural Influences on American Education

Cultural Influences on American Education is a required core class that students take during the second semester of their doctoral coursework.

Course Description.
Faculty who teach this course facilitate the study of leadership by exploring current knowledge and research related to diversity issues reflected in cultural and societal patterns affecting the American educational system. These include but are not limited to socioeconomic, ethnicity, literacy, gender, age, and other special needs. An emphasis on the educational leader as scholar–practitioner guides the examination of sociocultural and diversity issues pervasive in society. These issues are examined through an exploration of American educational history, philosophy, multicultural, and critical pedagogy. Existing, as well as emergent, cultural and societal patterns are contextualized in terms of leadership in Texas, the United States, and globally.

Session-discussion topics focus on cultural identity, White privilege, oppression, race, gender and special needs, social class, poverty, and immigrant cultures. Readings are drawn from Paolo Freire, Gary Howard, Lisa Delpit, Glenn Singleton, Jonathon Kozol, Joel Spring, bell hooks, Beverly Tatum, Cornell West, and others. Besides readings, activities included participating in class dialogue, writing self-reflective essays, studying how learning in the college classroom is evidenced in practice, and investigating a cultural challenge within the students' school or district. The goal of all activities is to engage doctoral students in transformative learning, with the promise of resulting in stronger PLCs on their work campus.

Activities and Observations.
Activities in this course emphasized the preparation of educational leaders as scholar-practitioners with the capacity to provide leadership within the local school and district. Students were challenged to create and sustain a communitarian spirit emphasizing the development of the human potential while honoring diversity**.** Observations from the activities were drawn from student reflections. One activity involved students in writing 20 statements about themselves by filling in the blank "I am _____" (Cushner, 2002, p. 55). A participating female student wrote this reflection:

> As a White person, I was thinking about the activity we did in class, where one fills in the blank with one word to describe him or herself. Usually White people do not include race in their top 10 but people of color do. Our class followed

> this same pattern. None of the White students indicated their race, but all five of our students of color mentioned race in their first five statements. Wow!

This student then noted, "I realize that I need to involve teachers at my school in similar activities about race because I'm not sure if they understand the importance of race to an individual's identity." By doing this, this student will implement an important component of a PLC on her campus—collaborative sharing of learning.

Another activity in this course involved students in responding to a series of statements by standing near one wall of the classroom and walking to the other side when a particular statement rings true for them (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997). An example of a statement given was: "When I was a child, my family struggled with poverty." Only two students responded to this statement by crossing the room. Both students wrote about the power of this activity in touching their emotions. One explained:

> I was one of the students who crossed the room when you read the statement about struggling with poverty as a child. I almost did not walk but I did. I was amazed at my emotions as I did this. First, I was embarrassed. Then, I began to think of students in my school who are poor. Even before I reached the other side I was seeing their faces.

Then the student wrote that this transformational activity would be shared with his faculty at the next staff development day in hopes that others would grow as he had: "I am now more aware of how these students must feel at my school. Because of this, I am more encouraging and I often share openly with students how I overcame some of my own early struggles." After reading class assignments on diversity, another student commented on changing beliefs and practices. She wrote that she had "a renewed passion for educating preservice teachers regarding the issues of racism in public education and to recruiting ethnically diverse students into the teaching profession."

Importantly, class dialogue also resulted in transformative learning that led to changes of practice. One student wrote:

> As usual the class dialogue this past Saturday was "rich" with experiences from various class members. The question had been raised [by another student in class]: What is your most painful memory of race? All of our Black students shared painful experiences from their past. None of the White students, including me, could think of even one experience regarding our race. I realize that continuing this dialogue and doing "little things" to make changes, such as including questions about race in faculty meetings, are important activities.

This passage addressed an important reflective strategy necessary for developing a PLC. The student examined previously held assumptions; she also committed to bring this learning to her school campus.

Case 2: Teaching and Learning Theory and Practice

Another core course taken during the first semester of the first year of doctoral coursework is Teaching and Learning Theory and Practice. The class consisted of teachers,

principals, superintendents, central office personnel, and higher education faculty and administrators.

Course description.
This course focuses on the applications of principles of learning to create a teacher-learner-centered, constructivist environment to support high academic achievement in multicultural diverse populations. A variety of learning theories are explored, notably constructivism, brain-based learning, moral reasoning, motivation, transfer learning, and transformational learning.

The major challenge involved in teaching this course was the variety of positions held by the doctoral students. While a few members worked as K–12 teachers, the majority of the students held administrative positions either on their campus or in the school district. Others had no direct contact with students in a classroom setting. Learning took place in a much different environment for these class members and the relevance of course topics must be examined from a different perspective in order to provide them with the tools necessary to build a stronger professional learning environment regardless of their position on their school campus.

Session topics and activities revolved around three sources of information. First, students read three practitioner books dealing with the application of the principles of human development research, brain-based learning, and research-based strategies for maximizing student learning. For each text, discussion leaders generated questions designed to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Second, students searched the literature for a research article related to teaching or learning. Articles were shared with the class and in smaller groups to facilitate discussion. Third, students informally observed students, teachers, staff, and/or administrators in the workplace to identify applications of the various theories. Their observations for this case study were included in a short paper they presented to the class for discussion.

Activities and Observations.
The first exposure most students have to various teaching and learning theories is when they initially enter a teacher education program. The goal of this course was to examine these theories through the eyes of an instructional leader and to see how they can apply to many learning situations.

One student shared the following after observing one preservice classroom at her university and relating these observations to constructivism:

> As this course is an introductory one required for new students, the cognitive struggle they are undergoing as new information is presented has been directly observable. At times, the course information has been a direct contrast to their existing perspectives formed from experiences. Mixing delivery of information in the classroom with lecture and slides, videos, experiential activities and discussion has been successful in meeting the needs of these learners.

After observations on one campus, another student who taught in a higher-education environment shared the following conclusions:

> As instructors our goal is that our students recognize the difference between their old viewpoint and the new one, and then make the decision to adopt the new

> perspective. Overall, it is amazing to note the numerous types of learning theories found within the instruction that occurs in our program. I appreciate the fact that now I am able to label what I am doing.

This student's comments reflected an understanding of the value of transformational learning not only for administrators and instructors but for students as well.

One class discussion focused on the discourse between student-centered learning strategies and the use of worksheets designed to prepare students for state-mandated testing. A superintendent was particularly moved by this discussion and vowed to address the issue in district meetings. In the case study, the administrator shared the following:

> Just because we have outlined goals to meet a state mandated curriculum does not mean that we need to forget things like student learning styles or opportunities for cooperative learning to be replaced by worksheet drill. In these administrative meetings, we have discussed teachers' movement away from this type of rote learning and providing appropriate staff development for re-awakening what they know and understand about students and how they learn.

This observation provided an excellent example of how engaging in critical reflection can result in transformations that will impact student learning.

Toward the conclusion of this course, an assistant principal reflected on the importance of understanding and identifying learning theory and extending this to the campus where she worked:

> Forcing an educator to search for the presence of various learning theories alive and at work in his/her school is a really good idea. We should take time (without being forced) to reflect critically, from a theoretical point of view more often.

Case 3: Leadership in Higher Education

The course Leadership in Higher Education is an elective for students in the doctoral program in Educational Leadership.

Course Description.
Leadership in Higher Education is an overview of the purposes of higher education; the culture of higher education; institutional issues in higher education, specifically governance and infrastructure; and impact of the external operational functions of higher education, including development, accreditation, accountability, and social and political challenges. One segment of the course includes participant formulation of career goals for roles in higher education.

Several learning outcomes were realized for participants: a written statement of the individual student's beliefs on the purpose of higher education, wide reading on the course topics and sharing of key findings, role-playing decisions and actions related to challenges in higher education, and the formulation of a career map to assist with preparing for roles in this context.

Activities and Observations.
Activities in the course focus on preparing leaders for higher education. Class participants included public school teachers and administrators; 2-year college faculty, staff, and administrators; and 4-year college faculty, staff, and administrators.

The instructor's first assignment required the students to write a one-page, informal statement on his or her beliefs on the purposes of higher education. Text and article readings during the first few classes included a variety of views on this issue. Participant responses varied from a strong bias toward the liberal arts tradition to a focus on specialized professional training. Throughout the semester, students read, listened to guest speakers, and discussed and explored the issues of governance, budgeting, facilities, access, affordability, accountability, and accreditation. At the end of the course, students reflected and revised their original statements on the purpose of higher education and shared "how" and "why" their original statement had changed. One student indicated the value of the activity to her career:

> I have used the educational philosophy I composed at the beginning of the course in my professional work and professional decision-making. I actually think that paper forced me to examine the values I hold around education in a way that has helped me mold and hone the educational philosophy my organization operates under.

Another assignment utilized case study role-plays to generate critical reflection throughout the semester. The course instructor provided students with case studies highlighting a challenging university situation related to faculty governance, tenure and promotion, fundraising, budgeting, personnel difficulties, and other situations. Course participants were assigned a different role for each case study. For example, one week a particular student might be assigned the role of the university president. For the next case study, s/he might be the faculty senate chair. Class participants studied the case, did outside reading related to the issue, and came to class prepared to address the case "in role" at a "make-believe cabinet meeting." Students were challenged to address the issue with knowledge gained from readings, class discussions, guest speakers, and experience. Student feedback on this activity included the following comment: "For me, the most valuable part of role playing was researching and understanding the 'platform' of the role I am to play. Assuming the paradigm and seeing, speaking, responding and understanding through the eyes of the role is important."

Another student indicated that "the case study role playing activities enabled me to employ the facts of higher education as I know them, with the promise of corrective feedback." One of the course participants indicated that her "worry" that everyone in the class knew more about higher education than she did was relieved through the case study activities. She wrote:

> The role playing activities did help me break out of my shell a bit, and boosted my self-esteem. With proper preparation for role plays, reading course materials and collaboration with other group members, I felt confident in participating in the role plays.

The course activity that many students found most challenging was the development of a personal career map. Course participants completed values activities, and professional

goals charts and worked on curriculum vitae in preparation for completing a career action plan. Although challenging, students found the career-mapping activities "very liberating." One reluctant student said, "Definitely, the career path work operated on me in the most primary educational mode—challenging my superstitions." Another added:

> Plotting my career path was, at first, very scary. . . . But I realized that this response is part of the activity—opening your mind, thinking about the things you enjoy, the thing you are passionate about and then making a potential (not necessarily set in stone) plan for the future.

Did students use the knowledge gained from their experiences in this course to develop learning communities in their work environments? Many of the students noted how course information had been brought to their work places. One student's response resonated with her efforts to use these models in her professional setting:

> I have used career mapping, professional goals charts, VSQ (Values, Stories, and Questions) charts, negotiation checklists, and applied knowledge (accountability, accreditation, academic freedom, academic bill of rights, academic jargon, etc.) from class most in my professional work and professional decision-making.

Transformational learning activities in doctoral classes can provide school leaders with models for designing learning communities in their personal school settings.

Discussion and Reflection

The three university professors represented herein are committed to implementing transformational learning in the classroom that extends to building a PLC in the workplace. Classroom activities were designed to encourage students to engage in critical reflection that results in a revision of old ideas and practices. At the same time, opportunities were provided to enhance and extend learning opportunities in students' places of work. Written comments consistently suggested that these doctoral students are building PLCs in a variety of ways when they apply transformational learning to their school campuses.

Observations made from student-written comments included all five of the strong PLC characteristics identified by Louis and Marks (1998). Students wrote of reflecting on their values and expectations as they related to teaching. As one student noted, this helped her "provide appropriate staff development for re-awakening what they [teachers] know and understand about students and how they learn." Doctoral students related a renewed commitment to improving student achievement in a variety of ways, such as identifying the need to help those in poverty. Collaborating to share newly learned expertise was mentioned by several students. They wrote of the need to share doctoral coursework with other educators on their work campuses through modeling new learning experiences. As one student said, "mixing delivery of information in the doctoral classroom with lecture and slides, videos, experiential activities and discussion" was useful in successfully "meeting the needs of learners." Consistently, in all three courses, student comments resonated with the importance of reflecting on dialogue and examining assumptions around their own best practices.

When doctoral classes were undergirded with transformational learning theory that emphasized discourse and critical self-reflection, students revised assumptions about the world and explored new belief systems while modeling ways to implement the new role. Upon applying these new learnings and understandings at their K–16 campuses, they increased their potential to create strong PLCs.

Steps to Take

To assist in developing the university connection with K–16 schools and a doctoral program that emphasizes transformational learning to enhance PLCs, we suggest the following:

1. Provide time at faculty meetings for reflective activities about teaching and learning
2. Provide resources (books, journal articles) that address the application of teaching and learning theories, and encourage teachers to share their findings with colleagues
3. Encourage teachers to "think outside the box" and try new strategies, particularly if they can provide sound evidence of the effectiveness of these strategies in other situations
4. Provide professional development opportunities to teachers who want to expand their repertoire of strategies
5. Develop issue-based staff meetings and retreats
6. Use role-playing to aid participants in exploring all sides of an issue
7. Use activities that require participants to move outside their comfort zones.

Exercise

Investigate the understandings of educators on your campus regarding transformational learning and commitment to PLCs. Through survey inquiry, dialogue at faculty meetings, workshops, and retreats engage educators in responding to these self-reflective questions:

1. Observation—what event, thought, or conversation stood out this week?
2. Reflection—what have I learned about others and myself through this experience?
3. Translation—how may this experience translate to the school, children, teachers, community, and others?
4. Application—how can I apply what I have learned to my personal/professional life? How will my behavior change? Or will it change?

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CHAPTER 8

A Vision for Linking Pre-K and Higher Education Through Learning Communities

John R. Hoyle & Timothy M. Kutka

Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offence.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down.

Robert Frost, *Mending Walls*, 1980, pp. 33–34

Every child deserves the opportunity to pursue a university degree. Envision a future where all American children are happy and successful, and where the unnecessary barriers to higher learning and general well-being were eliminated. Should our educators and policymakers want anything less? Toward these goals, collaborative learning communities in schools can help assure that every child's life is filled with contentment and that all children are given every opportunity to be successful and experience fulfillment. At the current time, the school system, at all levels, has failed in its social contract to the nation that, in effect, promises to make all children's and adolescents' dreams come true.

Herein we propose a radical change in the American education system by first establishing that the school system is broken beyond incremental repair. Next, we introduce a model for a new unified system to enlarge and enhance learning communities, and we present proposals for creating a unified PK–university system. Next, we offer a futuristic narrative to suggest how obstacles can be overcome by policymakers, legislators, and educators in order to improve the educational system by 2035 for all children and youth. Finally, we offer an exercise, the goal of which is to debate the impact of a unified educational system on the dropout problem.

Social Problems Resulting from Educational Failure

Current demographic data reveal that only one-half of our urban and poor children will succeed in school, and experience success and find happiness in their lives; this sad reality virtually eliminates any hope of attaining postsecondary education (Green, 2001). Because of an inadequate education and resulting limited job skills, high school dropouts usually face a bleak future of poverty. Despite efforts by educators to create learning communities in schools and collaborate on programs that connect to universities, businesses, and communities to help all children succeed, the results seem disappointing.

While more students in the United States are graduating from high schools in middle-to-high-income neighborhoods, the number emerging with diplomas from urban schools has changed little since 1970 (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2008). Nearly 50% of our prison populations represent failed urban school experiments (Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkings, & Kolstad, 1998). A 1% increase in high school completion would save our nation approximately $1.4 billion in incarceration costs, or about $2,100 per male graduate (CompuServe, 2004). Dropouts rarely vote or participate in community affairs and annually earn $9,200 less than high school graduates and $1 million less than college graduates over a lifetime. According to Duffrin (2003), students who fall behind during the eighth and ninth grades contribute to the "bulge," that is, the large numbers retained in the eighth or ninth grades due to inadequate math and language skills necessary for advancement. Once these students become part of the bulge, they are five times more likely to quit than those who move on to the tenth grade and fail only one course.

Expectations for a vastly improved education system were raised when *A Nation at Risk* was issued by a presidential commission to push standards-based reform in all states (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). This report was followed by the passage of the controversial No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002) that created more rigorous guidelines for standards-based reform with measurable results for all students and schools.

Educators are reluctant to change instructional practices to comply with new laws created by legislators and policymakers unfamiliar with the demanding job of classroom teaching. Also, many schools lack the necessary funding and organizational capacity for stringent accountability mandates to be implemented. In addition, observers indicate growing fear among teachers and administrators due to state sanctions placed on schools based on a single measure—test scores (Berliner, 2008; Bracey, 2008; Rothstein, 2008). They strongly question why other measures of student performance in music, art, debate, and improved student behavior are not of equal importance in assessing school quality (Wong & Nicotera, 2007). Vornberg (2008) challenged the single-test mentality this way:

> Test results define administrative practices, school organization, and the narrowing of instruction and may impact adversely the poor, minority, and handicapped students . . . schools must be committed to students, not only to higher scores and not only to special interests. (p. 142)

While more stringent accountability measures have forced teaching-to-the-test objectives and noticeable improvements in achievement levels of children of color and

poverty, significant improvements are not widespread. Hence, interventions will likely not have the effect of closing the widening gaps between the fortunate and less fortunate. When jobless, unskilled workers are coupled with the retirement of 30 million baby boomers over the next decade, America's economic health is expected to further deteriorate (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2008; Hoyle & Collier, 2006; Hoyle & Kutka, 2008; Kirst & Venezia, 2001; National Center for Policy and Higher Education, 2005). Unfortunately, one-half of the high school graduates who manage to enter higher education require costly remedial education (Hoyle & Kutka, 2008).

Education Reforms Show Promise

In spite of these gnawing problems in our education system, patchwork remedies have leveraged more minority students from low-income families to enroll each year in higher education. Also, legislated reforms have improved public school curriculum standards by requiring more emphasis in math, language arts, and science. Few people doubt that the American education system has been the foundation of the United States' economic supremacy and global leadership among nations. U.S. universities are still highly regarded by hundreds of thousands of students from throughout the world who seek coveted U.S. degrees (Blumenthal & Obst, 2005). Scholastic Assessment Test scores are edging upward while more women and minorities compete for admission to best U.S. universities and professional schools (Hunter & Samberg, 2008)

Reforms Create Patchwork Solutions

America's policymakers and educators continue to rely on slow patchwork reforms that arrive too late for millions of children trapped in poverty and urban chaos. When families face poverty, joblessness, and neighborhood violence, there is limited time to become active in the school learning community. Pouring in more tax dollars to prop up America's schools is not working fast enough to bridge gaps in serving the rich and the poor. While school leaders struggle to close this achievement gap, greater numbers of citizens—children, adolescents, and adults—lose hope of living more prosperous lives. If urban school dropout numbers are projected to be the same until 2020, major changes must occur in the educational system to even begin to reverse the incalculable costs in human lives and the economy.

America's Disjointed School System

The startling information just provided makes it clear that the United States cannot remain competitive or egalitarian by perpetuating disjointed patchwork reforms in education. Despite the continued inadequate funding of public schools, shortages of qualified teachers, and strong opposition to the single high-stakes test required by schools, dropout numbers at suburban high schools are decreasing and greater numbers of these students enter higher education each year (Bracey, 2006). In addition, attempts by some states to vertically align curriculum between K–12 and postsecondary education have strengthened content articulation, but efforts at aligning PK–20 remain loosely coupled at best (Hoyle & Kutka, 2008). As stated earlier, college entry and completion rates are abysmal for over one-half of urban and poor children; there

exists declining optimism that the current add-on, disjointed educational system, which is underfunded and overmandated, can effectively reverse the patterns of failure. Few educators claim that sweeping school reforms and current NCLB benchmarks have greatly improved the academic performance of most of our youth.

No Lower or Higher—Simply Education

Problems associated with separate, disjointed education systems are not new—indeed, they have been around since the founding of public schools in America. The 19th-century philosopher and pragmatist John Dewey (1899) strongly suggested the need for collaborative learning communities to be established in order to provide appropriate education for all students at public expense, as well as to create a curriculum based on logical transitions from preschool through graduate studies. We assume that Dewey (1899) knew that a fragmented system would lead to chaos unless collaborative systematic planning by educational leaders, legislators, and teachers—indeed the entire community—was employed:

> We want to bring all things educational together; to break down the barriers that divide the education for a little child from the instruction of the maturing youth; to identify the lower and the higher education so that it shall be demonstrated to the eye that there is no lower or higher, but simply education. (p. 108)

Dewey wanted American public schooling to circumvent the elitist and exclusionary system found at that time in Europe and around the world. Envisioning a system that created opportunity and access for all children, and for a lifetime, he encouraged the development of strong learning communities. The idea here was to establish such communities in order to avoid a fragmented system separated by "walls" between K, elementary, middle, and high schools, and higher education that block access to educational opportunities. Another American visionary, Harold Hodgkinson (1985), challenged the traditional lockstep education system of discrete schools working in isolation. He argued that this isolation would never lead to equal opportunity for all students and that people working in isolated educational units have little awareness of the overall purpose and activities occurring across different stages of education. According to Hodgkinson (1985),

> The only people who see these institutions as a system are the students—because some of them see it all. . . . It is our conviction that we need to begin seeing the education system from the perspective of the people who move through it. (p. 1)

Increased Need for Collaborative Learning Communities

More currently, Hoyle (1990) extended the systems-thinking model, calling for a unified PK–higher education system to schooling, believing that add-ons and reform reports create increasing political tensions over the purpose of schools, falling short of posing solutions to the dropout problem. When only 75% graduate from America's high schools and an alarming 50% never graduate from the urban campuses in the country, policymakers must act now to provide the resources. More importantly,

collaborative learning communities can be facilitated to help remedy a broken education system. Systems planning cannot succeed without well-designed collaborative learning communities. Individuals must come together from all levels of our current education system so that our high school graduates can be socialized to be globally competitive in math and science. Thus, it is no longer conscionable to maintain two separate and unequal systems of education. Van de Water and Rainwater (2001) support Dewey's, Hodgkinson's, and Hoyle's points of view by suggesting that a refined PK–16 system holds promise that planners and policymakers can tighten links among the systems to, in effect, close glaring gaps found in curriculum design, instructional delivery, and equitable funding.

K–12 to Higher Education Transition Programs

Several well-intentioned efforts aimed at easing the transition from high school to higher education have been put in place by both public and private organizations to help close the gap between the K–12 and higher education systems. These have proven instrumental in guiding many students through what are essentially disjointed systems. Among these add-ons are dual credit (DC); Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID), designed to create college-ready students (available in many school districts beginning in Grade 4); International Baccalaureate (IB); advanced placement (AP) (The College Board, 2007); and various types of school–university partnerships. Although these numerous interventions have proven successful in encouraging many students to pursue higher education degrees, they fall far short of their goal to reform a system that is failing millions of our K–12 students (Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003).

The add-on programs just alluded to continuing to expand each year. However, according to Kleiner and Lewis (2005), approximately 2,050 2-year community colleges and 4-year universities offer DC programs, and only 5% of these programs were directed toward high school students at risk of education failure. Krueger (2006) critiques dual enrollment programs, arguing that they reinforce "a system that shuts out low-income and low achieving students" (p. 2). While AP and DC courses do not reflect a student's total academic experience, IB programs encompass a more structured program encompassing the final 2 years of high school (Bailey & Karp, 2003). However, the IB is more than a 2-year program; it is closer to the theme central to the focus of this chapter—the need for a unified PK–20 system that will bring coherence to all of the nation's public schools. IB appears to be more inclusive than like programs as well as more attractive for minority and "at risk" students.

Thus, reform efforts have shown promise in assuring more children equal access to education (Conley, 2003). However, in spite of the numerous patchwork programs that provide generous support and hope for children from low-income and urban families to access higher education, time is running out for thousands of other children trapped in poverty with little hope of success in life. What educators and policymakers are doing to revamp America's educational system is too-little-too-late to provide equal educational opportunities for every child and hence reverse the loss of human capital (Becker, 2008). In the interest of democracy and justice, greater energy and resources must be allocated to alleviate the widening gap between rich and poor, urban and suburban schools.

Potential Problems with Unification

Attempting to unify the two systems of higher education and public schools poses formidable problems, not the least of which is the fear of regression toward mediocrity. Critics claim that mixing lower and higher education produces average education at best. Others assert that the two systems are completely different and have separate missions. Another fear is that funding for teaching thousands of "challenged students" will divert valuable and already scarce resources from research agendas at universities to public schools. Another major concern involves the role of university professors in such reforms and the values they covet. For example, it is feared that a change in the structure, function, and mission of the university's role in a truly unified system could result in a loss of professional status and individual autonomy. Faculty identify themselves as academic specialists (e.g., educators, historians, economists). It takes considerable time for faculty to become engaged in collaborative learning communities with public school colleagues; many have yet to realize that their new roles as school–university collaborators would not only enhance their status relative to taxpaying citizens but also improve the totality of American education, ensuring its global viability and competitiveness. Under the current merit-based reward system in most universities, professors are urged to seek external funding and publish papers in prestigious journals and write scholarly books (Hoyle, 1989). However, a new reward structure could encourage professors to become active participants in such public worlds as learning communities in which they would apply their expertise benefitting all levels of the unified education system.

Unifying Systems: Breaking Down Walls

The curricular and governmental barriers that function to constrain educational systems should be removed to allow all students free access to a unified, articulated, and rigorous education that not only challenges students academically, but eliminates problematic transition points as students move from early learning through college. Frost (1980), in the poem *Mending Walls*, expresses the need to remove unnecessary walls between people: "Before I built a wall I'd ask to know / what I was walling in or walling out, / and to whom I was like to give offence. / Something there is that doesn't love a wall / that wants it down" (pp. 33–34). Walls are built to exclude, defend, or secure property and people or to divide the educational system according to arbitrary divisions among grade levels, neighborhoods, student selection, testing, and funding. Our vision is thus of a unified and democratic system that could offer every child and adolescent the opportunity to live a successful and productive life while it expands new collaborative and egalitarian learning communities for all students, families, and practitioners.

The Unified System Model

We believe that each state should create a single, unified state education system beginning for students at age 3 and continuing through graduate and adult education. This unified system would gradually replace the disjointed systems that now exist, where separate education boards for PK–20 and higher education are charged with governing. Under the new system, a single state agency would govern and also coordinate a

sequentially aligned curriculum for PK–20, as well as establish standards of quality and combine finances, and other resources, to significantly boost the American education system. Rather than educators and the public blaming each other for the flaws in the education system, educational leaders could share their visions of success for every child and engage the business community and universities in supporting an egalitarian system for all students.

Unifying the two systems would go far beyond existing, well-intentioned collaborations between universities and school districts to capture the talents of denser constituent groups (e.g., educators, researchers, developers, and policymakers). These collaborations could become powerful learning communities that speak with one voice to the taxpayers and donors. According to Byrd (2008), a unified system could offer life choices that may include a college degree but not necessarily: "If all students are prepared to take on the rigors of higher education they will be equally prepared to tackle the stresses of living in a more technologically advanced world and in whatever career they pursue" (p. 4). Retention rates at all levels would be high; teaching, advising, and class work—face-to-face or online—would be aligned, relevant, and intellectually challenging. Retaining students who drop out or fail to succeed in higher education would be repaid many times over by enabling them to become productive, confident Americans.

This new unified system would reflect a seamless upward spiral with age-appropriate curriculum, instruction, and computer technologies that would produce independent learners who are creative and productive. Clearly the unified system model is the best alternative for confronting the growing numbers of at-risk students who face poverty, lack English-speaking skills, and suffer from malnutrition and poor health. There is little reason to doubt that universal preschool education for all children must be made available if a unified system model is to succeed. Granted, the unified system would be difficult to establish because of the ingrained 200-year-old bifurcated system. However, with growing economic disparities linked to school dropouts, crime and homelessness are far greater than our education problems. Public schools can no longer shoulder the burden to save urban communities and understaffed, troubled schools. Public education leaders have been asked to do much more with fewer resources to improve society. To make a difference, university educators must join collaborative learning communities with school educators as close allies in the struggle for survival and growth. Universities are established to create knowledge, seek wisdom, and to improve society in every possible way—including troubled schools and communities—and it is this mission that should serve as a guide.

Seamless Spiral

The unified system would be designed as a learning community and begin with clusters of 150 students aged 3 and older. The curriculum would take the form of a seamless spiral (Bruner, 1960), emphasizing constant repetition and basic skills development in the early years of a child's education, and building in complexity. Each cluster would consist of five fully qualified teachers, a community college or university professor, five teacher aids, retired volunteers, and health professionals contributing to the learning community. This team would work together in a family environment for 5 years after which five new teachers with different levels of expertise would be responsible for moving the 150 now 8-year-old students toward more

advanced learning. In this model students would remain together in three clusters, each one more challenging. The final cluster would be initiated at age 13. At this point, the learning communities would include members from the community college and university who would assist the educators of five in teaching a wider and more challenging range of classes and seminars with Internet and other global research retrieval technologies. This final cluster would prepare students for advanced technical and professional programs since about 50 hours of university coursework would have accumulated since the last year of cluster two. Imagine the benefit derived from university research and best practices in cognitive psychology and brain-based teaching, human development, and new information technologies, as other areas.

The governance of the unified system would necessitate a state department for the unified system that would be responsible for coordinating the new curriculum, instructional systems, and funding. This coordination would include numerous education centers in the state that would organize and administer the clusters discussed. Each education center would establish a collaborative learning community that includes representatives from a state university, one or two community colleges, and several public schools systems within a contiguous region.

Each education center would be governed by an advisory board consisting of university personnel, community college representatives, public school educators, businesspersons, parents, and students. In addition, each cluster would be coordinated by a learning community consisting of six to eight parents. Teacher recruiting would be conducted through each education center and members of each cluster learning

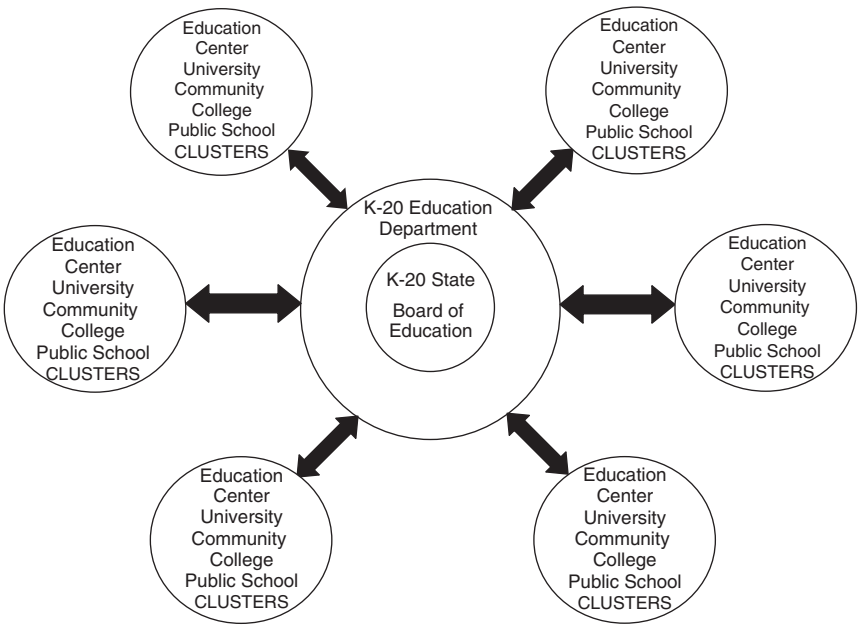

Figure 8.1 A unified education system

Source: Hoyle & Kutka, 2008

community would conduct interviews and recommend their choice. Funding for the unified system would be derived from a formula and drawn from property taxes for public schools and community colleges, and from various university funding sources. A systems approach to funding could be equity-based for each child beginning at age 3 in prekindergarten through young adults attending graduate school (see Figure 8.1).

The obstacles we have indicated to such a new system would likely include criticism from higher education leaders and faculty, and, in the eyes of learned institutions, fearing loss of prestige if funds were shared with other levels within the system. But these fears would be abated since, under a unified system, research grants and private and corporate foundations would play greater roles in supporting the vision and mission of a unified system aimed at producing a productive workforce and citizenry. This larger, educated workforce would more than offset the high cost of implementing the unified system. Any attempts to change the segmented system in place for over 100 years would meet formidable challenges. However, with these caveats, we articulate a futuristic vision of a unified system.

Every Child Succeeds: Education in 2035

Imagine that today is July 12, 2035, and the unified education system in the state of Texas has been selected by the U.S. Department of Educational Systems as the most effective educational system in the nation. At the National Conference on Learning Communities, representatives of the selection council are presenting the financial award of one million dollars to the chair of the Texas Education System and a plaque that reads "Congratulations to the Texas Education System for its Remarkable Leadership in Educating All Students. The Texas Unified System is a Model for Others in Building Learning Communities." After the awards presentation, a leader in the unification process is invited to the podium to present an overview of the events leading up to this prestigious award.

The Presentation Begins

This is a special milestone for the state of Texas and for all individuals who made this day possible. Back in 2008, educators in public schools and higher education, business leaders, and legislators were in near crisis trying to implement educational reforms that would make more Texas children ready for higher education and the workforce. While progress was apparent with children in urban and some rural schools, the success stories were overwhelmed by the number of students dropping out of school after the ninth grade. Some of these dropouts were accounted for while others merely disappeared. We knew then that these dropouts would be unemployed, homeless, or incarcerated for street crime or other offenses. In the mid-1990s observers of this growing social malaise placed greater attention on the problems of public schools. Strong collaborative learning communities were formed among university professors and administrators, public school superintendents, and legislators to creatively seek more pathways for minority and poor students to find their way to postsecondary education and to experience academic success. During this period, several state and national initiatives made strides in integrating the public school curriculum requirements with the academic demands in community and upper-level universities. However, attempting to smooth students' path from public schools to higher education

proved to be too bumpy (and political!) to prepare the majority of Texas students with the requisite skills and knowledge needed for leading successful lives.

A pivotal event that acted as a catalyst for putting into action a unified system began in 2011. The executive director of the Higher Education Coordinating Board organized a higher education–public school collaborative learning community to bring leaders on both sides to dialogue about combining the two systems of higher education and public schools. After 3 years of discussion and productive collaboration, representatives from public and higher education, corporate executives, and chamber of commerce leaders produced a landmark report titled *One Education System for All Texas Students*, essentially recommending that a unified system was the best direction for Texas and its citizens. Within 3 years steps were taken in the legislature to approve the new design to combine the educational, financial, and human resources required to launch the unified model.

The Systems Model

The presenter displayed the Education Center System Model (see Figure 8.1) on a large screen. She described the new system initiated in 2018 as a seamless upward spiral, which begins with the curriculum and knowledge base required at the highest level of the system, "backcasting" to the beginning learning tasks for a 3-year-old child. In the words of futurist Ed Cornish (2004), backcasting is applied to "[p]ostulate a future goal, event, or circumstance and then try to develop a sequence of steps or stages to explain how the imagined future goal or event came to pass" (p. 100). Thus, backcasting the curriculum for the unified system was conducted to assure that every child would have the option of attending a higher education institution or find success in the workforce. The backcasting method included an aligned curriculum assessment system based on the concept of a spiral curriculum emphasizing constant repetition and increased complexity building from one concept to another (Bruner, 1960). Bruner's spiral curriculum ideas led to widespread teaching concepts that were age- and experience-appropriate for students. He believed that teaching points in the curriculum should be repeated, building upon basic ideas with young children and adding more challenging instruction as they mature.

The pilot-unified model began in 2016 with the creation of clusters within the Central Texas Education Center. The Education Center included representatives from area schools, colleges, and universities who were facilitated by a center director and staff to coordinate cluster activities. A governance council was created consisting of representatives from public schools, colleges, and universities, the Center Director, and six trustees elected from each region within the Center territory. Within the Center, 20 clusters began with 10 clusters of 3- to 7-year-olds and 10 of 8- to 12-year-olds. The following year, numerous additional clusters were under way for 3- and 8-year- olds, and within 5 years, the final cluster for 13-year-olds was opened. Within 10 years, the three-cluster system was in full operation; the cluster schools were housed in existing facilities in public schools, community colleges, universities, and community centers.

The organization structure of the 3- to 5-year clusters consists of the following: The first cluster of 150 3- to 7-year-olds consists of five fully qualified teachers in areas of math, science, language arts, learning technologies, and health sciences. In addition, the second-level cluster for 8- to 12-year- olds includes five new teachers

but extends to community college and university students who serve as tutors and professors provide staff development as needed for the teaching staff. The third and concluding cluster begins for students at age 12 with five new teachers and community college instructors and university professors engaged in actually teaching some classes and mentoring the classroom teachers. Thus, in this model, students function within three different clusters during their 15 years of public school. During the final 5-year more advanced cluster, students would take college-level courses and accumulate over 50 hours toward a bachelor's degree at any state university.

Debate Exercise: A PreK–20 Unified System for Addressing Dropout

This exercise is recommended for graduate classes in education, social sciences, and public policy. In addition, it is a creative method to use at conferences, workshops, and seminars.

Objective: Identify the possible benefits and barriers facing collaborative learning communities in attempting to create the unified system discussed herein.

Activity: Debate format—divide the groups into pro and con debate teams of three to five participants.

Step 1. Ask each group to select a discussion leader and a scribe/reporter.

Step 2. After group discussions ask each pro and con debate team to present at least three points to support the members' position on the value of a unified system in resolving the high school–dropout problem.

Step 3. Arrange tables in front of the room and invite the discussion leader of each pro and con group to sit at opposite tables. In addition place a file folder on opposite tables indicating "Pro" or "Con."

Step 4. Allow the pro group leaders 5 minutes to present reasons why the unified system could potentially resolve the high school–dropout problem, followed with 5 minutes allocated to the con group leaders to present reasons why the system would not resolve this significant problem.

Step 5. Invite other class/seminar members to question both pro and con team leaders.

Step 6. After the discussion, invite each attendee to vote either pro or con by using a secret ballot.

Step 7. The instructor reveals the results and invites more discussion.

Step 8. The seminar leader summarizes the debate issues and invites others to contribute to the summary.

Outcome: The pro and con positions would reinforce the need for creative collaborative learning community members at all levels of the education system to share in both addressing and resolving the high school–dropout problem, and to improve education opportunities for more American children and youth.

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SECTION II

Democracy and the Learning Community

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Introduction to Section II

The contexts discussed in these five chapters range from schools to universities, with implications for K–12 schooling and leadership. In Chapter 9, "Forming Culturally Responsive Learning Communities in Demographically Changing Schools," Cooper, Allen, and Bettez argue that culturally responsive learning-community development in demographically changing schools requires that an inclusive and egalitarian leadership approach be used to promote collaborative learning, decision making, and reform. They posit that learning communities should focus on promoting social justice and culturally relevant education to prepare educators to equitably respond to demographic change. Drawing on their comparative study of two North Carolina elementary schools, they describe how the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity of students too often leads educators to participate in biased, reactionary, and exclusive practices. The authors suggest that developing learning communities that infuse critical multicultural orientations can help educators perform transformative cultural work. Included are creative exercises for educators and community members, and steps for developing inclusive and culturally relevant PLCs.

In "Transforming the Space of Schools into Learning Communities: Teacher Leadership as Pedagogy of Democratic Place" (Chapter 10), Jenlink and Jenlink examine processes, resources, and activities necessary for transforming the social space of schools into democratic, school-based learning communities. They address important questions about pedagogy, community, and educational responsibility and what helps teachers (teacher-leaders) and other cultural workers understand what a commitment to a truly democratic community of learning entails. The creation of democratic learning communities takes a concerted effort—they are constructed by individuals committed to transforming social space into a democratically lived space shaped by social justice ideals. In transforming the social space of schools into democratic learning communities, the authors remind readers that teacher leadership, as well as renewed professionalism, is necessary for creating educational practices that benefit all children. They provide a reflective "life text" exercise that schools and democratic communities can use.

Mullen and Harris, in "Catalysts and Barriers: Practitioner Concepts of Professional Learning Communities as Democracies in Action" (Chapter 11), offer a PLC portrait through the eyes of experienced educators who are developing school leaders. Doctoral students (K–16 practitioners) studying in a university-based educational leadership program responded to a series of prompts focused on democratic actions observed on K–16 campuses and barriers encountered in implementing democratic strategies.

The students, queried about the meaning of democracy, identified democratic actions, strategies, and barriers within professional communities. The authors illuminate dynamics of democracy in action as a core aspect of leadership, professional learning, and community development in the K–16 environment. They offer steps for assisting with the development of democratic learning communities in schools. The exercise includes and encourages investigation of practitioners' thinking on the subjects of democracy, leadership, and community.

Chapter 12, "Faculty of Color Constructing Communities at Predominantly White Institutions," by Roseboro and Gause, is an exploration of the experience of scholars of color in predominantly White institutions of higher education and the roles to which they are assigned. They offer an autobiographical, theoretical exposition framed by critical race theory to specify the hegemonic discourses they have personally negotiated as faculty members. They describe higher education institutions in historical and political terms, and question cursory efforts to include scholars of color in academic dialogue. They create a typology from their professional narratives, one that illuminates particular roles imposed upon faculty of color in academia. Critical questions are provided for both faculty of color and White faculty, as well as practical ideas for assisting institutional leaders with sensitive, inclusive, and fair decision making.

Finally, in Chapter 13, "Support for Women Leaders: The Visible and the Invisible," Applegate, Earley, and Tarule discuss how higher education and K–12 education have become more open to and representative of women in leadership positions. They explain that as women become engaged in roles that have been traditionally dominated by males, they seek to align with like-minded colleagues so that they can explore their leadership experiences and roles, and gain insight into female-oriented practices and behaviors. From three cases—written from the perspectives of an aspiring principal, dean, and former principal—the authors provide examples of what women leaders are struggling to understand and how discoursing about these communities enhances learning for all involved. They include steps for school districts, schools, or universities to embrace the diversity and distinctions among women leaders. An exercise they include elicits reflection on personal experiences of (in)visibility and the role of learning communities in this regard.

Carol A. Mullen

CHAPTER 9

Forming Culturally Responsive Learning Communities in Demographically Changing Schools

Camille Wilson Cooper, Romy M. Allen, & Silvia Cristina Bettez

Immigration, urbanization, and labor trends are causing rapid demographic shifts and, in effect, changing the cultural landscape of the United States and its public schools. Educators' biases, fears, and lack of cultural awareness, however, impede their ability to develop culturally responsive education. Drawing upon a comparative case study of two North Carolina elementary schools, we explain how demographic change too often leads educators to perceive serving culturally diverse students as an unwanted burden. Herein, we consider how professional learning communities (PLCs) aimed at challenging deficit-based views can function as a powerful tool for preparing educators to equitably respond to demographic change and orient educators' practice toward performing transformative cultural work. Contemporary scholarship on PLCs, collaborative inquiry, and critical multicultural education inform our discussion (e.g., Cooper, 2006; Jackson & Temperley, 2007; Mitchell, 1999; Nieto, 2004; Oakes & Rogers, 2006; Stoll & Louis; Zuniga, 2008). We also include a collaborative activity educators can use to advance their culturally responsive efforts.

Cultural Shifts and Chasms in U.S. Schools

Rapid growth of culturally and linguistically diverse populations in the United States has caused a permanent shift in the ethnic and cultural composition of urban, suburban, and rural communities in each region of the country. Public school personnel from Seattle to Southern Appalachia continually enroll new students from cities and countries around the world. Indeed, the nation's White population declined from

76% in 1990 to 69% in 2000, and together, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latino Americans will comprise over half the U.S. population by 2044 (Zhou, 2003).

The cultural diversity of this nation, and the imbalance of power among various racial, ethnic, and linguistic groups, has long resulted in social conflicts that affect public schools. Such conflicts largely arise when the cultural and family backgrounds of students are negated or disparaged. Research on culturally responsive education highlights the dangers of cultural discontinuity; it also emphasizes the importance of educators using culturally relevant pedagogy, affirming children's cultural background, and expanding students' cultural knowledge to facilitate their learning and academic success (Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2000; Gonzalez, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995). By failing to recognize and affirm the knowledge, experiences, and assets of culturally diverse student populations, educators proliferate a "culture of power" that marginalizes ethnic and linguistic minorities and casts them as deficient in character, behavior, and/or learning ability (Delpit, 2006, p. 25; Nieto, 2004; Valenzuela, 2001). Students, in turn, often internalize educators' negative perceptions of them and struggle academically and socially (Heath, 1996; Howard, 2001; National Resource Council, 2000). A growing body of scholarship stresses how the deficiency of culturally relevant practice in schools disadvantages ethnic and linguistic minority families and communities as well (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; Noguera, 2001).

Cultural Difference Theory

Culturally responsive education processes prompt educators to confront their biases about those who are culturally different. Educators then work to reduce their prejudices and foster new learning and leadership around cultural matters (Freire & Macedo, 1999; Howard, 2001). These antibias tactics also align with cultural difference theory that posits a view of culture as an influential factor in learning and development—one that shapes how groups collectively adapt or become transfigured by the social, economic, and historical conditions of deep macro-systems (Eisenhart, 2001; Heath, 1996). Cultural difference theory prompts one to analyze connections between home and school, in concert with viewing children's backgrounds from a strengths-based perspective (as opposed to a deficit-based one). The theory also behooves one to consider how deeply structured macro-forces can create school settings that clash with the smaller micro-systems of the home, especially for students who do not come from the White middle-class milieu. Cultural difference theory, which has influenced the culturally relevant scholarship just introduced, is typically linked to the practical application of multicultural education (Delpit, 2006; Eisenhart, 2001; Heath, 1996; Mehan, 2000). Yet, it is also important that the theory inform educators' meaning-making so they can reject deficit-based thinking about culturally different groups and broaden their vision of equitable schooling.

Cultural difference theory rests on the assumption that the educational welfare of children is improved when the cultures of home and school are bridged. Thus, the theory serves as a foundational framework for scholars to address how schools and homes can be cultural learning zones that affirm each other (Delpit, 2006; Epstein, 2001; Eisenhart, 2001; Heath, 1996; Mehan, 2000; NCCRESt, n.d.). PLCs can become these cultural learning zones since educators are engaged in reflective practice, group dialogue, and shared learning and leadership. In doing so, PLCs can also serve

as effective forums that prepare educators to enact cultural work that is transformative, and they can engage students, families, and school staff in a collaborative learning process.

Transformative cultural work entails understanding that educating is a political act. It further requires one to be critically reflective about his or her professional practice, and to resist inequities, diversify one's meaning-making, and reject separatist politics and biased notions of identity (West, 1999). In all, cultural workers align themselves with marginalized and oppressed groups to promote equitable reform and political empowerment. Cultural workers also embrace a collaborative ethos as they cross social and cultural borders to build relationships, learn with and from others, and advance social justice (Giroux, 2005; Lopez, Gonzalez & Fierro, 2006; West, 1999). Demographic change, propelled by the need to best serve all students, warrants this type of educational approach and commitment.

PLCs as Potential Sites of Cultural Learning

PLCs in schools are sites in which school–community members come together to coconstruct knowledge about educational issues through collaborative dialogue, inquiry, and shared learning. Thus, they have the potential to be vital cultural learning entities that prepare culturally responsive leaders and cultural workers to be transformative change agents. While educators and others join PLCs with a readiness to increase their consciousness, a dearth of literature exists that specifically focuses on using PLCs to increase members' knowledge about cultural diversity and educational equity.

Some existing PLC literature, however, offers general discussions about diversity and inclusion that can be extended to pinpoint possibilities for transformative cultural change. Stoll and Louis (2007), for instance, stress the importance of PLCs incorporating "divergent" and "intercultural" knowledge to prepare educators to implement reform within the diverse social contexts of schools. Yet, they do not detail how to employ this approach. In a similar manner, Mitchell (1999) notes that PLCs should not only focus on student learning issues but also address "issues such as school-wide events, classroom management, school democracy, and professional relationships" (p. 287). This researcher also stresses the importance of "valuing diversity" and describes important cognitive and affective learning processes that help one to do so. Addressing diversity issues through a critical lens, however, is not mentioned. Mitchell's conceptualization of diversity and critical learning skills, like many of the PLC scholars, pertain to generally embracing a range of ideological views without linking diversity to critical cultural contexts. Likewise, Jackson and Temperley (2007) assert the value of PLCs developing school–community networks that are inclusive of varied members within and outside of school sites in order to infuse multiple perspectives and knowledge sources. They further emphasize the need for PLCs to have "non-negotiable principles of moral purpose, shared leadership," and "inquiry-based practice" that focuses the community on problem solving (p. 47). Linking such perspectives, moral purposes, and problems to culture and equity issues is not broached.

Finally, Mitchell and Sackney (2007) offer a progressive PLC model that is amenable to the infusion of culturally responsive approach. They identify five key principles of engagement based on their observation of various PLCs: deep respect, collective

responsibility, appreciation for diversity, problem-solving orientation, and positive role-modeling among all participants. More pointedly, the researchers explain the need for school-community members to move beyond tolerating difference to positioning difference "as a core value of the school" and refusing to tolerate the "abuse, criticism, teasing, gossiping, or complaining" of children (p. 33). Their PLC model, which also calls adaptive leadership, is designed to develop an inclusive and affirming school community. The authors, however, do not include ideas or tips for implementing their model.

Overall, the broad conceptualization of diversity that is described in the PLC scholarship encourages PLC members' open-mindedness and shared meaning-making. The scholarship as a whole, however, lacks explicit connections to critical cultural contexts. Without making such connections, PLC members may fail to examine issues of oppression and equity-related tensions. Since PLCs are interpretive sites where educators and others coconstruct knowledge, it is a missed opportunity to not conduct critical and culturally relevant inquiry in these learning communities. Later, we draw upon data from a study of demographically changing schools to propose how to begin an inquiry process that can foster culturally responsive learning and reform.

Learning from North Carolina's Cultural Schooling Contexts

Brooding cultural tensions at the schools we studied indicate the need for educators to enact cultural work and form culturally responsive learning communities. For three academic terms during 2004–2006, Camille (first author), with Romy's assistance (second author), conducted a comparative case study of two elementary schools in Central North Carolina experiencing rapid demographic change. Both schools are predominantly White and located in industrial, working class towns that are politically conservative. The first school has a student population of almost 390 students; its demographics are 25% White, 34% African American, 33% Latino, and 8% Asian. The second school has a student population of almost 570 students; it is 48% Latino, 37% White, 14% African American, and 2% Asian.

As researchers, we examined school-community members' views about demographic change and how the increase of cultural diversity may be affecting school–family relations. Semistructured interviews were conducted for this study, 22 with educators and staff and 14 with parents. At both sites, we also conducted 10 ethnographic observations at events like parent–teacher group meetings, cultural festivals, and faculty and leadership meetings. Numerous documents pertaining to the schools' student population, school–family policies, and their relationships with local churches and civic agencies were collected as well. In addition, four data-sharing meetings were held at each school, including individual meetings with principals and group meetings with the faculties. Preliminary findings were discussed at these meetings and participant feedback was solicited. The meetings with the principals produced substantive conversations that yielded additional data. Data analysis was undertaken via an iterative process that enabled us to identify common themes, entertain alternative conclusions, and triangulate multiple data sources. *Much of the data analyzed revealed educators' and other school-community members' perceptions of cultural difference; therefore cultural difference theories guided our final analysis of the varied data collected.*

Views about Cultural Change and Difference in Schools

Across the board, the study's participants remarked about the growth and influence of Latino immigrants in their surrounding communities. Indeed, North Carolina, like the rest of the United States, is experiencing rapid racial and cultural shifts. North Carolina's immigration rates more than doubled between 1990 and 2000, and the state has one of the fastest growing Latino populations in the nation (Johnson, 2002).

Educators at the two schools either constructed Latinos as "different" from their "own" groups or acknowledged other school-community members' tendency to do so. For instance, a teacher (White male) at one of the elementary schools described the families with "roots" in the town as perceiving the rising Latino population as "an invasion." He added, "This has been their (mostly White residents) home for so long and now this—such a large population of a different culture is coming in, and some of them feel threatened." This teacher explained that such negative perceptions inevitably create tension within the school.

Educators and parents further described the schools and their districts as being stigmatized for being culturally diverse, particularly among White families. A school secretary (White female), who is also the president of her school's parent–teacher organization, offered this insight:

> A lot of parents want their children out of city schools . . . they only see the cultural part of it (demographic change) instead of the education part. And, I just wish there was a better way to get them to understand that it's not dirty to work or go to school here—you're out in public and you get people like, "Ewww, you work there?" And that is discouraging—as a parent and as staff member.

Parents, staff, and educators also commented that such negative perceptions of the two culturally diverse schools contribute to the flight of White parents from their sites to local, predominantly white schools.

Some educators' comments also indicated their belief that Latinos are socially burdensome. For instance, one teacher described Latino families as needing better "communication and understanding of the law." She further remarked, "You know having green cards would be helpful and being productive members of the society." The teacher's comments imply her disdain for what she assumes to be the undocumented status of Latino families at (and possibly beyond) her school.

Language constructed as a social barrier

No other cultural marker represented difference to educators and English-speaking parents as much as the use of Spanish in the school communities studied. Educators repeatedly referred to Spanish-speaking as a "language barrier." Moreover, we found that teachers' and administrators' lack of knowledge about Spanish and Latino cultures led them to distance themselves from Spanish-speaking students and families and/or make negative assumptions about them. For instance, a teacher at one of the schools said, "Some teachers will look at the translator (the interpreter) and just talk to the translator as if the parent were not there." We observed a similar dynamic at a parent meeting at the other school. An assistant principal stood to the side of the interpreter telling her what to say to the Spanish-speaking audience, but the administrator did little to directly interact with families before, during, or after the meeting. Instead, she

relied on the interpreter to interact while she stayed in the background. Furthermore, special education teachers mentioned general education teachers at their sites who inappropriately referred Spanish-speaking students for special education services. It appears that such teachers are too quick to equate students' lack of knowledge of English with having a language disability.

While many educators spoke of "caring" for all of the students in their schools and wanting to create a welcoming place for Latinos, we sensed a hesitancy to embrace Latino children lurking beneath happy exteriors. Overall, contentious social constructions of difference appeared to stem from educators' and White parents' discomfort with facing cultural change in their schools and surrounding communities. Indeed, the broader debate about the socioeconomic implications of immigration and demographic change in the United States seemed to play out in some ways at the micro level within these two schools. We suggest that stereotypical beliefs and xenophobic reactions, as opposed to language differences, pose significant barriers to fostering positive social relations among educators, students, and families. The implicit deficit-based assumptions about Latinos, and the explicit cultural bias expressed toward them, points to the need for intervention. For example, PLC members will need to encourage educators and community groups to examine their prejudiced assumptions that inevitably inform their practices and interactions and then make a concerted effort to improve these.

Infusing Critical Multicultural Education into PLCs

Pedagogy and learning processes steeped in critical multicultural education traditions are designed to help educators reject deficit-based views of students and families, gain political clarity about their role in the educational system, and assume a critical stance about education in general. These objectives must be met before educators can coconstruct transformative knowledge, effectively implement equitable and culturally relevant pedagogies, or nurture affirming relationships with students and families. These are strides that multicultural education experts such as Delpit (2006), Howard (2001), Ladson-Billings (1995), and Nieto (2004) urge educators to make. We next suggest three preliminary strategies for infusing critical multicultural education objectives into PLCs so that educators can equitably respond to demographically changing school communities. These strategies are also consistent with the tenets of cultural difference theory.

First, PLC members can integrate self-reflective activities that guide educators and others in recognizing and naming their biases. Using such activities can lead participants to understand the sources of their prejudicial beliefs, such as peer and family socialization, negative isolated experiences, and media influence. Research has shown that teachers' stereotypical and deficit-based thinking causes them to underestimate the intelligence and abilities of students of color and unreasonably penalize their behavior. This thinking becomes harmfully manifested through teachers' instructional practice such as when teachers provide less challenging material to students of color, assuming that critical thinking activities are beyond them, or when they unnecessarily track students into remedial classes (Cooper, 2003). Thus, cross-cultural learning and prejudice reduction efforts are essential to dismantling deficit-based perceptions of cultural difference. PLC members can also participate in multicultural activities that help them feel more comfortable discussing controversial topics and reflecting on identity issues and matters of privilege and oppression. Such activities can become instructional tools that educators use in their teaching.[1]

Second, PLCs can help members gain political clarity about serving culturally diverse and demographically changing populations (Bartolome & Trueba, 2000). Gaining such clarity requires educators to understand that teaching and leading schools are political, value-laden endeavors that can either advance or hinder equity-oriented aims. Educators should therefore make an effort to learn how they, their students, and other school-community members are nested in complex economic and sociopolitical systems that afford some groups many more privileges than others (Bartoleme & Trueba, 2000; Delpit, 2006; Shields, 2004). The status, resources, privileges, and/or marginalizing experiences that affect groups (like children of undocumented immigrants) outside of school can influence the extent to which they are privileged or marginalized within schools. We suggest that PLC members, with the help of a facilitator, discuss multicultural education literature to gain better understanding of how they contribute to either socially reproducing or dismantling unequal power relations among students and families.[2]

Third, after becoming clearer about the politics and systemic inequities that influence schooling, school-community members can use PLCs to help develop a critical educational stance. Forming such a stance entails that PLC members assess the extent to which they are willing to take risks, embrace new knowledge, and collaborate with others to promote social justice. Ideally, members must get to a place where they are willing advocates for culturally and linguistically diverse students and stand their ground when publicly acknowledging inequity. PLC members can become cultural workers who advance social justice when they take these proactive steps.

All in all, educators need greater awareness of the role they play (and are prepared to play) in reifying inequity or being positive change agents. Infusing multicultural education approaches into PLCs require that school-community members participate in intergroup dialogue about issues of cultural diversity, difference, and inequality. According to Zuniga (1998), intergroup dialogue helps learners "break through the surface tension created by difference; clarify and address issues of potential conflict"; and "rethink many of their attitudes, assumptions and political and social understandings" (pp. 1–2). Other critical scholars such as Freire and Macedo (1999) and Shields (2004) also stress the importance of dialogue being a transformative and conscious-raising process, in contrast with that which is merely conversational and informative.

Other such examples of critical, cross-cultural learning communities that incorporate similar strategies are described by Oakes, Rogers, and Lipton (2006). Their research details efforts to engage K–12 educators and others (students, parents, and community members) in activist-oriented learning communities dedicated to "disrupting schooling inequality" (p. 14). Deweyian philosophies of social democracy guided the learning communities they investigated, which were said to have stressed the importance of the public participating in critical thinking, social inquiry, dialogue, and equity-oriented advocacy. From a higher education perspective, Cooper (2006) offers an example of teacher education faculty members who engaged in intense intergroup dialogue about race and other complex issues of identity and equity as part of their collaborative learning. These faculty members formed PLCs to explore how to better align their teaching, curriculum, professional development, and school outreach programs with their educational commitments. The faculty reported that participating in critical, cultural learning groups assisted them in "working through their insecurities, frustration or confusion to be more effective and courageous teachers" (p. 124). Altogether, PLC members in both the K–12 and higher education contexts found their

collaborative learning experience self-empowering and valuable to the communities they serve.

Activity: Fostering Cultural Work and Learning

PLC members can use our activity called "Cultural Body Talk" to begin engaging in the type of critical self-reflection, consciousness-raising, and intergroup dialogue we have articulated and recommended (see Appendix 9.1). This activity is based on the work of Augusto Boal, the Brazilian founder of the Theatre of the Oppressed. Theatre of the Oppressed techniques have the potential to foster PLC inclusion by bringing together stakeholder groups through an embodied, intergroup process that requires participants to consciously name their own ideas and actively listen to others. This activity, through its imaging and intergroup dialogue techniques, has the potential to deepen participants' awareness of the sociopolitical realities that shape people's lives and to increase their cross-cultural understanding. It can also promote appreciation for diverse viewpoints about education and schooling.

Steps to Follow

To assist in developing inclusive and culturally relevant PLCs, we further recommend that

1. PLC organizers actively recruit diverse members within and outside of school sites, including parents and families, and ideally, students;
2. PLC members democratically structure their learning groups by (a) developing ground rules that prompt members to maintain an open and respectful atmosphere, (b) encouraging every member to assume a leadership role within the group at some point, and (c) choosing meeting times, dates, and settings that encourage broad participation;
3. PLC members identify guiding inquiry questions that help them prioritize their objectives and remain focused on achieving shared goals. Members may also benefit from developing collaborative inquiry projects that prompt them to (a) examine cultural conflicts occurring at their school and (b) devise culturally responsive, school-based initiatives.

Final Thoughts

PLCs can be forums in which educators collaborate to raise their cultural awareness and reduce their biases to better serve diverse school populations. Forming culturally responsive learning communities in demographically changing schools requires an inclusive and egalitarian leadership approach that invites educational stakeholders at every level to share in collaborative learning, decision-making, and reform. It further entails learning and leading with a critical educational stance, in addition to rejecting the separatist politics that usually fuel inequity. Engaging in the type of critical, cross-cultural learning communities we have described constitutes an important form of cultural work. It is our hope that our proposed strategies and steps will help school-community members to not only form new knowledge but also use that knowledge to implement practices and policies that promote equity, democracy, and social justice.

Appendix 9.1 Cultural Body Talk: PLC Activity

Activity Purpose: The purpose of this activity is to increase cultural understanding among teachers, administrators, students, and families about how school is experienced by each group. The ultimate goal is to identify what can be done to improve school experiences for all involved.

Time Needed: 1 hour (1.5 hours would allow for more discussion).

Materials Needed: A large open room. Interpreters may be needed to include participants who are not fluent in English. Group signs to be placed in the four corners of the room (explained below in "Directions for Image Creation").

People Involved: A facilitator, preferably a nonadministrator from outside the school, teachers, administrators, students, and families. A group should comprise 4 to 10 members.

Introduction to the Activity (as stated by the facilitator): "Thank you for agreeing to participate in this community-building activity. Today we are going to engage in an exercise that should allow us to gain a variety of perspectives about the school community and hopefully learn about how we might better work together and support each other."

Directions for Image Creation: Before the session starts the facilitator should place signs in the four corners of the room. Each corner will have one sign: Group 1: Students, Group 2: Parents/Families, Group 3: Teachers, Group 4: Administrators. The facilitator explains the following directions to participants:

1. Move to the corner of the room that represents the group to which you belong.
2. With your group, select an image that represents your collective view of a specific cultural issue/conflict affecting the school.
3. Create the image with your bodies. Use whatever props you might find in the room. Your bodies can represent people, things, or concepts. The image can be a still image or it can move, but posed group members should remain silent after forming the image.
4. Talk with each other about the image as you create it.
5. If you get stuck, one person can create a pose and then others can add on to that pose.
6. In order to create images, people often must touch each other, so be respectful and ask each member of your group permission to touch them before doing so.
7. Take 10 minutes to create your image. Once your image is formed, be sure to remember your body position. You will disassemble your image positions and recreate them later.
8. Everyone in the group should be part of the planning process and part of the image.

(*Continued*)

Appendix 9.1 (*Continued*)

Observation and Discussion of Images:

- Group 1 stays in position. The participants from the other groups walk around and describe what they see in the image and what they think the image represents. The group that created the image does not speak.
- After observers describe their perspective of the image, participants who created the image discuss what they hoped to represent. (Groups' various interpretations tend to highlight how there can be multiple perspectives and analyses of the same issue/event.)
- Continue the same process for each group. Limit discussions of each image to 5 minutes.

Large Group Discussion
(The questions below can help the facilitator solicit group members' multiple perspectives.)
About the Image Creations:

- How did you choose the school image you created? Were there differing ideas within your group about school? If so, what where the differing ideas?
- Were their difficult ideas to negotiate in the creation of the images?

About the Images Themselves:

- What did you notice about the images overall?
- What were the similarities? What were the differences?
- How were the images positive or negative? How were they thought-provoking?
- Are there any major representations of the school or schooling experiences that were missing from the collective images?
- What factors might influence a person's cultural perspective of schools?
- What might these images tell us about schools and schooling?
- What have you learned from participating in this experience?
- What can be done to improve the educational experiences for all community members?

Some Possible Modifications:
Long-Term Focus: The "Cultural Body Talk" activity can be spread over 4 weeks with the same groups. At the first meeting, each group can create an image of students; at the second meeting, an image of families would be created, and so forth. Through this process, each group would gain a sense of how they are perceived and experienced by others.
Conflict Resolution: PLC members can repeat the activity process and create an image that represents a resolution to a cultural conflict affecting the schools (or act out the resolution).
Vary Participants: While it is best to involve students and their families in "Cultural Body Talk," the activity can be carried out with only PLC educators and staff. With the latter option, participants should form four groups by counting off from one to four and then create an image they believe represents the perspective of group (1) students, (2) families, (3) teachers, or (4) administrators. Participants can also be grouped to represent the views of different cultural groups at the school.

Notes

1. Websites that offer helpful critical multicultural education resources are www.nameorg.org, www.rethinkingschools.org, www.teachingforchange.org, and www.tolerance.org.
2. Literature that can jumpstart meaningful conversations for PLC members include chapters 1 and 10 of Landsman's (2001) *My White Power World* and chapter 2 of Delpit's (2006) *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*. Ideally, these chapters should be read together because together they paint a fuller picture of how the culture of power operates in schools. We also suggest PLC members read chapter 2 of Valenzuela's (1999) *Subtractive Schooling*, which can be paired with *Introducing Carla: "This is America and Here You Speak English!"* an article by Espinoza-Herold (2003).

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CHAPTER 10

Transforming the Space of Schools into Learning Communities: Teacher Leadership as Pedagogy of Democratic Place

Patrick M. Jenlink & Karen Embry Jenlink

> Public space has the power to sustain, and it has the power to transcend. While supporting the established culture, the holder of public space has the potential to advance the common good by transcending the past and creating new futures.
>
> Fain, 2004, p. 27

> I appeal to teachers . . . to remember that they above all others are consecrated servants of the democratic ideas in which alone this country is truly a distinctive nation—ideas of friendly and helpful intercourse between all and the equipment of every individual to serve the community by his own best powers in his own best way.
>
> Dewey. 1916a, p. 210

Democracy does not just happen. It is constructed through experiences shared by all members of a community committed to transforming social space into a performative space that is defined by democratic ideas. In the sense of democratic learning communities and transforming the social space of schools, teacher leadership is not an end in itself. Rather, teacher leadership is a necessary condition and social agency for renewing professionalism and rectifying cultural histories, and, ultimately, for the important work of creating democratic educational practices that benefits all students.

In this writing, we present our understanding of democratic learning community as involving the work of teacher-leaders and other cultural workers taken to mean as a *democratic pedagogy of place* that can transform the space of schools into a democratically practiced place of learning. Herein, we attempt to address critical questions about

pedagogy, community, and educational responsibility, and what might help teachers, teacher-leaders, and other cultural workers to understand what commitment to a truly democratic community of learning entails. We argue that the nature of teacher-leaders' work as *pedagogy of democratic place* is situated within time and space; there is both a temporality and spatial quality that draws into question how social space shapes reasoning and practice. The teacher leader is concerned with the implication of social space, in particular questioning how cultural, pedagogical, and political meanings are produced, sustained, and interpreted in the context of transforming schools into a learning community.

This chapter is founded upon three assumptions. First, public schools function in all societies "as ideological templates revealing and organizing national aspirations, myths, symbols, and standards" (Finkelstein, 1984, p. 275). Second, teachers have the capacity for leadership and are, in general, passionate supporters of the role of schools in democracy. Their leadership capacity and passion, however, are not always rooted in clear conceptions about what leadership or democracy means or should be. Third, transforming the social space of schools into learning communities is important pedagogical work that must embrace the political and cultural nature of schools in order to realize the democratic possibility of the school.

School, Leadership, and Community Reconsidered

School as Public Space

School is a metaphor for public spaces, a purposeful creation of spaces that comprise learning environments. School, as a practiced place of teaching and learning, both shapes and is shaped by social practices (de Certeau, 1984). In considering the transformation of the space of school into a democratic learning community, teacher-leaders are concerned with forces that shape the space we call school and the ability of that public space to represent the needs and desires of the constituents it serves. When the school is placed in the relational context of being a social agency in a democracy, teacher-leaders are concerned with forces that shape the space as a place for democratic learning. As public, social spaces, schools are practiced places of learning by those who understand that place is defined by boundaries and understandings. In effect, schools are unrealized places of potential until they are occupied, and used, by the participants and authorities that animate and control them, respectively (Pérez, Fain, & Slater, 2004).

Transforming the space of the school into a "practiced place" requires that teachers discern what makes the space of school a practiced place (i.e., pedagogical practice, cultural practice, political practice, leadership practice) and why a practiced place is both pedagogical and political in nature. Transforming the space of school into a democratically practiced learning community requires, on one level, that teachers and other cultural workers understand the power of language and discourse in shaping social relations and practice. Simply stated, they should be aware how language and discourse encode cultural meaning and inscribe political ideologies in such ways that shape the space of school, in undemocratic fashion. Representations of public spaces, such as schools, are spatial metaphors that make individual's social and political existence meaningful (Epstein, 1999), and, at the same time, influence historical reasoning and cultural meaning. Teachers concerned with transforming the space of schools understand that

they must be concerned with the origin of spatial metaphors, post-structurally working to decode the historical origins in relation to the symmetry of power relationships that often define and control the space of school.

Teacher Leadership

The teacher leadership concept is not new. In the mid-19th century, teachers were often referred to as classroom leaders (Cuban, 1988). With the professionalization of school administration beginning in the 20th century, teacher leadership became an issue of workplace democracy (Smylie, Conley, Barbara, & Marks, 2002).

However, in the current discourse of policy and educational change efforts in schools, teacher leadership is being reexamined as a means to further a more democratic system of schools and promote a more professional workplace. Drawing on teacher expertise and experience as a school resource, providing teachers with power and presence in matters related directly to teaching and learning, and redesigning teachers' career opportunities give voice to how teacher leadership can impact education.

Over the past two decades, "teacher participation in school leadership has expanded, and teachers are not asked to perform a variety of non-teaching duties" (Ovando, 1994, p. 31). Among emergent teacher-leader roles are team leader, decision maker, action researcher, staff developer, and mentor (Ovando, 1994). This distributed sense of leadership suggests that the essence of leadership lies in the nature of the work, not the position or role that it occupies. Since the release of the Carnegie Task Force's (1986) report, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century,* teachers have experienced the redesign of work structures to provide leadership opportunities, including roles in school improvement, shared governance / shared decision making, professional development, and mentoring.

Problematically, however, teacher leadership is all too often interpreted through the lens of leadership theories that emphasize formal roles with defined responsibilities. This lens produces a traditional hierarchical definition of the teacher leader as a formally sanctioned subordinate to the building principal. Often these traditional roles create an asymmetrical power relationship between principal and teacher, and, more importantly, between teacher and teacher. The work of teachers as leaders is defined by a position of authority over other teachers, premised on an assumption that power is distributed.

What makes these interpretations of teacher as leader problematic is the absence of consideration and concern for the nature of work required to create schools as democratic social spaces wherein all participants are authentically engaged toward creating alternative future possibilities. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey (1916b) singled out "the area of shared concerns, and the liberation of greater diversity of personal capacity" as hallmarks of democracy (pp. 101–102). He believed democracy could only be sustained through voluntary action and vested interest, empowered by open communication. For Dewey (1934), communication was understood as the process of creating participation, "of making common what had been isolated and singular; and part of the miracle it achieves is that, in being communicated, the conveyance of meaning gives body and definiteness to the experience of the one who utters as well as to that of those who listen" (p. 244). In this sense, Dewey saw connections between individual voice and the public space. The school as a public space is made more democratic through the practice of using one's voice.

Greene (1988) amplifies the need for public space, where diverse individuals can be "the best they know how to be" (p. xi), noting,

> Such a space requires the provision of opportunities for the articulation of multiple perspectives in multiple idioms, out of which something common can be brought into being. It requires, as well, a consciousness of the normative as well as the possible: of what *ought* to be, from a moral and ethical point of view, and what is in the making, what *might* be in an always open world. (p. xi)(Emphasis in the original.)

In this public space, when individual voices are released and conjoined, this space becomes a performative space of democratic possibilities. Teacher leadership, interpreted through a lens of *space as a practiced place*, redefines the work of teacher-leaders in day-to-day interactions, working toward dismantling hierarchical patterns of engagement in exchange for more democratic ones.

Democratic Learning Communities

Against the myth of the school community as a space where sameness is a standard, and in which individuals have set identities, Rose (1999) posits an alternative view in which "communities can be imagined and enacted as mobile collectives, as spaces of indeterminacy, of becoming" (p. 195). According to this view, community is not fixed and given; rather than sameness, communities are in part defined by difference and otherness. Community can be constructed on a range of different levels of social life. A democratic learning community—"rather than relying on the view of community as solely a particular entity or narrowly defined set of relations—offers potential for a radical reordering of politics" (Little, 2002, p. 317). Therefore, democratic community "enables us to think about a public space comprised of a variety of actors with cross-cutting identities and some shared membership" (p. 317).

Creating and sustaining a democratic learning community requires democratic methods. Dewey (1963) believed that "democratic ends demand democratic methods for their realization. . . . Our first defense is to realize that democracy can be served only by the slow day by day adoption and contagious diffusion in every phase of our common life of methods that are identical with the ends to be reached" (pp. 175–176). The hallmark of democratic methods lies in the actions and discourses that we engage in, those that do not diminish or silence those with whom we disagree. Rather, democratic schools and the democratic practices of teachers and other cultural workers work to capitalize on differences by converting their differences and conflicts into lines of inquiry.

> The method of democracy—inasfar as it is that of organized intelligence—is to bring these conflicts out into the open where their special claims can be seen and appraised, where they can be discussed and judged in the light of more inclusive interests than are represented by either of them separately. (Dewey, 1935, p. 81)

The emphasis on democratic method is essential to democratic learning communities, most significantly to transforming the public space of school.

Teacher-leaders and others invested in transforming the space of school will find that movement toward the creation of a democratic learning community sets in

motion conflict with members' prior beliefs and practices concerning teaching and learning. Any conflicts must be resolved in order for democratic practices related to knowledge and teaching to be embraced. Explicit in conceptualizing a democratic learning community is an understanding of Dewey's (1927) ideas concerning community and democracy and the notion of learning communities as communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). As performative space, members of the democratic learning community are attentive to providing the grounds for forms of self-representation and collective knowledges of marginal peoples as part of an attempt to create within schools what Mohanty (1989/1990) calls "public cultures of dissent" (p. 207) and by so doing to simultaneously transform the space of school. By this she means

> creating spaces for epistemological standpoints that are grounded in the interests of people and which recognize the materiality of conflict, of privilege, and of domination. Thus creating such cultures is fundamentally about making the axes of power transparent in the content of academic, disciplinary, and institutional structures as well as in interpersonal relationships. (p. 207)

Furthermore, it is important for teacher-leaders to appropriate the codes and knowledge that constitute broader historical and cultural patterns that are less familiar. Underlying this pedagogical practice of place is the critical nature of understanding how subjectivities are produced within those configurations of knowledge and power that exist outside the immediacy of one's experience. Giroux (1991) asserts that these configurations of knowledge are central to forms of self and social determination, the obligations of critical citizenship, and the construction of critical public cultures.

In understanding and mediating social interaction within performative space, the democratic learning community is engaged in rethinking tensions within the existing space of school. Teacher-leaders and members of the community understand the need to stress the importance of democratic relations that encourage dialogue, deliberation, and the power of teacher-leaders to raise questions. Moreover, democratic relations signify the conditions necessary for teachers to expand their sense of agency as a part of a larger process of increasing both "the scope of their freedom" and "the operations of democracy" (West, 1990, p. 35).

Conceptualizing democratic learning community, we argue that a synthesis of the strengths of democracy and contemporary community is necessary. As Furman and Starratt (2002) note, democratic community within the context of postmodern diversity depends on a sense of deep democracy with a respect for difference. Democratic learning community, then, is enactment of participatory processes of open inquiry, centered on the common good and guided by a sense of moral responsibility "that recognizes the work of individuals *and* the social value of community" (Furman & Starratt, p. 116). Teacher-leaders and other cultural workers in the learning community honor difference, and understand that creating a democratic community requires the interdependence and contribution of all individuals.

Democratic Pedagogy of Place

A pedagogy focused on democratization (Giroux, 2004), as critical and political practice, suggests that teacher-leaders refuse to reduce their work to matters of technique and method. Rather, teacher-leaders who commit to the performative nature

of democratization as an act of intervention in the world "[focus] on the work that pedagogy does as a deliberate attempt to influence how and what knowledge and experiences are produced within particular sets of [social] relations" (Giroux, 2004, p. 41).

A major purpose of democratic pedagogy of place is to engage teachers as learners in the act of what Freire (1970) calls *conscientizacao*. This idea is explained as "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (p. 17). A democratic pedagogy of place has the same aim of *conscientizacao* and identifies "places" as the contexts in which these situations are perceived and acted on. In order to promote *conscientizacao* and at the same time transform the social, cultural, and political texts that are so essential to it, Freire (1998) advocates reading the world.

The act of "reading the world" occurs when teachers engage in discursive and inquiry-oriented practices. Examples of such practices include teacher study groups, action research, public forums of democratic dialogue, self-critical reflection, examining ideologically embedded practices, authoring the self and community through narrative inquiry, and related activities that are teacher-led and focused on democratizing the school community (Jenlink & Jenlink, 2008). In this sense, democratizing requires that learning community activities be focused on the generation of new knowledge while critically examining existing knowledge in relation to existing social practices.

Pragmatically, *democratic of pedagogy place* interprets as transforming and democratizing the social space of school into the practiced place of democratic learning communities. Giroux (2003) is instructive in noting that historically critical theorists have interpreted pedagogy as a moral and political practice that plays a critical role in constructing the social and cultural dimensions schools. Democratic pedagogy, as a form of social practice, operates within "institutional contexts that carry great power in determining what knowledge is of most worth, what it means for students to know something, and how such knowledge relates to a particular understanding of the self and its relationship both to others and the future" (Giroux, 2003, p. 160). Transforming the space of school into a democratic learning community means transforming pedagogical practices, which in turn means understanding that "teaching as knowledge production" must be connected "to teaching as a form of self production" (Giroux, 2002, p. 160). Pedagogy of place "presupposes not only a political and ethical project that offers up a variety of human capacities, it also propagates diverse meanings of the social" (Giroux, 2003, p. 160).

Providing Democratic Spaces

Through a *democratic pedagogy of place*, teacher-leaders create democratic spaces through the connection between the community of practice and cultural politics. What is required is that teacher-leaders and others actually experience and interrogate the places inside and outside of school—as part of professional learning—that are the local contexts of shared cultural politics. An emphasis of pedagogy of place is "to provide a space where the complexity of knowledge, culture, values, and social issues can be explored in open and critical dialogue within a vibrant culture of questioning" (Giroux, 2003, pp. 160–161). Such exploration through pedagogical practices translates into making the social space of school more democratic.

As teacher-leaders seek to and engage in transforming the space of school into a democratic learning community, they understand that there is an inherent responsibility of

being self-conscious about forces that work to silence individuals. Such forces prevent teachers from speaking openly and critically, often as ideologically inscribed patterns of racism, oppression, discrimination, "or part of those institutional and ideological mechanisms that silence students under the pretext of a claim to professionalism, objectivity, or unaccountable authority" (Giroux, 2003, p. 161).

A *democratic pedagogy of place* focuses upon the language of the cultural, political, and ethical as teachers examine how schools, knowledge, and social relationships are inscribed in power differently. Transforming the space of school into a democratic learning community—a place of democratic practice—requires pedagogy of place as a means through which individuals can evaluate their situations, reflecting on place-based problematic conditions and then engaging in creating and sustaining democratic learning community. The ethical enactment of democratic pedagogy is concerned with examining how the shifting relationships of knowing, practicing, and learning are constructed in public spaces and social relationships based on judgments that demand and frame "different modes of response to the other, that is, between those that transfigure and those that disfigure, those that care for the other in his/her otherness and those that do not" (Kearnery, 1988, p. 369).

Examining Ideological Inscriptions

Teacher- leaders understand that a focus on how ideologies are inscribed in the various relationships of teachers and students and others in the school is important. Whether the ideologies are inscribed in the curriculum, infrastructures, and organization of the school, or in teacher–student relationships, there is a more viable form of pedagogy. Transforming the school into a democratic learning community requires a pedagogy of place concerned with how ideologies are actually taken up in the contradictory voices and lived experiences of teachers and students as they give meaning to the dreams, desires, and subject positions that they inhabit (Giroux, 1991).

Schools as human communities, or places, are politicized, social constructions that often marginalize individuals and groups. A democratic pedagogy of place seeks to connect place with self and community, identifying and confronting the ways that power works through places to limit possibilities for others. As teacher-leaders engage in a democratic pedagogy of place, they must addresses "the specificities of the experiences, problems, languages, and histories that communities rely upon to construct a narrative of collective identity and possible transformation" (McLaren & Giroux, 1990, p. 263).

Reading Life Texts

Developing a *democratic pedagogy of place* requires teacher-leaders to challenge both themselves and other social actors within the learning community to read the world, and to read the stories of their own lives in relation to the world. Teacher-leaders must also question their life stories, asking what should be changed and what aspects should be retained. Questioning life stories, Gruenewald (2003) explains, requires an examination of "the cultural, political, economic, and ecological dynamics of places whenever we talk about the purpose and practice of learning" (p. 11).

A *democratic pedagogy of place* must do more that simply promote a culture of questioning. Such pedagogy must address how and what teachers' practices do to transform

the space of school. It must also explore recognition of the value of a democratic learning community in which teachers share leadership and work to ensure social justice, freedom, and distributed authority as well as responsibility. While it is crucial for members of a learning community to be attentive to those practices in which forms of social and political agency are denied, it is also imperative to create the conditions in which forms of agency are available for teachers to learn ways to think critically and act democratically.

Democratizing the space of school requires that teacher-leaders and other cultural workers read the social and cultural texts of the school or schooling and of the individuals that comprise the learning community. Starratt (2001) notes that at the heart of transforming space into a learning community are democratic participation and the sharing of "stories" in the interest of mutual understandings:

> [C]ommon space is productively occupied by our stories, not by our rationalizations of our convictions about theories of democracy. We will find common ground in stories about our lives and our communities, stories that will generate bonds of affection and sentiment. Instead of seeking to become a community in which we share uniform commitments to common goals, values, and cultural expression, we might seek a more modest goal of accommodation and acquiescence so that we can collectively get on with our public lives. (p. 6)

Transforming the space of school into a democratic learning community requires that teacher-leaders be prepared to teach for democracy with respect to an expanded capacity to think critically, and assume public responsibility through active participation in the very process of governing and engaging important social problems. Teaching for democracy is accomplished by teaching through democracy. Democratic community as performative space requires connecting pedagogy of place with pedagogical practices that are empowering and oppositional. In the transformation of space, teacher-leaders use practices that offer teachers and other cultural workers the knowledge and skills needed to believe that a substantive democracy is not only possible but is worth both taking responsibility for and struggling over (Giroux, 2003; Little, 2002; Mohanty, 1989/1990).

Performing Pedagogy of Place

Transforming the space of school into a democratic learning community is not passive work. It requires that teachers engage in democratic methods and practices that are performative. Through a democratic pedagogy of place, teacher-leaders engage self and others in performative practices, not as practices with pregiven effects but as the outcome of previous place-based cultural and contextual struggles. Pedagogy of place is grounded in a sense of history, politics, and ethics wherein theory is used as a resource to respond to particular contexts, problems, and issues (Freire, 1970, 1998; Giroux, 1991).

Teacher-leaders understand the need to extend this approach to pedagogy of place beyond the project of simply providing colleagues and other cultural workers with the critical knowledge and analytic tools that enable them to use the knowledge and tools any way they wish. A pedagogy of place as performative practice is concerned with the primacy of dialogue, understanding, and critique, focusing on the social interactions

and the obligations regarding questions of responsibility and social transformation. Through a pedagogy of place, teacher-leaders work to engage, through discourse and inquiry, important questions about power, knowledge, and what it might mean for teachers to critically engage the place-based conditions in which life in the school is presented to them.

Transforming the space of school into a democratic learning community requires that teachers critically examine existing conditions of the school as a practiced place of learning. Giroux (1991) is instructive in understanding the performative nature of pedagogy of place when he states that

> this entails speaking to important social, political and cultural issues from a deep sense of the politics of their own location and the necessity to engage and often unlearn the habits of institutional [as well as forms of racial, gender and class specific] privilege that buttress their own power. (pp. 516–517)

Democratic teacher-leaders focus on the tension between the pedagogical and the performative. They recognize that for the space of school to be transformed into a democratic learning, it is necessary to stress the importance of democratic relations that encourage dialogue, deliberation, and the power teachers have to raise questions (Giroux, 2004).

As performative practice, pedagogy of place embodies a belief that in order to transform the space of school, to democratize that space, teacher-leaders and other cultural workers must understand that all individuals within the school exist in a cultural context—culturally bound place. To quote Freire (1970),

> People as beings "in a situation," find themselves rooted in temporal-spatial conditions which mark them and which they also mark. They will tend to reflect on their own "situationality" to the extent that they are challenged by it to act upon it. Human beings *are* because they are in a situation. And they *will be more* the more they not only critically reflect upon their existence but critically act upon it. (p. 90, emphasis in original)

Finally, a democratic pedagogy of place means that teachers challenge each other to read the texts of their place-based lives. They engage in questioning what needs to be changed or made different, and equally important, what needs to be conserved as viable to the community. This means that teacher-leaders must critically examine the existing space of school and the relationships that define that space. And they must and work to transform the space through performative practices that are democratic.

Final Reflections

Transforming the space of school by creating and sustaining democratic learning community requires teacher-leaders and other cultural workers to make choices. Choosing wisely helps endure that teacher-leaders understand the school as a cultural space in which they can reconstruct the relationship of individuals within and across different cultures and subcultures, otherwise larger and/or external forces control individuals' lives without their participation. The creation of a culturally reflexive public space in which one is committed and participatory is essential to the well-being of a democracy.

While our American schools in general provide a cultural space and institutional base from which we can operate to enlarge the participation of our citizens, that enlargement depends on shift in focus and a transformation of the space of school into a democratic learning community.

Reading *Life Texts* Exercise: Steps to Take

As Starratt (2001) explains, we "find common ground in stories about our lives and our communities" (p. 6). Sharing stories contributes to creating a common space and shaping community and democracy. Equally important is "reading the world" (Freire, 1998; Freire & Macedo, 1987) through examining social, cultural, and political texts that translate into life issues and are a focus of a pedagogy of place.

Life Text Issue Story

In this exercise, each teacher will reflect on a *life text issue* he or she has experienced within the school. The issue should relate to texts of the teacher's own life that has influenced participation and practice in the school as a democratic learning community. These steps should help with preparing a narrative of the *life text issue*:

- Focus on a specific *life text issue* authentic to the school and/or democratic learning community, with respect to democratic practice, participation, and method. This may be interpreted as an issue of social justice, equity, power relations, or other.
- Describe the *place-based context* in which the *life text issue* took place. That is, provide a narrative description of the setting to enable others to vicariously share in and understand the issue.
- Describe individual participating in the *life text issue*. Who are they in your story? What is his or her role or relationship?
- Reflect on the various relationships and dynamics that contributed to the *life text issue.* Critically examine both self and other social actors, and how and what teacher practices contributed to the life text issue.

Pedagogy of Place Questions

Once each participant has written his or her *life text issue* story, in small groups or learning community share the emergent stories with each other, examining each story for the *life text issue* that define the school and the practices within. Here it is important to engage in dialogue and deliberation, honoring each *life text issue* and respecting the differences and experiences that have shaped participants' lives. To help facilitate the dialogue and deliberation, use some or all of the following question prompts or develop your own to guide discourse:

- What practices have contributed to the *life text issue* within the school?
- What previous place-based cultural and contextual struggles precede the current *life text issue*?
- What are the ideological inscriptions in the *life text issue* that work against creating and sustaining a democratic learning community?

- What existing relationships define the space of school and contribute to the *life text issue*? And what relationships are necessary to address the issue and democratize the school?
- What democratic methods best align with addressing the problematic nature of the *life text issue*?
- Considering the *life text issue*, how might teacher-leaders best work to create the democratic spaces necessary to cultivate a more democratic learning community?

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CHAPTER 11

Catalysts and Barriers: Practitioner Concepts of Professional Learning Communities as Democracies in Action

Carol A. Mullen & Sandra Harris

How do school leaders and teachers imagine democratic learning communities at the action level within schools? To investigate our question, we turned to practicing teachers and leaders studying in a higher education context. For the purpose of this writing, we focus on democratic leadership in action and perceived barriers.

This is the second phase of a two-part study involving an educational leadership population. The concepts, research questions, and data we present were not previously reported. The earlier publication explored democratically accountable leadership in the school lives of leaders and teachers (Mullen, Harris, Pryor, & Browne-Ferrigno, in press); the current writing focuses instead on the professional learning community (PLC) as a framework that connects democratic leadership and learning. Our assumption is that, in order to remain viable over time, PLCs must resonate strongly with a democratic philosophy.

Conceptual Frameworks

The frameworks that shaped our thinking for this study are democratically accountable leadership and PLCs.

Democratically Accountable Leadership Conceptualized

Democracy, both a discourse and a practice, shapes lives, identities, and stories. Theories and practices of democracy are, as Giroux (1992) has written, "informed by the principles of freedom, equality, and social practice" (p. 5). This definition challenges school leaders to function as democratically accountable leaders who

simultaneously embrace a social, cultural, and humanistic responsibility while nurturing and sustaining a democratic climate on their school campuses (Mullen et al., in press). To this end, Apple and Beane (2007a) argue that schools have a "moral and social obligation to promote democracy" (p. 36); however, they acknowledge that this obligation is only minimally addressed in most schools. Schools that do have democracy at the core of their culture have a formal curriculum that addresses social issues and service learning; participatory processes that promote shared decision making at all organizational levels; critical thinking and a respect for differences that is modeled and expected; school structures that encourage equity through access for all students; and authentic involvement with the local community (Apple & Beane, 2007b). When structures, staff collaboration, and peer learning are the norm, organizational school cultures become strengthened (Southworth, 2005). Schools that potentially make a difference are characterized by collaboration, shared leadership, responsibility for continued learning, and responsiveness to alternative ideas and approaches (e.g., DuFour, 2004; Giancola & Hutchison, 2005; Mullen & Hutinger, 2008).

As social justice proponents, we are committed to supporting the transformation of schools from within to become more democratically accountable. Critical elements in this reculturing effort are learning and collaborating (Southworth, 2005). Consequently, the need to understand PLCs is implied if one is to take seriously the development of democratically accountable schools and their sustainability. In such places, accountability and democracy are used to foster participatory leadership and shared decision making and to integrate theories of inclusiveness in policy and practice (Mullen et al., in press).

PLC Conceptualized

We define PLC as a school culture where all faculty members are committed to collaborative work that emphasizes learning and democratic accountability. PLCs function as the supportive structure for schools to continuously transform themselves from within. We evolved our definition from such critical notions as Sergiovanni's (1994), which places a premium on *commitment* within communities as "socially organized around relationships and the felt interdependencies that nurture them" (p. 217). Further, Sergiovanni (2000) observed that schools engaged in focused improvement become learning "communities of practice," generating capacity and refining capability to sustain improvement (p. 140). Similarly, Hord's (1997) view of schools that are PLCs draws attention to the commitment of professional staff to supportive and distributed leadership, shared values and practice, collective learning, and supportive condition.

Benefits and Challenges of PLCs

Benefits

Hord and Rutherford (1998) and Bryk, Camburn, and Louis (1999) found that when schools effectively implement PLCs, student learning improves. Reyes, Scribner, and Paredes Scribner (1999) observed a similar effect in their work with low-performing Hispanic schools. They created learning communities to assist staff in developing their own capacities to collaborate, with a resultant increase in student achievement. Additionally, Shellard (2003) and Marks and Printy (2003) noted that benefits of

PLCs include increased faculty morale and expanded knowledge, as well as improved teaching skills. Louis and Marks (1998) also reported that PLC teachers were more likely to engage students in challenging and authentic learning practices. DuFour, Dufour, Eaker, and Karhanek (2004) found that adult and student learning improved when collaborative teacher cultures identified student learning needs and took action to meet them. Further, Mullen and Hutinger (2008) have reinforced the importance of the principal's role in making the study-group model a hallmark of the PLC.

Highly successful, diverse school reform programs reflect a philosophy espousing the school as the center of change and the teacher as a catalyst for classroom change. Accordingly, the effective reform programs Harris (2002) described demonstrated a commitment to the PLC model through professional development, devolved leadership, and a teaching/learning focus.

Challenges

The benefits of creating a campus culture that can support and sustain PLCs are compromised by outdated organizational structures, increased workloads, and faculty attitudes toward collaboration (Bezzina, 2006; Fullan, 2007; Giles & Hargreaves, 2006). For example, Wells and Feun (2007) found that while teachers were interested in sharing resources and dealing with student misbehaviors, they were reluctant to share best practices and review student learning. Hord (1997) also cited the catch-22 of building collaborative cultures that depend on healthy collegial relationships. The complexity of implementing structural conditions through such means as the effective use of time has been emphasized as well (e.g., Hord, 1997).

Principals who lead PLCs have shared the view that "democratizing the decision-making process is fraught with difficulties" (Bezzina, 2006, p. 163; see also Mullen & Graves, 2000). While teachers may value such opportunities for building the collective capacity of the staff, they tend to depend on a designated leader to address issues that arise (Bezzina, 2006). Direction and leadership are essential and cannot be left to occur serendipitously—structures must be in place to ensure there is a shared vision and purpose, what Senge (1993) described as a "purpose story."

How We Approached This Study

Our methods replicated a study piloted at a Florida university similarly situated within an educational leadership program, with emphasis on democratic learning and leadership (Mullen, 2008). Our goal in this study was to learn the potential relevance of the principle of democracy and democratic action expressed by educational leadership students in another program and state.

Participant Profile

The 39 participating doctoral students were leaders in a range of K–12 school and district contexts in the state of Texas: teachers (n = 5), principals and assistant principals (n = 13), superintendents and assistant superintendents (n = 7), and central office directors and supervisors (n = 14). (The eight higher education teachers and administrators who participated in the original study were excluded from this analysis.) Experience in their current roles ranged from 1 to 9 years; 15 worked in district offices,

and they were almost equally distributed across elementary, middle, and secondary sites. The respondents included 23 females and 16 males who were White (n = 30), African American (n = 8), and Asian (n = 1). The majority profile was a White female professional, which matches the demographic profile reported for other educational leadership and administration programs (e.g., Harris, 2005; Mullen, 2004).

Program Profile

The cohort-based doctoral program at this Texas institution is designed for educators to become effective leaders in diverse settings. The program stresses these outcomes: (a) understanding change and leadership that result in sustainable reform; (b) shaping and aligning organizational values to promote learning for all students; (c) implementing standards-based curricula and performance-based assessments that ensure high achievement for all students; (d) creating caring organizations that address equity and opportunity; and (e) cultivating democratic learning communities. To ensure these outcomes, learning activities in the program emphasize critical inquiry, dialogue, and self-reflection. Students participate in field-based research in diverse settings to examine how leadership capacity is demonstrated within educational organizations.

Study Procedures

We administered a survey (i.e., reflective writing exercise) consisting of two sections, demographic information and open-ended questions (see Appendix 11.1). Questions included the following: What is the most democratic action you have seen on your K–12 campus to date? What specific barriers do you (or others) face when trying to implement democratic strategies on your K–12 campus? It was explained that we were seeking participants' insights and ideas and that their responses should reflect personal or work experiences.

Data Displays

Regarding the two data displays included herein, "actions" in Table 11.1 refers to the major democratic actions that the respondents identified as being carried out in their schools and, in some cases, their districts. "Examples in data" encompasses salient and repeating instances of a particular phenomenon (e.g., human issues / resist change). In the "actions" column in Table 11.1, we have included the number of times the item in question was noted; for example, in the case of the category "building teacher leadership/collaboration," 15 individual remarks were made about this point, resulting in the organic derivation of the category. The same logic was used for organizing the statements elicited on barriers to democratic action (see Table 11.2). The totals in the "actions" and "barriers" columns in the two charts thus do not reflect the number of respondents but rather the total number of occurrences of each item.

Data Analysis

The basic qualitative study design we used involved identification of key words and phrases in the students' written responses, followed by joint analysis of the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To formulate this analysis, we coded the data using our research questions, searched the coded data for units of meaning, collapsed and refined categories,

and explored relationships and patterns until consensus and saturation were reached. The coded responses were placed in separate tables. Trustworthiness of the data was established by combining conventional data procedures with interrater reliability. These efforts at data analysis yielded two major themes—what democracy in action means and what barriers to democracy are perceived.

Results: Democratic Actions and Barriers

An area of relative consensus that emerged via the data analysis coalesced around collaboration on organizational, interpersonal, and curricular levels. The practitioners we surveyed perceived, based on the examples given, collaborative actions on their campuses as illustrative of democracy in action. The most frequently reported area of democratic action was developing teacher leadership (15/39; 38%). This was primarily evidenced by involving teachers in site-based decision making, encouraging faculty to voice their concerns, and respecting faculty input. Another area given emphasis was campus-led collaboration (11/39; 28%). This category subdivided into campus-led collaboration that was organizational, research-based, and curricular. This was followed by district-led collaboration leading to structural changes, such as involving faculty in developing school calendars (6/39; 15%). The next area of importance was student collaboration and, finally, community collaboration (see Table 11.1).

Table 11.1 Democratic actions taken on K–12 campuses (n = 39)

Actions	*Examples in Data*
Building Teacher Leadership/ Collaboration (15/39)	Engaging in site-based decision making; voicing concerns and being respected; applying to Teacher Advancement Program; making grade-level decisions; focusing on shared mission and continual improvement; sharing governance (leadership teams); identifying campus goals; collaborative problem solving
Campus-led Collaboration (11/39)	Undertaking school-wide investigation and implementation of new programs (e.g., alternative daily schedules); integrating the academy within high school campus; developing value-added benchmarks to determine teacher incentive pay; involving of stakeholders in developing campus plan
Organizational (4/39)	Using of research (survey instrument) to address campus culture and safety, student motivation, and teacher development and advancement; collecting and analyzing data to address organizational effectiveness; implementing a task force to develop a research-based intervention model
Research-based (4/39)	Teaming to support teacher voice and developing curriculum related to standards and tested subjects; Understanding mandates requiring teacher development of behavioral objectives
Curriculum (3/39)	
District-led Collaboration (6/39)	Involving faculty in developing school calendars
Student Collaboration (5/39)	Infusing student collaboration in community service projects and advisory committees; Involving the participation of persons with disabilities participated in school events; collaborating to promote new learning
Community Stakeholder Collaboration (2/39)	Utilizing as collaborative and networking sources campus educational improvement committees, teacher–parent meetings, student advisory boards, customer service committees, and departmental meetings

Table 11.2 Barriers to democratic action manifesting on K–12 campuses (n = 39)

Barriers	*Examples in Data*
Human Issues (29/39)	
Resistance to change (11/39)	Fear of change; resistance to change in routines and beliefs; avoid responsibility and impede progress toward goals; dislike for working in teams or consensus-building
Perspective (8/39)	Role and authority of school district limits human potential; people invested in their particular views; fragmentation/service overload on campuses restricts whole-campus view; decisions/actions of administration vague or inconsistent; staff's inability to see "whole" picture and leader unable to establish vision; fear restricts potential for open dialogue
Diversity challenges (5/39)	Provisions for diversity minimized by government; campuses experience confusion over culturally diverse perspectives; minority groups provided special opportunities; education given low priority in general
Ethical concern (5/39)	No mechanisms for faculty voice; cronyism in administration
Organizational Structural Issues (19/39)	Lack of human comfort with top-down leadership styles; disconnect between ideas and authority of district office and campus leaders; conflict in traditional leadership and collaborative leadership; decision makers need information; administrators not seeking input yet making decisions affecting everyone; campus leaders who control beliefs and opinions to be held by others
Hierarchical Decision Making (7/39)	Lack of time and resources to engage in democratic process; decisions should reflect student interests; constituents difficult to organize; little buy-in from stakeholders
Resources (6/39)	District, state, and federal mandates create barriers; district culture can be overly centralized and controlling; desirable changes not implemented because of conflict with policies; personality clashes occur; "red tape" promotes inefficiency; archaic rules and people resist change even if this could help students
Centralized control (6/39)	

Next, concerning the prompt asking about specific barriers to implementing democratic strategies on K–12 campuses, responses were organized into human issues and organizational/structural issues. Human issues (29/39; 74%) were most often mentioned as barriers. These subdivided into challenges involving resistance to change (11/39; 28%), limited perspectives (8/39; 20%), and diversity and ethical concerns. Organizational/structural issues (19/39; 49%) focused on hierarchical decision making (7/39; 18%) but included resources and centralized control (see Table 11.2).

The "Big Ideas"

Here we synthesize the ideas and results emerging from the writing exercise. To set the stage, we turn to what has been said about the successful implementation of PLCs. In this context, DuFour (2004) has warned that the PLC model could become another failed reform movement unless educators attend to the "big ideas" that must become deeply embedded in school cultures: ensuring that students learn, creating a culture of collaboration, and focusing on results. The "big ideas" that our participants emphasized were building school culture, coping constructively with human issues, and dealing effectively with organizational/structural barriers. The responses we received can be classified as "big ideas" that were shaped by the

queries we posed about issues of democratic actions and barriers. The direction of our thinking as researchers probably accounts for why the practitioners focused more on human and organizational issues in their responses and less on student learning per se.

Query 1: Democratic Actions

The democratic actions seen by the practitioners on their K–12 campuses all fell within the provided definition of democratic principles as collaboration, shared leadership, responsibility for continued learning, and responsiveness to alternative ideas and approaches. In the data, collaborations most often involved building teacher leadership and were campus-led. One participant described the support for teacher leadership this way:

> The decision to join the Teacher Advancement Program was democratic. When faced with this issue, we invited master teachers to speak to our faculty about the program. We hired subs allowing our teachers to visit sites where the program was implemented. We voted on whether we wanted to participate in this process.

Campus-led collaboration included organizational actions, research-based actions, and curriculum actions. One organizational activity that generated positive synergy involved "meeting to discuss how my teachers could work with other teachers. While some initially resisted, we have reached beyond our borders. The synergy of more people working on a common cause has made us all better."

Research collaboration was, to some extent, empirically and systematically conducted. Several individuals made comments to this effect: "Input is sought via surveys and interviews about the mission and beliefs of the organization. Not a one-time process, this is continuously used as means of improving overall effectiveness, which fosters quality service." Further, collaboration on curriculum issues was considered a democratic activity: "During our team time, the teachers meet to decide the most effective way to teach objectives. All have a voice and input."

Including students in school collaborations was an example of democratic activity occasionally seen on campuses, as in the case of those who served on advisory committees and provided school board members with information. Only two participants cited instances of campus-led collaboration. These involved listening to community stakeholders "to gather input on the needs of the learning environment," resulting in the development of improvement plans.

Query 2: Barriers to Democratic Actions

The practitioners conceptualized the barriers faced when trying to implement democratic strategies in their K–12 schools as human issues and organizational/structural issues.

Human issues

Human issues were manifest as resistance to change, limited perspectives, diversity challenges, and ethical concerns. Regarding resistance to change, someone shared

this opinion: "Resistance to change is the number-one barrier when implementing democratic processes. The greatest barrier is the problems caused by those who avoid responsibility and who make difficult or impossible to achieve the goals or standards." People's limited perspectives were associated with fear, complacency, and avoidance behavior: "Most people are afraid of free thinking and feedback; they'd rather be told what to do and how to do it instead of being a part of the thinking and accountability process."

Perspectives on diversity challenges ranged from the critically reflective to the covertly racist. Engaging in critical reflection, participants commented that, because of the limited scope of diversity it encompasses, the U.S. federal government's policy making in education is problematic: "The government wants everyone to be accountable and at the same time and by the same method of measurement. There are no considerations for diversity. The human side of education is being minimized." At the other extreme, several practitioners identified as barriers to democratic action "minorities who fault-find and whine (usually loudly) until the best plans falter because it was not their way," "opportunities provided to minority groups that are different than the previous norm," and "'real' problems campuses have to face and deal with have to face (i.e., culturally diverse and socially diverse perspectives on issues, even trying to agree or disagree on just what is the issue)."

We speculate that, generally speaking, teachers have been socialized to teach and lead within traditional schooling contexts that are rooted in stereotypes or false premises rather than those aligned with cultural or ethnic diversity (Mullen & Johnson, 2006; Tillman, 2006). Negative assumptions about faculty who are ethnic and linguistic minorities are reinforced through losses of privilege and power for White adults; for students who represent traditionally underrepresented groups, such assumptions are reinforced through mandated accountability practices that include prespecified curricula and testing, as well as tracking in schools. Democratically accountable leaders will need to find constructive ways to confront and change historic and limited mindsets within their buildings.

Ethical concerns steeped in politics and personalities were also identified as barriers to democratic action within schools. One participant exclaimed, "Simply put—cronyism! There's absolutely too much favoritism." Democratically accountable leaders are critically aware of conducting themselves professionally and ethically, and their actions must be fair. They model values that respect the delicate balance between accountability *and* democracy, and the individual *and* the collective.

Organizational/structural issues

Organizational and structural barriers to democratic action on campuses encompassed hierarchical decision making, lack of resources, and centralized control. A participant gave this example of hierarchical decision making: "Administrators do not always seek input from students, staff, or parents before implementing a decision that affects everyone involved with the school." When noting problems with resources, an individual wrote, "The democratic process is time consuming. It's difficult to reach all constituents and to choose a time, place, or forum in which all can participate." Finally, centralized control over decisions was described as an obstacle: "Barriers occur within the overall system with mandated decisions outside our control. However, we work together, as a department, to marginalize the effect of these barriers as we focus on our shared mission."

Steps to Take

To assist with the development of democratic learning communities in schools, ideas and strategies intrinsic to their creation follow. Keep in mind that every context is unique, which means that program adaptations are inevitable.

- School leaders should solicit the endorsement and involvement of faculty and staff in identifying principles of democracy and learning community and overarching ideas that allow for complex new forms of leadership and community to emerge. The parties involved should develop a shared understanding of how the new cultural ways of thinking and behaving potentially fit with (or ideally enhance) the vision and mission of the school.
- Schools need to confront and change limited mindsets that prevent the making of an authentic democratic learning community.
- Schools must stipulate through a negotiation process the resources needed to support the learning community initiative (e.g., staff assistance, course release, stipend).
- Teacher leadership needs to be built from within by involving teachers in leadership councils that are actively developing/revisiting the mission of the school, sharing governance, and collaborating to resolve issues.

Exercise

Within your educational context, investigate the views of teachers and leaders with respect to democracy, leadership, and community. (The survey prompts we provided can be used [or adjusted] to this end; see Appendix 11.1.) Find out what they believe to be democratic actions on your campus and the perceived barriers to them and seek descriptive but anonymous examples. Document the feedback, share the results, and, as a whole faculty, create a plan of action and follow through on the commitments made. Consult Sergiovanni (1992) on the concept and practice of promise making as a covenant (not a contract). Here, collective promises become a source of authority, morally binding people. These activities can be carried out at staff meetings, workshops, retreats, or via preservice internships for leaders and teachers.

Authors' Note

Institutional Review Board approval (exemption certification number 7340836) was awarded in fall 2007 from the university in which this research was conducted.

Appendix 11.1 Democratic School Leadership Survey

(Mullen, 2008; the instructions and Section I are adapted from the original; Section II is original and it represents phase 2 of this study)

You are being invited to participate in a survey on democratic leadership that we are conducting with colleagues. To protect the anonymity of your response, please return your completed file electronically to [anonymous] by October 30, 2007.

Instruction

Write as much as you can in Section II. *Remember*: There is no "right" answer—it is your insights and ideas that matter here. Draw upon your personal and professional experiences. Complete sentences are preferred. Individual responses will be analyzed thematically and anonymously.

Section I. Basic participant demographics

1. Name of cohort: 1____ 2____ 3_____ 4_____
2. Where do you work? Elementary __ Middle __ High __ District office __ Other __?

   Specify here __
3. Current professional role or title: _____
4. Years completed in your current role: _____
5. Gender: M __ F __
6. Race—specify here: _____

Section II. Democratic strategies in practice

7. What is the most democratic action you have seen on your K–16 campus to date?
8. What specific barriers do you (or others) face when trying to implement democratic strategies on your K–12 campus

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CHAPTER 12

Faculty of Color Constructing Communities at Predominantly White Institutions

Donyell L. Roseboro & C. P. Gause

> Between me and the other world there is ever an unmasked question. . . . How does it feel to be a problem? They say, I know an excellent colored man in my town.
>
> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks,* 1903, pp. 3–4

Creating professional learning communities (PLCs) that attract qualified faculty members, regardless of race, should be the goal of any institution of higher education. For predominantly White institutions (PWIs) that are committed to creating racially inclusive PLCs, the constructing of communities that sustain faculty of color requires an identification of what the culture of the institution is as well as the ways the institution might exclude (whether explicitly or implicitly). And, it requires recognition of the roles faculty of color might be asked to fulfill. Most important, it demands a "truth telling" process in which White faculty hear their colleagues of color, faculty of color hear their White colleagues, and both groups engage in dialogue about the institutional culture and how faculty members, administrators, staff, and students might create sustainable, inclusive democratic learning communities.

We begin with reference to Du Bois' (1903) equation of being "colored" with being a problem because it mirrors the deficit terminology often used to describe the absence of faculty of color at PWIs (Thompson & Louque, 2005; Turner & Myers, 2000; TuSmith & Reddy, 2002; Smith, et al., 2004). The absence of faculty of color at PWIs and the inability of PWIs to create and sustain racially diverse professional communities are issues that continue to be debated in academic and professional communities (Curriuolo, 2003; Weinberg, 2008). Ultimately, the creation of racially diverse PLCs at PWIs requires a transformation of the institutional culture, and transformation, regardless of institution type, requires thoughtful and proactive leadership.

Herein, we briefly examine the roles and expectations of faculty of color at PWIs using autoethnographic and theoretical lenses. We use our lived experiences as faculty of color at PWIs to inform a new theoretical discourse—topology—that brings specificity to the experiences of faculty of color who must navigate institutional structures that oppress (implicitly or explicitly). We extend this topology as an invitation to dialogue, that is, as a rearticulation and synthesis of what has already been discussed, critiqued, and deconstructed among faculty of color. We also recognize that a topology, by its very nature, essentializes experience and would thereby implicitly presume that all faculty of color share the same beliefs. Fundamentally, we resist the assumption that all people of color identify with one another across some predetermined psychological bond. We do, however, believe that being raced, othered, or oppressed can generate a similar interpretive framework that would implicate how people respond and act, and that this framework is historically contextualized (Biegert, 1998; hooks, 2003; Tatum, 2003).

In this writing about positionality, we specifically explore how faculty members of color are situated at PWIs, why that situatedness matters, and how that situatedness is explained. Positionality is comparable to "metaknowledge . . . locating yourself in relation to social structures, such as the classroom, that recreates and mediates those relationships" (Maher & Thomsom-Tetreaullt, 1994, p. 202). *Positionality matters* because the presence of faculty of color at PWIs holds both symbolic and real significance; it, at least, calls into question racist presumptions that faculty of color do not belong at such institutions and in such positions. And, it provides students, faculty, staff, and administrators opportunities to engage with and learn from traditionally disenfranchised individuals.

The situatedness of faculty of color at PWIs has been explained in a number of ways. Umbach (2006) sums up the deficit discourse that is embedded in most discussions about faculty of color (e.g., why are they not at PWIs?). Most researchers explain the low numbers of faculty of color in the following ways: (1) the minority PhD candidate pool is low; (2) institutional structures make it more difficult for faculty of color to get tenure; (3) the racist attitudes and practices make the working environment intolerable; (4) feelings of isolation and alienation that stem from being the only or one of few people of color; and (5) a failure to appreciate scholarship on issues related to race written by faculty of color. To counter the first explanation, Weinberg's (2008) data note that the number of Black and Hispanic individuals earning doctoral degrees has increased proportional to Whites. Specifically, she says that

> from 1981 to 2001, the percentage of Black Ph.D.'s has grown from 4.2% to 6.1%; the percentage of Hispanics has likewise grown from 1.9% to 4.2%; and the percentage of whites correspondingly has declined from 91.6% to 83.9%. (p. 366)

Weinberg adds that this growth in the number of Black and Hispanic students earning doctoral degrees has not significantly altered the numbers of Black and Hispanic faculty members at some PWIs (although numbers vary greatly depending on department, school, or college within an institution). Nationwide, there has been an increase in the number of faculty members of color from 9% in 1983 to 16.5% in fall of 2005 (Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2008; Snyder, Tan, & Hoffman, 2006). That increase, however, has occurred in large part because of an increase in Asian American faculty (Harvey & Anderson, 2005). The number of faculty of color at PWIs, in contrast,

remains low. In 1993, only about 3% of faculty members at PWIs were people of color (Abrahams & Jacobs, 1999), and currently, the majority of faculty of color teach at institutions that primarily serve minority students (Turner, 2003). Ultimately, no one explanation exists for why there are so few faculty of color teaching at PWIs (particularly in tenure-track lines), but, in this chapter, we examine possible explanations that relate to reason four mentioned above (feelings of isolation and alienation).

Finally, we write from the assumption that increasing the number of faculty of color at institutions of higher education would improve the educational environment for all students, "diversification of faculty increases the variation of perspectives and approaches creating a richer learning environment for students" (Umbach, 2006, p. 318). While having a racially and ethnically diverse faculty has been upheld as a positive goal, neither affirmative action policies nor the continued (albeit slim) support of the U.S. Supreme Court for such policies has improved the numbers of faculty of color in higher education. We consider the question of presence (rather than absence), not what has been done to exclude but rather what roles faculty of color must fulfill to gain acceptance and avoid excommunication—discursive segregation—by colleagues, whether White or of color.

Faculty of Color at PWIs

Stanley (2006) provides an analysis of the literature on faculty of color at PWIs, noting that the paucity (there is a little) of empirical research mirrors the low numbers of this population at such institutions. In comparatively analyzing qualitative studies of faculty of color at PWIs, Stanley concludes that they are almost universally excluded, expected to only speak about diversity issues, expected to be a minority figure head but not to engage in service directed at assisting minorities in some way, and expected, as scholars, to divorce their *colored* identity from their professional identity. Turner and Myers (2000) outline the effects of affirmative action programs on hiring practices at PWIs but emphasize the fact that faculty of color, once hired, experience "cultural taxation"—additional work expectations that do not boost their chances of earning tenure and/or promotion (as cited in Padilla, 1994). They also argue that faculty of color face the unenviable burden of being perceived as "tokens" (e.g., unqualified for the job), being typecast (expected to only work at certain jobs), and of conducting illegitimate research when studying issues related to diversity (the "Brown on Brown" dilemma).

Various researchers point to the ways in which faculty of color are marginalized, erased, silenced, or ignored once hired at PWIs (Cleveland, 2004; Garcia, 2000; Thompson & Loque, 2005; Turner, 2003; TuSmith & Reddy, 2002; Vargas, 2002). They are simultaneously hypervisible and invisible, seen yet not heard. Stanley (2006) sums up the discursive constructs of faculty of color at PWIs: "multiple marginality, otherness, living in two worlds, the academy's new cast, silenced voices, ivy halls and glass walls, individual survivors or institutional transformers, from border to center" (p. 3). While this list is not exhaustive, it does capture the core of what has been written about faculty of color at PWIs.

Because this language emphasizes the absence of faculty of color and their marginalization from the dominant discourse of higher education institutions, we extend that conversation by offering a topology of role expectations. We hope this will help illuminate the authorship of faculty of color in these role enactments. Faculty members

of color are subjects (see Freire, 1970) and agents who exercise power in complicated ways (see Foucault, 1997). While they work within preexisting hegemonic structures, such structures are not completely closed spaces; we believe, as Gramsci (1971) argued, that there is always space for contestation and change. As faculty of color, we recognize that we enter and resist these spaces with turmoil, confidence, and wariness. Whatever the context, however, we do not enter these spaces assuming that we must fulfill the roles assigned to or expected of us. Instead, we enter with caution or avoid with reservation, understanding that each decision, whether made consciously or unconsciously, may irrevocably alter our professional lives and those of other faculty of color.

Alexander-Snow and Johnson (1998) contribute to our understanding of faculty of color and role performance. These researchers who used data collected from 12 African American and 19 Latino / tenure-track faculty members suggest that the social knowledge (beliefs formed from experiences with the institution, colleagues, and professional associations) at PWIs are enacted as social norms. For faculty of color who are not versed in the normative discourse of a PWI, navigating the social climate of the institution becomes paramount; consequently, an inability to successfully navigate has a detrimental effect on their academic lives. Snow and Johnson also argue that faculty of color wear a "White mask" and that the mask (or disguise) rarely disappears. Interestingly, they historically explain the "hostile" social culture of PWIs as stemming from the residual effects of affirmative action policies—policies that reinforce the impression that PWIs hire unqualified faculty in response to the social and political pressure that institutions are under to bring in diverse faculty.

Other scholars of color (e.g., Antonio, 2003; Baez, 2003; Bonner, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2001) have discussed the implications of their roles in PWIs whose institutional culture, despite attempts to include diverse perspectives, seem impenetrable when trying to have authentic dialogue about race. Based on such scholarship, we wonder how a PWI can demonstrate its commitment to recruitment and retention of faculty of color such that the institution creates a space for the coconstruction of an academic culture that embraces differently raced individuals but that does so while also acknowledging and dismantling racist institutional practices. We next delineate the role expectations for faculty of color at PWIs (their positionalities) and end with possible institutional responses to this critical question.

The Topology: Theoretical Expositions of Survival

The topology we next introduce theoretically frames the particular roles we have performed or witnessed other faculty of color enacting. Because we believe that PLCs depend upon dialogue, we extend this topology as a call to conversation among colleagues. And while we do not suggest that all faculty of color will necessarily relate to or even agree with the roles we have identified, we do expect that the topology will bring into public space/conversation some constructs of experience that might not otherwise materialize in discussion. Our purpose is not to convince White faculty that these roles are real but rather that they are possibilities, framed by the question, "If the topological markers introduced in this paper represent experiences of faculty of color at our institution, then how might our higher education institutions best respond?" Ultimately, we believe that the creating and maintaining of racially inclusive PLCs depends upon the identification of race-related role expectations for members of those communities.

The Suspect

Interrogated from the time we enter a PWI (Banks, 1984), faculty members of color are open to question and challenge from White students. It appears that their disbelief in our intellectual capability and authority gives them the boldness to do so. Such disbelief is grounded in their historicized understanding of people of color as inferior, and this understanding is further supported by popular media images and cultural messages. These not only continue to erase and ignore but also vilify and demonize people of color (Hendrix, 2002; & hooks, 2003; Yosso, 2002). As suspect, every interaction in the classroom potentially becomes a site of contestation in which we, the instructors of color, strike a responsive posture predicated upon the implicit defense of our race. This defensive racial posture embeds itself within student–teacher situations that already harbor the potential for conflict (e.g., discussions about grades or classroom policies). If suspect, faculty members of color cannot enter public conversations or PLCs without having to "compensate" for their raced inferiority.

The Diversity Witness

As the "diversity witness," we often find ourselves assigned to diversity committees or projects, selected to other committees as the minority representative, or asked to facilitate diversity discussions. Hence we find ourselves, whether "qualified" or not, speaking to the historical evolution of race relations in the United States. While we believe these assignments and discussions are usually worthwhile, we find ourselves dubiously navigating the tension between embracing such opportunities for dialogue as a way to make thoughtful contributions to university discussions and, in contrast, avoiding these as additional and unofficial responsibilities as faculty of color, responsibilities that, we might add, typically provide little to no leverage in our seeking of promotion and/or tenure.

Despite the limitations just raised, we embrace this role of diversity witness because it flows naturally from our spiritual pedagogy. We resonate with Dillard, Abdur-Rashid, and Tyson's (2000) explanation of witnessing as a practice that calls forth our lived experiences with oppression into public space. Witnessing is painful, evocative, and truth-telling. It requires that we suspend our hermeneutic of suspicion—that we, temporarily, abandon our learned desire or need to decode hidden meaning (Josselson, 2004) so that we may, if only for a moment, trust White people. It means, for us, that we bear our souls in public and unsafe spaces among people who may look at us with contempt (Du Bois, 1903). When we engage in race-based dialogues with our White colleagues in public space, we believe the dialogue becomes more than intellectual; it can heal wounds, foster honest communication, and lead to the development of sustainable PLCs.

Affirmative Action Statistic

Though race-based assignments in public schools have been effectively dismissed by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1 Et Al.*, affirmative action in higher education remains a possibility (see *Grutter v. Bollinger* 2003). Many institutions of higher education continue to adopt and maintain diversity goals as a part of their mission, and if the Court follows its logic in the

University of Michigan's Law School case, *Grutter v. Bollinger*, university officials may continue to use race as a factor in their admissions processes. While these cases are not directly applicable to faculty and staff, they do hold specific implications for universities and their hiring processes. As purported sites of democracy (we believe, one of the few semiprotected sites), we continue to believe that part of the purpose of higher education is to educate students for life in civic society. With such a charge, many institutions are making concerted efforts to recruit and retain students as well as faculty of color.

There are obvious differences in university administrators' intent and expectations of faculty of color. We have, in our experiences, noted many public exclamations made by such leaders who claim to embrace and want diverse faculty, but we have similarly witnessed little depth to these exclamations. Faculty members of color are expected to independently discover how our "diverse" perspective might actually alter the topography of the institution such that the institution's leaders can claim that they have successfully addressed the diversity issue. We are celebrated at new faculty meetings, yet our incorporation into the institutional structure occurs (or does not occur) in complicated ways such that even as some of us move into upper-level administrative positions, that movement does not come with a corresponding increase in the capacity to voice, to make critical decisions that alter university policies (Turner, 2003).

Contract Workers

Knowing that PWIs are predicated upon systems of power that work to maintain White privilege (Delgado & Stefancic 1997; hooks, 2003; McIntosh, 1988), we have, in some ways, taken as a foregone conclusion that they will remain so. We believe that our presence will do little to deconstruct that historicized paradigm. Knowing this, we view our work as contractual, designed to provide a temporary relief for a specified period. We question whether our efforts contribute to any sustained growth in the university because we are only expected to fulfill roles that seem to have more to do with appearances than with transforming the culture in which we work (Brayboy, 2003).

Like other contract workers (e.g., construction workers), the conditions we face can be hazardous, albeit differently. Others critique us for speaking too loudly or too often when we voice complaint, while others question our periodic silence and challenge us to challenge everything. Very rarely do we find a happy medium, one in which we speak ourselves without offending those who have hired us. Herein lays the ultimate tension: Because we will never quite *be* a part of the dominant culture of the institution, we will always function as contract workers because we do not hold, by cultural or racial virtue, a permanent place at the institution; we feel that we are "on loan" until we become too militant, race(y), or unpredictable.

Code Breaker

For centuries people of color have been interpreters/translators for White people who either cannot or refuse to learn multiple languages (see Meadows, 2002 for a discussion of the WWII Army Comanche and Navajo "code talkers"). While this code breaking represents an important skill of those who performed it historically, it continues to hold potentially dangerous implications for the people of color who engage in it today. It means, most literally, that at times academics of color translate the "world of color" to White people who may misinterpret, misuse, or misappropriate. Such

interpreting/translating does not come without specific consequences. It places the interpreter/translator "between" worlds, knowing that neither can fully be home (Anzaldua, 1987; Du Bois, 1903; Mohanty, 2003).

In interpreting/translating, we know that we are woefully inadequate—one person of color cannot speak for an entire group. If we refuse, however, we see and have "witnessed" more than one White person's inadequate attempts to understand people of color absent any interpretation or translation. We are thus placed in the unenviable position of deciding how to engage in conversations among White people who consider themselves liberal or progressive, and who are talking about and representing "us." Somehow, remaining silent, while our well-meaning colleagues attempt to understand oppression based on skin color, seems wrong, but even when we enter into these conversations, we often find ourselves refuted, ostensibly because we have "class privilege." For some of our White colleagues, this class privilege mirrors their own experience; they believe we are more in tune with their cultural frameworks (as middle class, working professionals) than those of poor people in the racial group we share. While this may be true to some extent (we do not suggest that class does not complicate our understanding of racial oppression), we resist the presumptions of White academics who believe they are best able to make this determination for us.

The Informant

The role of informant closely resembles that of the code breaker, but distinct differences lead us to treat it separately. While operating as "code breakers," we are primarily speaking and listening in different voices. There are times, however, when we are expressly expected to provide critical information about one group's intentions and motivations. Put more bluntly, White people want to know "Why do [insert race here] people do that?" and, if we ever introduce a White colleague to a group of "Other" people in the community, the community members want to know if this individual can be trusted. In our introduction, there comes a particular kind of beginning trust—an unspoken, "This White person must be okay because s/he is being introduced by the [insert race here] faculty member," but the introduction only serves this function if we (the *colored* faculty member) have established connections with the community to which we are introducing this colleague.

We are, at times, able to gain trust in both communities (the communities of color and White communities), but this is a tenuous position. To maintain trust, people in both communities must believe in our integrity and sincerity and that we are loyal to their particular cause or effort. When the causes/efforts of each community are diametrically opposed, our work/role is challenging. We recognize, however, that if the university system is to sustain positive and proactive relationships with local communities of color, then it must have faculty members who know not only the world of the university but also of the local community. And, if local communities of color are to use the resources of the university, they must know what those resources are and have access to those who can help them identify and utilize those resources.

A Topology and PLCs

As we indicated prior to the extension of this topology, these roles are put forth as possibilities and the question is, "If the topological markers introduced in this paper

represent experiences of faculty of color at our institution, then how might our institution best respond?" To be more explicit, if faculty of color are persistently questioned (suspect), repeatedly called upon to discuss race (diversity witness), assumed to be unqualified (affirmative action statistic), unable to make any structural change in oppressive institutions yet hired to make some effort (contract workers), expected to translate one community to another (code breaker), and asked to provide information on *colored* communities (informant), then how should professionals at PWIs respond? How has one's institution possibly created spaces that allow for and sustain these role expectations? These are beginning questions for faculty and administrators to use in trying to determine how the institutional culture at their PWI might exclude faculty of color.

Exercise: Critical Questions for PWIs with Progressive White Faculty

What is important to us is what faculty of color must do, how they must *be* to succeed at a PWI, and what the PWI must do to support these individuals, especially with places that are unfriendly and antidemocratic. For faculty of color, we must name the roles we enact and consider ways to build on the discursive strength afforded by our ability to perform multiple identities. Equally important, faculty and administrators at PWIs must holistically consider the subcultural and sociocultural expectations and opportunities at their institutions. For example, are junior faculty expected to be seen, not heard? Is there a professional social network of faculty and staff of color at the institution? If not, why not? What are the relationships the institution has with its staff who are people of color? What relationship does the institution have with local communities of color? What, if any, student groups are geared toward meeting the needs of students of color? And, are faculty members of color expected to mentor or advise these groups? Such questions can stimulate conversations for reinventing the social culture of the traditional institution. They also serve another important role—they can help faculty members, staff, and administrators respond to our question, "How can a PWI demonstrate its commitment to recruitment and retention of faculty of color?"

Practical Possibilities

In thinking of actions that an institution should take, we consider the structural processes of the institution that specifically relate to retaining people of color as faculty and that primarily center around tenure and promotion. An institution should research the raced implications of its tenure and promotion process. This means that researchers would comparatively analyze the number of faculty of color and White faculty who have been granted tenure and promotion. If there are a disproportionate number of faculty members of color not receiving tenure and promotion, institutional leaders need to critically examine their promotional practices. Are faculty members of color being penalized for conducting research about diversity? Are they not receiving credit for providing service to the university and specifically communities of color? Are they expected to fulfill more teaching or service responsibilities than their White counterparts? Are the faculty members of color teaching diversity-related courses, and, if so, how does the university account for inherent problems with the course material, the

evaluation process, and faculty of color assigned to teach those courses? (see Coren, 1998; Nast, 1999).

Once the first issue has been examined and policies are in place that honors research and service on and to communities of color, then PWI administrators need to establish clear guidelines for protecting the time investment of faculty of color, particularly junior faculty. They should not be expected to serve on diversity committees or on every committee that needs an "Other," thereby overutilizing (and taxing) the few faculty members of color on staff. Finally, regular professional conversations are needed between faculty of color and upper-level administrators. They should allow for heterarchic rather than hierarchic dialogue—dialogue which is "bottom-up" rather than "top down" (Mason & Randell, 1995). Most importantly, these discussions should affect some change in policy or practice.

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CHAPTER 13

Support for Women Leaders: The Visible and the Invisible

Jane H. Applegate, Penelope M. Earley, & Jill M. Tarule

A growing body of literature is available about women in leadership roles. We seek to contribute to that work by focusing on issues related to being visible or invisible as a woman leader, particularly in the context of leadership communities. By "visible," we mean capable of being seen, exposed to view, well known, or capable of being perceived, recognizable (Merriam-Webster, 2003). The Oxford English Dictionary (1987) adds, "The degree to which something impinges upon public awareness; prominence" (p. 1343). It is these themes, visibility and invisibility, that we trace in the following narratives.

Five years ago, we, the three authors of this chapter who are longtime colleagues and friends, began a systematic inquiry into what we call gendered leadership. We proposed that some leadership styles are gender related, but not gender specific (Tarule, Applegate, Earley, & Blackwell, 2008). Using gender as a lens or frame to deconstruct and analyze our own leadership experiences, we focused on identifying themes that characterize gendered leadership in leadership networks or learning communities. These networks may comprise people who are in the same place (proximate) or people who are geographically separated (nonproximate). In our earlier work we found and described four leadership themes: the power of context, mentoring and networks, the intersection of personal and professional lives, and the belief in leadership practices to guide action (Tarule, et al., 2008).

Our method has been to make narratives of our leadership experiences and the experiences related to us by women colleagues. Once they were written, we used a gender lens to analyze each individually to see what theme or themes emerged as important. We then engaged in a collective discussion of our individual findings and through those conversations identified our four themes. The final part of the process was to reflect on and analyze the implications of these themes for women leaders.

In this chapter, we continue that method, using leadership experiences in both K–12 and higher education settings. What emerged from our analysis of these further

narratives is a new theme: visibility. We discuss the following variations on the theme of visibility in leadership: arriving at the decision to make something visible, creating a safe place to make personal challenges visible, being marginalized or made invisible, and experiencing "surplus visibility" (Patal, 1992). We further suggest that proximate or nonproximate learning communities may themselves be deliberately visible or invisible. Each narrative below, given in the speaker's own words, is followed by a brief reflective analysis of how the narrative illuminates aspects of visibility and invisibility as it intersects with the practice of leadership and the leader's sense of efficacy.

Jenny's Story: A Nonproximate, Informal Network

I am a doctoral student in education leadership at a university in a metropolitan area and an aspiring principal. Last fall semester one of my courses, Leadership Strategies for School Administrators, included an online discussion for students to communicate issues or concerns we were having as we carried out our school district responsibilities. Most of us had been encouraged to seek a principal's license, and we were also involved in extra school responsibilities to practice our leadership skills.

Initially, I thought the online discussion board where students could describe leadership challenges and other students could respond was a novel idea but wondered if anyone would write what was happening in real life. During the first few weeks in class, no comments were posted. I suspected we all had concerns because during the evening breaks, we had hallway conversations about what was going on in our schools. One evening as we were chatting, our professor overheard Sarah tell a story about a challenging situation at her school. The professor suggested that she write about her experience on the discussion board to see if others in the class had advice for her. She agreed, and this was her post:

> I feel I've fallen into a snake pit and there is no way out. I never expected taking on a leadership task would make me feel like this. I've worked in my school for 6 years and have always had a good relationship with my colleagues. I thought they respected me as a teacher and as a team player, but right now I feel I don't have a friend in the world. I was asked to chair the school council and knew it might be a challenge because that group has considerable power over how the state achievement dollars are spent. Each week before the council meets I sit down with my principal and review the agenda to be sure that we are on the same page. I also ask him for suggestions when there are sensitive items on the agenda. Even with this advance planning, when I get to the meeting, problems erupt. I want to be sure that everyone has a chance to speak about a topic, whether it is renewing the contract of the vending machine company or purchasing new software for parent contacts. Inevitably, someone with a contrary viewpoint wants to talk on and on. Last week's meeting, which was scheduled for an hour, finally disintegrated after three and a half hours with everyone in a bad mood—especially me. I felt we didn't accomplish a thing! I really need some help in leading these meetings, but I don't want to ask my principal because I think he'll see me as a failure. One of my friends said, "You asked for it, now deal with it." Maybe you all can help me sort this out.

I was amazed at that posting. What courage it took on Sarah's part to tell her story. I had sensed that she was having a hard time at school from what she said in class

each week, but now I really understood what she was going through. I was moved by how alone she seemed to feel and how worried that not everyone would like her or agree with her. I worry that when I get started in administration, I will have trouble with that, too. I was also amazed by the responses that Sarah received. In addition to what I thought were good suggestions about organizing and running meetings like the one she described, there was so much empathy and compassion expressed about her frustrations as a leader. Sarah's courage opened the door for us to support her and to understand that even with careful planning the dynamics of some groups can challenge a leader. In this case, certain members of the school council appear to be monopolizing the agenda as a way to draw attention to themselves and away from the purpose of the group.

What I discovered through the discussion board is that among my colleagues are bright and caring people willing to share their wisdom if only we are able to open up and ask for help. Although our class ended over a year ago, our virtual community continues through a ListServ that one of the students set up. Just about every week someone posts information on a new resource or seeks advice.

Reflective Analysis

In this example, doctoral students were frustrated and anxious, isolated and initially silent about their leadership challenges, largely because of concern about how they would be perceived by others. In essence, they chose invisibility until the option of a discussion board was made available. The discussion board was first a proximate community because it was associated with a graduate-level seminar that also had a face-to-face component. Ultimately, when the conversations continued on a ListServ, it became a nonproximate network. In this case, the medium of electronic discourse offered these students a safe place to make their leadership challenges known and thus visible. However, because one must be added to a ListServ, conversations on it are not public. In that sense, one gets to choose visibility with a specific and safe group while maintaining invisibility to others not on the ListServ.

The Dean's Story: A Proximate and Formal Network

They are on every campus—women on the faculty who have such talent and insight that they shine at everything they do. These natural leaders are often recognized by supervisors as "women with potential," good candidates to be groomed for administrative roles. On my campus, through the leadership of a woman president, a program focused on identifying, nurturing, and developing leaders among women and minority faculty members was born. This program, organized and guided by the president's leadership team, annually selects a cadre of faculty members to become part of the program. Monthly meetings acquaint the participants with a cross-section of university leaders. In addition, each participant is required to select a mentor from among the administrators on campus and meet regularly with that person to learn about the mentor's duties and responsibilities.

During my first year as dean, Janice, an associate professor who was interested in joining the leadership development program, approached me about it. From casual conversations with her, I knew her to be engaging, bright, and energetic, and so I nominated her for the program. She was accepted and asked me to mentor her.

Each month Janice spent a day with her colleagues in the program, and each week she and I spent an hour discussing a range of topics—some she would raise and others I would. One day, after she had sat in at a particularly spirited discussion of impending budget cuts at a meeting of department chairs in my college, Janice asked me about the levels of participation in that group. She observed that of the eight chairs that I inherited from my predecessor, all but one was male and all were White. She also remarked that the one woman attending was an acting chair, not a permanent appointment, and was silent unless I called on her. Janice asked if I was comfortable with being the first woman dean and having a nearly all-male set of department heads.

Her questions prompted me to ask myself how I could have a leadership team that looked like this in a college with a student population nearly 80% female and 36% minority. How could I, so early in my tenure as dean, make changes that would reflect my values and still maintain the support of those who hired me?

As Janice and I mulled over these issues, she told me that the buzz on campus was that four of the current chairs would be retiring in the next year or two. That day I took steps to diversify my team. I began with the department that had an acting chair and launched a search to fill that position. I made a mental commitment to bring diversity into the leadership positions in the college, including my office staff. Would I have taken these actions without Janice's probing? I hope so. But having her present to observe and ask hard questions certainly brought the point home to me.

Participating with Janice in the program had as much effect on me as it did on her. Having the opportunity to support her in her leadership development provided me much needed support in my first year at a new university. This partnership in leadership development was coincidental and symbiotic. It has been several years since Janice and I worked together, but we are still friends. Janice is now a dean in her own right and has her own opportunities to develop new academic leaders.

Reflective Analysis

In this narrative, we find several levels of visibility and invisibility. Overall, it is an example of a decision at the presidential level to make the mentoring of women and minorities for leadership positions a high profile campus activity. This level of visibility may have been the impetus for reluctant mentors to step up to the plate. The selection of individuals for the program was transparent and visible; their activities made the program participants well known on campus.

We suggest that because the program was formal and visible, Janice had the confidence to raise a sensitive topic with her mentor—the gender and racial composition of the dean's leadership team. Although the previous dean had created a department chair demography that did not reflect the diversity of the university, the homogeneity of the group was not really visible to the new dean until it was pointed out by her mentee. It is likely that the predominance of White male chairs in the group was the root cause of the female acting chair's silence. The gender imbalance was either pushing her to the margins, making her invisible, or it was so powerful that it caused her to avoid being noticed.

A meta-analysis by Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and van Engen (2003) found that women leaders in the noneducation sector were more likely to be transformational, while male leaders were more often transactional or laissez-faire. They describe a transformational leader as one who elicits motivation and respect from others, communicates

well the organization's mission and values, exhibits optimism and excitement about the future, examines and respects new perspectives, and focuses on mentoring others. We believe the dean in this narrative exhibits the characteristics of a transformational leader and would add to the description by Eagly and colleagues that such individuals have a visible and transparent leadership style as they interact with others.

The Principal's Story: The Rise and Fall of a Proximate Network

I am mourning the loss of the group I am about to describe—and the loss feels intense, like that moment just before one bursts into tears. When I reflect on how important it was for me to have this time with my female colleagues, I imagine I am not the only one to whom it mattered so much.

The story began 3 years ago. "So," said a colleague, a fellow principal, as we sat at a dinner get-together, "this conversation is so important. Let's be more intentional, like picking a night every month, the fourth Tuesday or something, when we can meet." All of us at the table agreed.

Each of us was the first woman to be principal of her high school, although not the only female principals in our large suburban school district. At first, we went out to dinner together, choosing a different restaurant each time. While it was a relaxed and social gathering, no one ever said, as happens so often in social groups made up entirely of professionals in the same field, "Let's not talk shop."

We explicitly wanted to be together to do just that. And it would go on for hours. Whoever had an issue, an idea, or a frustration would bring it to the group. Often we started by simply reviewing events of the past month. Someone would begin, usually in an incredulous tone, describing something that had happened, mostly a decision by the superintendent or an action by the school board. We would analyze why those moves by the district—or individuals—were being made at that time. Among the four or five of us (even with good intentions, on occasion one of us could not attend) there were strikingly different perspectives. Eventually, we began to identify those perspectives as strengths: one of us always cast analysis within a political framework; another within an organizational behavior one; a third within an individual, psychological one; and a fourth took a political/financial view.

The perspectives of my colleagues and friends taught me something and always inspired a new way to understand my work in the context of the district and in relation to other school leaders. Reflections on our leadership discussions became over time a critical component of how I thought about what I was doing as a leader. I came to see leadership much more contextually from these experiences, to understand that every significant decision made by someone had ripple effects and multiple meanings, some that I was neither aware of nor could control.

In time, we began taking a meal into the apartment of one of our members. She was struggling with a serious illness, and her work left her too drained to go out to dinner. The group thrived in that new environment. All was well until the illness took over, and she finally and valiantly gave up. Before her death, she had invited a new principal in the district to join the group. Although our new colleague had attended only a few dinners, she joined us in mourning the loss of our dear friend.

Losing her was so painful that we could not gather for a full 6 months after her death. At that point, the new principal offered to organize the dinners. But then an odd thing

happened: she never called the next meeting. I mourn for the loss of the original group and am baffled that none of us did anything to reconvene it.

Reflective Analysis

This narrative illustrates what one of us likes to call the principle of the food processor. When flour, water, and shortening are put into a food processor in an appropriate ratio, pie dough is created. Too little water results in a mix that does not hold together, while too much creates something resembling paste. If one ingredient changes, so does the final product, and even after adjustments the outcome is never the same as before. Groups can be like that. The establishment of the proximate leadership community, a change in its composition, and the attempt to create a similar but not identical group is an example of the "group/food processor principle" at work.

Unlike the narrative of the doctoral class using a discussion board for future leaders to be visible—to see and be seen—this situation involves a small number of established women principals. Even though there were other women principals in the system, the group did not expand until it brought in one new member. The dynamic of the group was to create a proximate community to air concerns of people in role-alike positions in a single school system. Because membership was not open, however, the group itself was invisible to those outside of it. Moreover, the particular perspective on work issues that the group provided frequently remained invisible during the school system meetings as well.

For women in high-profile positions, like principals of large schools, superintendents, or deans, there is what Patal, writing about the challenges of women of color, calls "the stigma of 'surplus visibility'" (p. 35). She argues that surplus visibility has two aspects. The first is a shift in perception among those in the dominant group when those from a marginalized population "challenge the expectation that they should be invisible and silent" (p. 35). The second is that often someone who is different from the norm is seen as a token instead of an individual in her own right. Because the women in this narrative were in high-visibility roles they had to worry that their words and actions would undergo a higher level of scrutiny than those of their male counterparts. This is a compelling reason for the group to seek a level of invisibility. In fact, we suspect that the group never reconvened because the impact of the surplus visibility, perceived or real, felt too threatening, which leads to our final observation. When individuals feel they are in a safe place and can make known their fears and challenges, there is an expectation that the information and discussion will remain within the group. This level of interpersonal trust, as well as agreement about how confidentiality will be managed, is critical in a proximate learning community where individuals work in the same school system or university.

The Story of a "Different Dean": A Nonproximate and Formal Network

When I was a new dean, it did not occur to me that a source of information and support might lie beyond my university. It did occur to me that there were sensitive issues with which I needed help. They included dealing with competitive dean colleagues and the sense that gender was playing a bigger role in the power and privilege dynamics of the institution than I had expected.

It was in those early months that a story, a friend studying medicine once told me, became emblematic of my own experience. She was a successful medical student. Until her surgery rotation, that is. There, despite intense effort, she kept feeling that she was not "getting it," an unusual experience for her. Nor could she figure out what was wrong until one notable day. After a particularly complicated session in the operating room, she, the other students, and the chief of surgery were deep in discussion about the operation as they walked back to the doctors' locker room to change out of their scrubs. In those days, there was no locker room for women med students, so they had to change in the nurses' locker room. As my friend turned away from the group's discussion to go change, it hit her: the conversation about the difficult surgery was going to continue in the "doctors' locker room." She would miss it. And those missing chunks of knowledge and instruction were the reason she was not "getting" surgery. Without intent or recognition, hers was inadvertently a "different education" in surgery from that of her male colleagues.

I had not realized how much mine was a "different deanship" in similar ways until I was at a national professional conference. There I was approached by a leader of the organization, who asked if I would consider serving on its women's forum. Once I recovered from an immediate reaction of "How did she know to ask me?" (one of those moments when one feels totally seen and understood by a virtual stranger), I jumped at the chance to be a candidate for the open position. I was appointed, and the time in this nonproximate, formal learning community became enormously important to me.

Now a decade later, I realize how much the women's forum became my locker room. It was not just about having the chance to talk to and become a colleague and friend of a diverse group of deans, mostly women, but it was also the chance to be engaged in the forum's work. We took up issues like mentoring other "different deans" into the profession; examining what we call the "missing discourse" about gender in policy and practice in the organization and in the profession; and supporting women in higher education to become organizational leaders.

My membership in that community or network was an invaluable component in my own growth and development as an academic leader. The dialogue in that community made me think of something discussed by the critical theorist Paulo Freire (1970). He described how the accouterments of power—voice, ascendancy in the organization, dominant theoretical stances, resources, and public attention—were assigned differentially to individuals within an organization, and how gender was salient and relevant in those assignments. The kind of dialogue we had in the women's forum was impossible at home, not only because it is hard to be completely objective about the daily practices of power differentials in one's own institution, but also because the subject is often too risky to discuss with colleagues, many of whom may be the beneficiaries of those very power differentials. But in the nonproximate community, we could have these discussions. It was unlikely that we could have done so without the quiet and clear leadership of a vice president in the organization. It was she who would set the agenda for meetings and create an "emancipatory dialogue," which promoted understanding and led to action resulting in changes in the professional organization.

The dialogue and the work were exhilarating, enlightening, troubling, hard. But along with what we accomplished for the profession, I gained a new perspective on my own institution and the practices in it.

Reflective Analysis

Many women have experienced what might be called deliberate accidents of discrimination. In the medical student's story, the low number of female medical students meant that the problem of the dressing area was neither compelling nor visible. But making the problem of the locker room visible would not have addressed the underlying fact in medicine at the time: women were marginalized and invisible.

As mentioned previously, we believe that visibility and a transparent leadership style are characteristics of a transformational leader. Nevertheless, there are times when organizations, with their visible and hidden norms, may not be hospitable environments for transformational leadership. Blackmore and Sacks (2000) studied women leaders in Australian universities following a major national reorganization of higher education. One finding was that, while women were a new source of leadership for universities, as demonstrated by more of them moving into top administrative positions, they were often institutionally powerless. The study also found, "Universities are highly competitive systems which increasingly espouse rhetoric of collaboration in the interests of the faculty and the university, but which increasingly reward individuals differentially as resources shrink" (p. 9). This could easily be a description of American universities.

The challenge for the dean depicted in this narrative is to move from the margins to the center without attracting surplus visibility, which leads to stereotyping and other forms of marginalization. She stands on a tightrope with her transformational leadership skills the pole that helps her achieve balance and a spotlight on her that makes her every move visible, and sometimes blinds her. Yet, she does not know what may be ahead to upset her balance and send her falling to the ground, where there may (or may not) be a safety net. She does not know when the conversation she is trying to influence will disappear into a locker room.

The dean, like the principals in the previous story, needed to connect with women in roles like hers, but the institutional context worked against finding or creating a proximate learning community. It seemed to the dean a welcome coincidence that she was asked by a leader in a professional society to become involved in the women's forum. If a professional society is serving its members well, it knows who they are. The dean seemed surprised that a vice president in the organization knew her, describing the recognition as "one of those moments when one feels totally seen and understood by another, almost a stranger." In this case, the organizational members were sending the message to the dean that you are visible and valuable to us. Moreover, the women's forum was an example of a learning community where leaders could safely be visible and enrich the organization by engaging in professional development. The experience helped the dean in this narrative to affirm her leadership style and consider ways to be successful in a demanding university environment.

Steps to Take

Our analysis of the experience of women leaders hopefully illuminates the many facets of being visible and invisible. We conclude that in some situations a proximate or nonproximate learning community may elect to be invisible or inconspicuous to avoid the trap of surplus visibility. Within the community, however, it is essential that members feel they can be visible or exposed to view. This requires that the norms of these

learning communities include consideration of how confidences will be honored. We further suggest that while some gender-related learning communities may be formalized, like the women's forum in the fourth narrative, they cannot be forced and need time to evolve.

Furthermore, we would assert that for school districts, schools, or universities to embrace the diversity and distinctions among women leaders, we must all recognize that visibility is framed by three constructs. The first is the culture in which current and emerging leaders live and work. Is it one that actively promotes mentoring and professional development or, like the story of the medical student, one that did not recognize when some individuals were advantaged over others? The second construct is the importance of self-reflection. Leaders must interrogate their own sources of privilege, consider whether their privilege causes them to marginalize others, and think critically about the consequences of not being visible, being visible, or having surplus visibility. The third and final construct is that of the organization. What can institutions, schools and districts, and professional organizations do through the structure of proximate or nonproximate learning communities to illuminate the power of visibility in shaping the careers of leaders?

Exercise

Consider a time when you as an individual consciously chose to act in a way that was visible or invisible. Why did you make that choice? Explore how a proximate or nonproximate learning community might have helped you sort out your options and make an informed decision. Is one of the four perspectives on visibility and invisibility more relevant than the others? Why? Write a narrative about your experience incorporating these ideas, then find a small group (two to four) who have also done the exercise, agree on confidentiality, including neither telling the stories to anyone else nor attributing any part of a story to its author. With this agreement made, discuss your experiences of networking or learning communities and the issue of visibility. How was the experience successful and helpful? How not? How did visibility or invisibility inform the experience? What advice would members of your learning community have for one another on managing visibility/invisibility issues?

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SECTION III

Technology and the Learning Community

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Introduction to Section III

In this section, the authors of the three chapters take on current and progressive issues pertinent to technology and the learning community. Virtual learning communities are brought to the fore, with critical attention on a myriad of issues that range from changing norms and patterns of behavior within institutions, including communities of practice, to benefits and drawbacks of this medium. Critical frameworks for thinking through the implications of this revolutionary change are provided, in addition to successful experiments in the virtual world.

In Chapter 14, "Professional Learning Communities and the Culture of Digital Technology: A Philosophic Inquiry," Hudak explores conceptual links between PLCs and the digital, informational culture. He builds on educational reformer Michael Fullan's cultural framework of system-wide development by applying it to the digital culture. His position is that just as the Tyler Rationale shaped thinking about schools in the early 20th century, digital technologies now influence and frame the very ways we think of schooling and leadership. He discusses how the online/digital dimension of schooling in the 21st century is altering the daily life of the educational worker, and as such is affecting what leadership means.

Carter and Villaverde, in "Virtual Learning Communities: Encountering Digital Culture, Politics, and Capital" (Chapter 15), discuss how virtual learning communities face some of the same challenges as traditional learning contexts. They assert that building learning communities that encourage introspection, analysis, and respect for difference is challenging, regardless of the context. The authors (a professor and her students) focus on issues pertaining to the construction and replication of culture, politics, and capital in virtual learning communities, with a critical perspective on the borders (e.g., social, emotional, and behavioral norms) that influence digital environments, in addition to issues of privilege and cultural capital. They ask about the extent to which virtual spaces are conducive to informed learning and knowledge production. Importantly, they also prompt reflection on how communities help us learn and what exactly constitutes community. Included are case illustrations of two successful virtual learning communities and an exercise that is applicable to both secondary and college curricula.

"Graduate Students' and Preservice Teachers' Electronic Communications in a Community of Practice" (Chapter 16), by Richards, Bennett, and Shea, is a study of the developmental nature of interpersonal relationships in the electronic world. Using a community of practice framework, the authors demonstrate the reciprocal nature of interactive dialogue through computer-mediated communication. The context for this

writing is a literacy camp, which is situated in a low-income charter school committed to supporting the instructional needs of at-risk children. The researchers analyze the electronic communications between graduate student mentors and preservice teachers; they conclude that long-term email exchanges can facilitate quality mentoring relationships and facilitate reflection and problem solving. Included are exercises for encouraging instructors to add electronic networking to their courses and for scholars and practitioners to foster semester-long electronic communities of practice.

Carol A. Mullen

CHAPTER 14

Professional Learning Communities and the Culture of Digital Technology: A Philosophic Inquiry

Glenn M. Hudak

In this philosophic essay, I explore the professional learning community (PLC) within the cultural context of contemporary digital technology. Herein I extend my own thinking about what I refer to elsewhere as the "electropolis" (Hudak, 2007b), the contemporary electronic community found online. For increasingly, as I have described (see Hudak, 2007a), Web technology has become the site of the United States' commerce with its vast pools of information, its capacity for networking and communication, and its ability to provide instantaneous information on global, cultural, business, and political events. Indeed, when we turn our attention to the context of schooling and the larger educational-political-administrative complex, we notice immediately how Web technology, as a manifestation of our contemporary digital culture, has become a part of everyday life. More and more we observe, for instance, that communications between and among superintendents, principals, teachers, parents, community leaders, social workers, and health professionals occur online. Indeed, as the infrastructure of schooling goes online, it is hard to think where the traditional boundaries between individual schools will begin and end. In fact, it may be said that the Web is transforming the very cultural foundations upon which traditional schooling rests: the individual school with its own distinctive educational culture.

This may not be all bad. For PLC advocate Fullan (2006), one of the functions of the PLC ought to be the establishment of a collaborative culture between schools for the purpose of building a common culture of "continuous improvement." As he explains,

> [T]he work of transforming schools means all or most schools, and this means a system change. For system change to occur on a large scale, we need schools learning from each other and districts learning from each other. We call this "lateral capacity building" and see it as absolutely crucial for system

> reform. . . . The basic purpose, in my view, is to change the culture of school systems, not to produce a series of atomistic schools, however collaborative they may be internally. (pp. 10–11)

In essence, lateral capacity building means that schools within a district are bound into a single, total organization with a common grid, and where distinctive school culture gives way to a unified district organization. That is, school reform, through PLCs, reorganizes school districts into a single entity with the aim of eliminating the "atomistic" school. For Fullan (2006), the target of this collaborative effort at school reform is the very infrastructure of schooling, its "social and human resources" (p. 13). As such, the PLC, then, is conceived of as an organic entity that is linked at all levels, from student–teacher communication in the classroom, to intra staff communication within the school, to school–school collaboration between and among schools. This sort of communicative networking for the PLC demands the latest in digital communication systems to coordinate such broad efforts in collaboration.

One such effort that addresses Fullan's (2006) PLC proposal for the creation of system-wide collaborative cultures between schools is the George Lucas Foundation's innovative digitally centered reform efforts. This foundation has published an extensive study entitled *Edutopia: Success Stories for Learning in a Digital Culture* (Chen & Armstrong, 2002), documenting Web-based innovations in classrooms and "involved" communities; parent networking, business partnerships, and community partnerships; and Web-based leadership initiatives such as the "digital district." While I will not detail these digital success tales here, it is nonetheless worth pointing out that the very foundations of what we in the United States normally consider as "traditional schooling" are in the process of being transformed by digital technologies. "Traditional" schools and school districts—that is, school districts composed of a number of "atomistic" (Fullan, 2006) or individual schools, each with its own distinctive learning culture—are now being transformed by digital communication technologies into one vastly interconnected school system.

Through digital communication technologies—now more than ever before—it is possible for "lateral capacity building" to occur not only within school districts but further between school districts as well. In essence, as the problem of implementing lateral capacity building among schools (and school districts) is solved through digital communication technologies, we can expect greater communication, and hopefully greater collaboration, between schools.

While these collaborative efforts work to create a climate of exchange between educators, the digital district also has the capacity to "level" all individual school cultures to one common denominator—a single district-wide culture. And if Fullan (2006) has any say, it would be a common culture of "continuous learning" and "continuous improvement." For, as Fullan points out, the current problem "is that there is no opportunity for teachers to engage in continuous and sustained learning about their practice in the setting" (p. 12). In response, if the Lucas Foundation (2002) has any say, it will come to the rescue, so to speak, with *Edutopia*—the digital version of the PLC.

My point is that there is a sort of "call-response" relationship between Fullan's conception of the PLC and the Lucas Foundation's *Edutopia.* Fullan calls for a solution to the problem of "atomistic" schools and the Lucas Foundation responses with a "digital" solution—*Edutopia*. Considering central passages, first from Fullan (2006), he claims

to have found in his research "breakthrough results" when teachers are connected to their work through a model of continuous learning with other educators. At the core of his "breakthrough" in reform efforts is the Triple P model. In his own words,

> [W]e offer the Triple P model personalized, precision, and professional learning. The first two P's are what educators do when they try to get differentiated instruction right. That is to say learning for all requires we address the learning needs of each student (personalization) and do so in an instructional manner that fits their learning needs of the moment (precision) . . . The kicker is that in order to achieve these two P's, a third P is crucial: Every teacher must be learning how to do this virtually every day. . . . What is missing in school cultures then is most schools, structurally and normatively, are not places where virtually every teacher is a learner all the time. (p. 12)

Next, notice the *response* from Milton Chen (Chen, Milton & Armstrong, 2002) of Lucas Foundation,

> Edutopia. The word conjures up images of some far-off, unreachable land, where student are motivated to learn, study subjects in depth and over time, and display initiative and independence in organizing their time and work. The quality of their work is astonishing, often several years ahead of current definitions of being "on grade level." Similarly, the teachers are energized by the excitement of teaching. As professionals, they possess strong mastery of their subjects and how to teach them. *They have the time and commitment to attend to the academic and social needs of their students as individuals. They regularly plan, analyze, and reflect on their teaching with other teaching colleagues.*(p. xvii) (my emphasis)

I quote theses passages at length to make explicit the convergence and conceptual connections in the thinking between Fullan's PLC and the *Edutopia*'s digital orientation of The Lucas Foundation. Furthermore, judging from Fullan and Chen's statements it is difficult to determine if Fullan's notion of the PLC is moving toward the *Edutopia* or whether the idea of a "digital district" has simply captured the imagination of educational reformers. Either way, it would seem that an alliance between school reform efforts by Fullan and the digital solutions offered by the Lucas Foundation has been brokered, so to speak. Indeed, with regard to PLC proposals for school reform, what differentiates Fullan's efforts from that of the Lucas Foundation's is the implementation of digital technologies. In my view, the Lucas Foundation is putting forth the *Edutopia* as the means to achieving something similar to Fullan's Triple P goals for school districts.

Crucial, then, to my inquiry is the effect the digital technology solution will have on PLC-based school reform efforts. Digital technology is not simply an instrument to be used, in the everyday sense of the term, as a common object. Instead, it would be more helpful to think of "technology" in analogous terms as something akin to the air we breathe. Similarly, the Web itself is the physical manifestation of a larger, deeper cultural system.

Indeed, today's digital technology acts, according to Bowers (1988), as a "generative metaphor" in the sense that it "provides the basic conceptual framework that shapes our interpretation, provides a sense of coherence among images, and dictates what

iconic metaphors will be appropriate" (p. 46). Generative metaphors "en-frame" (*Gestell*) the world in Martin Heidegger's (1977) thinking, meaning that the essence of technology frames the very ways in which we think and act in the world. Indeed, for Heidegger, the question of technology is not a new concern, but is rooted rather in the very depths of Westernized thinking itself. As Heidegger (1977) points out, "the word 'technology' stems from the Greek *Technikon*, [meaning] that which belongs to *techne* . . . [As such *techne*] is even more important. Such knowing provides an opening up. As an opening up it is revealing. . . . Technology is a mode of revealing" (pp. 294–295). Here Heidegger returns to the root meaning of the word technology, *techne*, to provide us with some sense of the ways in which our very culture identifies itself by and through technology. Note then that *techne* is linked with knowing in the broadest sense—it is to be entirely "at home in something" such that this knowing "provides an opening up" and where opening up links to "revealing" the "place where truth happens" (pp. 294–295). Further, Bowers (1988) who extends Heidegger's ideas on technology points out that,

> The use of technology, in effect, amplifies certain aspects of human experience and reduces others. . . . Thus technology is not simply a neutral tool, ready at hand, waiting to be directed by a human being. In effect, it acts on us (through selection and amplification), as we utilize it for our instrumental purposes. (pp. 32–33)

Here Bowers makes clear that the use of technology is not a value-free, "neutral" activity; rather, the very act of using technology shapes and frames our very experience of the world. Or, put another way, we do not "use" technology; instead, technology "uses" us to transform the world in certain ways.

But, is the use of technology within the educational arena new? Interestingly, we get the first glimpse of the relationship between education and technology some 2,400 years ago where in Plato's *Republic* (Book VII) (Grube/Reeves tr., 1992). Socrates declared that,

> Education isn't what some people declare it to be, namely, putting knowledge into souls that lack it. . . . [Instead] education is the craft concerned with doing this very thing, this turning around [of the soul], and how the soul can most easily and effectively be made to do it. . . . Education takes for granted that [there is knowledge in the soul] but that it isn't turned the right way or looking where it ought to look, and it tries to redirect it appropriately. (p. 190)

Of crucial importance, note that the classical Greek scholars Grube and Reeve translated the original Greek (passage 518d) as "education is a craft." The term "craft" is significant in that the original Greek is *techne*. If we substitute *techne* for craft we yield the following: education is a *techne*. That is, we discover that the very conception of education, drawn from Plato, clearly links it to technology, as *techne* belongs to *technikon*! *So*, if education is techne, and if techne as technology is a mode of revealing, then we can infer, perhaps that "education" is a technology that reveals? If so, what does this technology reveal?

For Plato what is amplified or revealed by "education" is that the learning experience itself is neither left to chance nor is it solely the responsibility of the child's parents. Rather, the education of children comes under the control of one central system that

elite guardians guide. Here the learning experience is given focus and direction through a universal program of study, a curriculum that will lead the child to knowledge and a virtuous life. As such, education as inherited through the Platonic tradition is conceived of as providing a sense of coherence in the learning process by offering directionality and purpose for learning through a specific sequence of subjects; this in turn enables the child to find his or her "true nature" as human beings.

This Platonic legacy represents what I shall refer to as the traditional metaphysics of schooling. This view of schooling that is rooted in Platonic thought views leadership as hierarchical; it also assumes that children are to be taken from their parents to be "educated" by the state and that the curriculum to be provided is linear. The Platonic curriculum for children of the guardian class begins at early an age with physical education, art, and music through and to higher mathematics and abstract reasoning. Appreciating the legacy of this curriculum 2400 years later, however modified today, we can ask: If education and technology are interconnected, how does the term "digital" transform the Platonic metaphysics of schooling which still haunts schooling today?

"Digital," as in digital technology, translates our everyday, lived experience into electronic impulses. For as noted philosopher John Caputo (2001) explains,

> [T]he revolution in electronic communication systems has begun to weaken the distinction between the 'virtual' world and the real' world or 'material one. . . . I am arguing, that the advanced communication technologies actually undermine old-fashioned materialism and deprive the material world of its fixity and dense heavy substantiality. (pp. 75, 77)

Indeed, our commonsense thinking tells us that there is a "real" world, and that the Web is a "virtual" reality; that is, the "real" is material and the "virtual" has no materiality, substance. Yet, contemporary philosophical thinking in epistemology informs us that there is no "unmediated" access to what we would call "reality." Either through language, discourse, culture, history, or ideology, we never make contact with the Kantian notion of the world as it is: the thing-in-itself.

If the electron mediates between the world of matter and mind, in essence making this binary obsolete, when we are online the boundary between everyday realty and our inner psychic life is blurred. All events are translated into one common denominator—electrons/electronic impulses. But does this translation of everyday life into electrons mean that we have a new baseline for what constitutes reality: electrons? No, as Richard Rorty (1999) would argue, for merely translating the world into electrons "does not take you out of language into fact, or out of appearance into reality, or out of a remote and disinterested relationship into a more intense relationship" (p. 56). As digital technology translates our everyday world into electronic impulses, which in turn re-describes the ways in which we think about our lives, we are provided us with new generative metaphors. Rorty's (1999) anti-essentialist attitude amounts to seeing the world as historic, contingent, and socially constructed—there is no Platonic essential nature to reality, or, for that matter, education.

Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo (2004) would agree with Rorty's assessment that digital technologies are leading the way to a major paradigm shift in our thinking from the essentialist tradition of Plato and Kant to what Vattimo conceives of as a "weakening" in traditional metaphysical ideas. For Vattimo, the change in traditional

metaphysics is referred to technically as "weak thought." That is, weak thought signifies a shift in our sense of "reality" as solid and unchanging, a way of thinking about reality that has dominated "Western" thought for 2,400 years. Today, digital technologies employed by The Lucas Foundation have the potential to loosen the grip of traditional ways of thinking. One way to think about the paradigm shift involving schooling is to use as a lens Fullan's (2006) Triple P model—the call for personalized learning, the call for precision in instruction, and the call for continuous improvement and professional learning. These can act as a guide to what I referred to earlier as the "electropolis"—a site where communities of people come to meet, mingle, and otherwise connect in cyber space.

The Call for Personalized Learning

From this writing about digital technology I discovered a link between the concepts of education and technology. Further, I found that this education–technology couplet serves to frame the learning experience in specific ways. One way in which traditional education frames learning is by controlling the child's learning experience. For Plato and Kant, no aspect of the child's learning is left to chance. In contemporary terms, critical theorist Apple (1979) found that one of the most invaluable lessons children learn in kindergarten is the lived difference between what constitutes "work" and what is defined as "play" within the school context. "Work" is defined as the official curriculum—the important stuff that the child must grapple with and master. "Play," on the other hand, is merely the child's own personal knowledge, which while relevant to his or her world, often is viewed as having little relevance to work. Here within traditional thinking about schooling exists a clear boundary between work and play.

I raise this work/play distinction because it helps frame my discussion of the first "P" of Fullan's (2006) Triple P: the call for personalized learning. That is, instruction should "fit the learning needs of each student" (p. 12). From the perspective of the traditional metaphysics of schooling the focus of personalized learning is on school (i.e., work) and most often not on play, (i.e., the child's personal world). Again, recalling our earlier discussion, I explained that the term "digital," as in digital technology, serves as Vattimo (2004) points out to "weaken" traditional notions of schooling. Hence, within the context of Fullan's call for personalized learning, we would expect that as the PLC goes online to become a digital district, weakening will occur in the boundary between the categories of work and play, and between the official knowledge and the personal in the learner's life.

So we ask, as the boundary between work and play changes, what are the personal needs of the moment for the child, the teacher, the administrator? Today in the anti-essentialist world of digital education, "personalized" needs are linked closely to what appears to be an insatiable desire to communicate through electronic technology, such as cell phones and text messaging. In a world where one's social life is being translated into electronic life, noted sociologist Bauman (2007) observes that children and adolescents network on MySpace.com and other electronic sites in rituals of "public confession." For Bauman, making public one's private life online becomes the order of the day for young learners as he points out:

> The teenagers equipped with portable electronic confessionals are simply apprentices training and trained in the art of living in a confessional society—a society

> notorious for effacing the boundary which once separated the private from the public, for making it a public virtue and obligation to publicly expose the private, and wiping away from public communication anything that resists being reduced to private confidences, together with those who refuse to confide in them. (p. 3)

The making public of our private lives has become something of a ritual act: it is an act of confession. Indeed! Essentially Bauman (2007) argues that as the boundary between traditional categories of public/private and work/play dissolve that which was once hidden, secret in our lives now becomes exposed to public scrutiny. The personal is not only political it is public as well, and as such it is exposed and open to the influences of our market economy. In fact, one of Bauman's greatest insights is that "the most prominent feature of a society of consumers—however carefully concealed and most thoroughly covered up—is the transformation of consumers into commodities" (p. 12). In a world where the public and the private have no clear boundaries, one not only sells his or her labor at work but online can market one's private world. Bauman points out that the extremes of marketing oneself online are to be found within the confessional ritual of exhibiting one's innermost private life with the hope of attracting the attention of an anonymous public. Bauman refers to the extremes of online confession as "psychic nudity" (p. 3).

As personalized learning becomes implemented in the electronic PLC, learning becomes be more "confessional" to the point where one's personal views on issues trump, so to speak, more traditional concern for the "facts." At its extreme, "confessional learning" borders on psychic nudity; hence, new forms of policing will no doubt materialize as to what goes online, hence the formation of cyber police to monitor the electronic PLC community. Second, the Web is now saturated with billions of pages of information creating what is known as "clutter." So, in order for one to have his or her private, personalized world seen by others, one must cut through the clutter to be noticed. Perhaps, then, a skill that could enhance personalized learning will be to help children (and adults) learn how to "market themselves." For, as Bauman poignantly observed, in a consumer culture we too have becomes commodities!

The Call for Precision in Instruction

The second "P" in Fullan's (2006) Triple P model for PLC reform is the call for precision in instruction. He defines "precision" as "an instructional manner that fits the needs of the moment" (p. 12). If Fullan's statement sounds familiar or even obvious it is because the assumption of meeting the needs of the moment has long been part of the traditional metaphysics of American schooling. As historian and curriculum theorist Herbert Kliebard (1986) noted, "the general idea of shaping individuals through a system of schooling is as ancient as Plato" (p. 93). However, the social scientific movement popular in the early years of the 20th-century radically translated our thinking about schooling from Plato's notion of education as giving direction to the soul to a technological model. The modern American school was to mirror modern industrial thinking and organizational logic—using the assembly line as its model.

Key to the development of the idea of "precision" in learning is John Franklin Bobbitt's influential thinking on instruction within the school context. In 1912 Bobbitt wrote,

> Educate the individual according to his capacities. This requires that the materials for the curriculum be sufficiently various to meet the needs of every class of individuals in the community; and that the individual can be given just the things that he needs. (quoted in Kliebard, 1986, p. 98)

As Kliebard explained, while Bobbitt called for individual variation in curriculum, the hidden curriculum for Bobbitt was the elimination of waste; put simply, he wanted schools to be efficient. The generative metaphor for education at that time was also drawn from Taylor's industrial model based on the rationalization of work to its maximum level of efficiency. Hence, in my mind Fullan's (2006) conceptualization of "precision" appears to fall within the social management tradition of Bobbitt and Taylor.

However, today a fundamental shift has occurred in the very meaning of the "technology" for educational thinking. For Taylor and Bobbitt, the industrial model of efficiency embodied productivity as its goal. At the turn of the last century the "motor" as a means of production was the generative metaphor for the new technology that was dominant in the minds of curriculum theorist, like Bobbitt, thinking about social policy. In our modern, consumer-orientated society, the generative metaphor framing education and technology has shifted from a mechanical to an informational motif—from motor to the electron. The "electron" does not produce so much as it has reframed technology into a more dynamic, fluid, and multi-directional way of engaging the world, and where power does not emanate from a single, central source like the motor, but is instead is decentralized throughout the entire system.

With regard to this shift in technology, philosopher Vattimo (2004) observed that the shift from mechanical to information technology has "weakened" traditional hierarchical structures/institutions, including schools. This shift in technology allows for greater interpretative space where more "voices" can be heard. That is, "in the very society in which the pervasive power of the media has penetrated furthest, minorities and subcultures of every kind acquire visibility" (Vattimo, p. 16). This means that with the new digital technology comes the potential for greater democratization in the sense of more minorities and subcultures have joined the dialogue about schooling and other societal matters.

As such, the meaning of precision (i.e., the instructional need of the moment) when framed within digital systems tends to extend the very meaning of "instructional need," increasing the interpretative power of the learner. Why? Because, the Web offers the learner greater access to the instructional needs of a larger, more inclusive population, and with this access to a rapidly growing digital community comes the potential for greater democratization of learning. But, ultimately, the question of digital redefinition of what we mean by precision turns on a political axis. A question is, will Authority allow for greater inclusion of the community in policy, as interpretative agency strengthens for minorities and subcultures? And finally, the democratic process is slow, even online, as debate and consensus take more time processing greater community input and mitigating "conflicts of interpretation." The underside of democracy in a digital culture is impatience, as decisions obviously need to be made even within the PLC culture. While the potential for democratizing PLCs is evident, it will be interesting to see if school authorities have the "patience" to fully bring this spirit foreword or will they collapse, so to speak, under the weight of the administrative needs of the moment. This is not an easy situation for administrators as they are over

a barrel—patience for democracy on the one hand, and meeting the pressing needs of the moment on the other.

The Call for Continuous Improvement and Professional Learning

The final "P" of Fullan's (2006) Triple P model for PLC reform is call for continuous improvement and continuous professional learning. Interestingly, Immanuel Kant (1960) wrote in the 18th century that "man's duty is to improve himself . . . and thus advance the whole human race towards its destiny" (p. 11). Here Kant links education, improvement, and our duty towards humanity. In fact, for Kant one's duty is to continuously improve. His notion of improvement is not just something the child or adult does within the context of the school but rather throughout one's whole life—as one is learning all the time. So for Kant being in school was simply not enough time to expose the child to continual demands of duty: to improve themselves. To rectify what he perceived as the shortcomings of schooling, Kant (1960) wrote *Education* as a guide for parents and educators on how to properly educate the child, from birth to age 16. In essence, similar to Plato, Kant's thinking was to extend control over the child's learning and parent involvement. Kant left no aspect of the child's education to chance, declaring that our "destiny" as humans was at stake: "The greatest and most difficult problem to which man can devote himself is the problem of education" (p. 11). In essence, while Kant was a strong advocate for public education, he feared that parents would miseducate their children. Kant's proposals—which call for greater control over education—dissolve the boundary between school and home.

Today, the problem of continuous improvement and continuous professional learning can be easily addressed by digital technologies. In a spirit that Kant would appreciate, digital technologies make the "home office" a reality for many educators as much can be accomplished at home online. If we push Kant's modernist notions of continuous improvement to the limits, we find a blurring of the boundary between home and school. And as we move away from essentialist, Platonic notions of schooling to more anti-essentialist forms of digital schooling the categories of "school" and "home" become more fluid, less stable. What does this mean? It means that digital technologies can now address a key problem that Fullan (2006) recognized: "What is missing in school cultures then is most schools, structurally and normatively, are not places where virtually every teacher is a learner all the time" (p. 12). Indeed, these "digital solutions" bring with them a specific mode of thinking and reasoning: agile thought.

As philosopher Edith Wyschogrod (2006) observes, digital technology employs a new informational logic, one that makes old-fashioned, plan-driven programs obsolete. Today, information processing is conceived as being "agile" in nature where "agility thrives in an atmosphere in which people see themselves as having considerable freedom. . . . [Here] decision-making authority is democratized, sometimes empowering managers and at other times the programmers. . . . [And where] no decision is ideal for all time" (pp. 220–221). As such, tacit within the logic of agile thinking is a more horizontal, fluid, and democratic way of organizing the way we make decisions; decision making is open-ended and always inclusive, for no one decision is good for all times. This "agility" in our thinking allows for greater input and interpretative power within the community and accommodates continuous improvement at all levels of the organization. (The rub, just as one policy is implemented district wide another is on the way to replace it.)

As such, in the electropolis, a child can learn at home, and hence policy can be brought right into the living room. In this worldview, the hegemony of segregating children—the Platonic move to send them off to a place away from their parents—is no longer necessary. And what about the other aspects of the traditional schooling metaphysics? As the Lucas Foundation (2002) clearly demonstrates, the traditional linear curriculum is neither necessary nor sufficient to attend to the multiple levels of learning available to children through the "agile" logics of digital culture. Top-down administrative leadership styles are no longer necessary as decision making becomes horizontal online, which allows greater parental input, more local community involvement, and overall greater local input in decision making. And as for teachers, perhaps we might consider "Web-mentors" who provide guidance on the Internet for parents and local community members educating their child through a variation of home/local schooling.

Up for real grabs once again is our political commitment to democracy, for the rock bottom of the traditional metaphysics is control. Plato and Kant designed their educational enterprises in such a way as to place control within the selected elite, not in the hands of the people. In a digital culture how will we handle the traditional metaphysics (and by extension the politics) of control? Will we, as educators, "feel" the democratic spirit, but be unable to "let go" of control and thus allow ourselves to be more open/inclusive in decision making? How might we conceptualize this "digital" democracy? There is no clear or single answer. Being submerged in a techno-consumer culture, as Bauman (2007), Rorty (1999), and Vattimo (2004) have all observed, has at the very least blurred traditional boundaries, demarcating the public from the private, reality and from fantasy, and work and from play. As such, digital communication systems are opening up new confessional spaces; once "off limits" topics are now discussed publically and "psychic nudity" has not only become commonplace but a new mode of commodity fetish. However, the Internet also disrupts, as Vattimo (2004) has noted, traditional and hierarchical forms of authority, allowing for new democratic spaces to be created in addition to increased political participation, as in MoveOn.org.

Ending on a hopeful note, digital communities might provide us with the opportunity to engage in what Dewey called the great experiment of democracy. Rorty (1999) writes, "[Dewey] did not try justify democracy at all. He saw democracy not as founded upon the nature of man or reason but as one promising experiment. . . . He asks us to put faith in ourselves" (p. 119). If the traditional metaphysics of schooling is "weakening," and if we have faith in ourselves again, then perhaps we might reclaim Dewey's vision to see America and schooling as a promising experiment in democracy.

On a cautious note, by its very nature an experiment is always open to the unexpected, the chaotic, and the unpredictable moment that threatens to deconstruct the experiment itself. Put in its simplest form: As education is being transformed by digital technologies and the outcomes are difficult to predict. The Web is too unwieldy, agile, and unpredictable to control. And paradoxically it is in the Web's very agility that allows for both its capacity for globalization and strangely its capacity to render long-standing traditional patterns of educational control obsolete.

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CHAPTER 15

Virtual Learning Communities: Encountering Digital Culture, Politics, and Capital

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Thinking Through Virtual Borders

Virtual learning communities (VLCs) are often riddled with some of the same challenges of any nonvirtual learning context. Wherever people come together with the intent to learn, expectations, demands, and hopes are generated. Building learning communities that encourage introspection/reflexivity, analysis, and respect for difference are challenging to negotiate, regardless of where these desired factors reside in physical or virtual space.

This writing focuses on the construction or replication of culture, politics, and capital in VLCs. We ask, what borders (social, emotional, and behavioral norms) might be established, followed, and questioned in digital environments? What privileges and cultural capital are wielded? Are virtual spaces more conducive to informed learning and knowledge production? What are the limits of teachability when technology dictates curriculum or obscures the sociocultural and political dimensions of virtual communities? What is it about communities that help us learn and what exactly constitutes community? Herein we seek to understand how learning is produced in digital culture, how politics are exercised/experienced, and how capital is defined as high school or university students engage in virtual communities.

We also discuss the need to establish a collaborative and democratic leadership exchange in virtual communities where learning (defined as skills and content enveloped by critical awareness and political consciousness) is the ultimate goal. These elements are key in the study of VLCs: incognito and blatant identity politics, constructions of new identities and positionalities, and the significance of place and power. We aim to go beyond discussions of constructing virtual spaces (although these are important) to politicizing ways of being-in-the-world in VLCs. To this end, we use different examples of VLCs at the university level (and possible uses for high school

students), both synchronous and asynchronous communications. Additionally, we attempt to illustrate the phenomena of imagined communities and virtual ethnography as two theoretical/methodological paths for both increasing access and critical insight to and within VLCs. We hope to contribute to the current theorizing about being in virtual communities while challenging intentions to create utopian spaces for pedagogy, identity formation, and democratic leadership. Finally, steps are provided to consider for both building and engaging in VLCs.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Some may regard online learning as a way to address all sorts of pedagogical ills, such as lack of student engagement, attendance, individuation, spatial confinement, and curricular limitations. Online learning may indeed expand capacity, access, or possibilities for pedagogy, but like any other educational space, it is not a singular factor that ensures meaningful experiences, but the interaction of many factors (e.g., educators, students, curriculum, interest, applicability/significance). One method will not suffice for effective pedagogy or leadership.

For educational philosophers, Rousseau, Dewey, and Illich, experience was fundamental to learning and education. We wonder could VLCs be a contemporary version of what Rousseau (1762) privileged in *Emile*? Might cyberspace parallel the countryside where he thought humans could freely explore and learn?[1] Can VLCs extend the vision Dewey proposed in *Experience and Education* (1938) and *Experience and Nature* (1925)? Are VLCs a current way to deschool society and implement Illich's (1971) computer-based learning Webs? All of these propositions are possible depending on the theoretical framework used to design virtual communities. Both Rousseau and Dewey are credited with furthering active learning, learning by doing, and inquiry learning. These concepts are central to online learning and especially for combating the critique that these spaces engender disconnection, isolation, and individualism. Illich, an avid proponent of deinstitutionalizing schooling, offers rich insight for developing newly imagined communities.

In light of the promises educational history offers, additionally we turn to contemporary theorists for foundational thinking on virtual learning. The amalgam of past and present allows for greater theoretical usability. Lewis and Allan (2005) contend that "[v]irtual learning communities provide an opportunity for individuals with a common purpose to come together across barriers in time and space" (p. 10). These researchers also situate VLCs within constructivism, sociocultural theory, and situated cognition. Communities in general, but specifically virtual ones, are sustained by participants' interactions and use of specified curriculum to facilitate the learning process.

Constructivism emphasizes collective and collaborative methods of knowledge production, where students connect what they already know to what they are learning and within a community of learners. Students are regarded as knowledge producers in contrast to passive recipients or "empty vessels" in more traditional learning environments. Sociocultural and political theorists highlight power as it is enacted in the learning space, questioning the "expert" as knower as opposed to simultaneous learner. By deemphasizing the expert's authority, constructivism demands students become aware of their own power in the learning community, and that all participants be more critically reflexive about how their identities play out in such pedagogical spaces.

Situated cognition allows for place or position to be analyzed in the process of learning. In context, students can better assess the value of what they know. Knowledge then becomes situational as opposed to universal; subsequently, all participants can offer expertise/perspective/analysis, further exemplifying the collaborative intent of VLCs. As students are empowered to increase meaning making and understand what changes may be necessary for increased agency, learning ultimately becomes more engaging through the use and application of theoretical frameworks.

The teacher as "expert" is not off the hook here. S/he is also considered a learner, but with the added responsibility of negotiating a democratic leadership to guide all the considerations previously mentioned. Dantley and Tillman (2006) outlined a perspective on social justice and moral transformative leadership where they integrated social justice, leadership for social justice, and social praxis. In discussing the role of the leader from these ethical referents, they contend:

> educational leaders who base their work in moral transformative leadership facilitate an environment where students learn from one another and express their own ideas . . . Leaders who have adopted a moral position as public intellectuals recognize the formidable task of education in freeing students to inquire and interrogate the traditionally accepted purposes of schools and the curriculum that supports them. (p. 21)

In concert with such qualities, educators who design and guide VLCs must choreograph the interchange among all participants in ways ever so conscious of power, privilege, and respect for difference. The online space does not safeguard learners or educators from the politics of social inequity or discrimination. Our argument here is that we need to recognize the politicized ways of being-in-the-world in VLCs, particularly how culture, politics, and capital are wielded. Dialogue about sociopolitical topics or identity politics can result in charged pedagogical spaces; hence, informed leadership is necessary for navigating and pushing the critical issues that are often ignored or glossed over. If we are to situate knowledge within a larger social framework, it is imperative that one is attentive to these issues in VLCs as well. As with some virtual experience involving anonymity, many things can be said or done without recourse of accountability. In other words, a person interacting online with someone else can misrepresent his or her identity, credentials, or even values potentially abusing the liberties of virtual spaces. The virtual educational space may give latitude for ideas to surge that otherwise would remain latent or covert in the face-to-face classroom. VLCs can afford greater freedom for learning, while simultaneously emphasizing the need to equally increase one's responsibility. For instance, students with disabilities could have their environments modified to participate with other students with increased ease, in contrast to the obstacles placed for maximized instruction and learning in traditional classrooms.

In bringing to the forefront our awareness of the politically and socially charged environment in virtual spaces, we would be remiss not to discuss critical pedagogy as it relates to VLCs. Critical pedagogy is a domain in education that offers study of the social, cultural, political, economic, and cognitive dynamics of teaching and learning.[2] The educator or designated leader in the VLC, we contend, should understand how these forces influence, affect, and are present in any online space. Additionally, VLCs allow for participants to be anywhere in the world (as in the case we discuss) or in

their own backyard, so to speak. A potentially complex heterogenous group raises questions about diversity, culture, collaboration, and learning, thus demanding a critical consciousness or, more precisely, a critical alterity (a reflexive awareness of difference) about difference and power. Kincheloe (2007) elaborates:

> [T]eachers and leaders steeped in critical pedagogy also understand the social, economic, psychological, and political dimensions of the schools, districts, and systems in which they operate. They also possess a wide range of knowledge about information systems in the larger culture that serve as pedagogical forces in the lives of students and other members of society: [various media and subcultures]; alternative bodies of knowledge; . . . the ways different forms of power operate to construct identities and empower and oppress particular groups; and the modus operandi of the ways sociocultural regulation operates. (pp. 16–17)

Such knowledges are essential in the virtual learning space where access to a variety of media potentially expands any issue examined or project undertaken, and where interactions among participants should be synergistic, not hierarchical. Many tout the Internet as a democratic space; it is not entirely, but various online interactive spaces are or can be designed to be with attention to equitable practices. VLCs prepared and supported by the integration of various theories (educational leadership, critical pedagogy) can engage an active citizenry, one that understands the sociopolitical and ideological terrain in relation to identity formation, and one that is willing to undertake a critical agency/praxis approach to one's own world, whether that be in public schools, higher education institutions, or other. Making such critical connections interrogates the romantic lens of technology in general and of digital culture in particular. For example, a "second life" (with a fully decked out avatar, http://secondlife.com) is not a better existence if it replicates the first/material life or affords a space to negate accountability and responsibility. In contrast multiuser virtual environments (MUVEs) can offer great possibility for imagined communities and virtual ethnographies.[3]

VLC Spaces

What does the virtual learning space consist of for curriculum designers? The main elements to consider in designing or analyzing online spaces are participant roles, group categories, platforms for VLCs, and democratic goals. A primary strength of the virtual learning environment is that it can be used to uncover complexities and multiplicities of perspectives on a given topic and to engage in critical inquiry. We next discuss roles, groups, and platforms along with some of the challenges these may present to the educator/leader and participants. Participants can fulfill many roles in VLCs dependent on tasks given and personalities; however, the roles we discuss represent some of the more common dispositions. The engaged learner is likely to move through the roles we identify.

The Observers

The *observers*, otherwise known as lurkers,[4] adopt a predominantly passive role. These participants may not contribute much to group activities or post much commentary to online discussions, chat rooms, or the like, but may question whatever is being

discussed and be more pensive about it. They mainly take in information and may not commit to one specific virtual community unless required through a particular project. They might also surf various VLC platforms (wikis, blogs, chat rooms, threaded discussions, video/podcasts, etc.). The challenge for VLCs may be that the content development is dependent on the interaction of the group. Failure to compile or update new content stifles the growth and learning within the environment, particularly for the observer who might be constantly seeking new information. The other challenge is not to dismiss observers as disengaged simply because their participation is not as active. Critical educators always consider the importance of taking the time to reflect on and question the material presented and the interactions witnessed.

The Builders

Builders or analyzers are active seekers, contributing new material and insights, probing others to engage at their level. They may be very critical of the material presented or the methods utilized for learning. In building additional knowledge they are associative, linking other subjects or ideas to the matter at hand. They may also feel a need to respond to many if not all the members leading to exponential growth of learning material. The learning builders bring may lack focus and decrease benefits to the larger group. Seeking other connections or adding content may also be a way to avoid dealing with the group's specified subject, issues, or task.

The Presenters

Presenters are declarative and they rely on documentation for support. They adopt a certain authority in their demeanor, regardless of accuracy. They may use certain modes of rationality or logic to communicate their ideas as if without room for questioning. In cases where presenters have moved in and through other roles, the confidence in which they share contributions offers knowledge and information to others; the presenter may even become a mentor. The challenge to VLCs is the presenter's need or desire to look for fixed definitions, which can limit the potential for new ideas and creative thought. Presenters risk being stuck in one way of thinking or method of producing knowledge, in effect shortchanging their online experience. The major challenge for educators is to help presenters shift their rigidity and become more flexible in their learning.

Engaging Participants

Various collaborative processes can be employed in the VLC to mobilize participants into meaningful interaction. Peer learning strategies in particular can be adapted, and in a multitude of ways, for each virtual context, so we have identified several. *Buzz*[5] **or** *brainstorming groups* are given a task or question and together devise multiple outcomes on any given subject. The members examine various perspectives and personas connected to a topic. The success of the group depends heavily on the dynamics produced between participants, and each person's ability to think creatively and collaboratively while engaging various roles. *Nominal groups* are temporary subgroups with a specific charge or task in service of the larger group. They may submit outcomes or resources on a specific subject to create a repository/reference section, case study or defined scope

for the larger group. *Analysis groups* may use what the nominal groups generated to glean more specific information or questions. Their charge is to critically analyze the information or knowledge in meticulous ways, as well as evaluate proposed outcomes based on a previous assumption, conclusion, or argument.

Comparative question groups focus their attention on questioning the topics/issues posed to the larger group. The member studies the material and then posits one question after the next. After several rounds of just question-posing, participants stop to carefully go through each one, deliberating over uses and potential. When a more manageable set of questions is agreed upon, the group members deliberate over these queries in order to deepen their understanding of the content. The groups are then encouraged to exchange or compare questions through critique sessions that open access to new analyses, similar to critical hermeneutics, which is the search for interpretation that leads to emancipatory practices and counteracts oppressive forces. These peer-to-peer virtual learning situations combine more traditional instructional methods and "active" learning, yet, for these to be effective, the educational leader must ensure that the entire group experiences positive interdependence, group processing, and individual and group accountability.

Additional Virtual Tools

Platforms exist for VLCs that bear mentioning for their popularity and ease of use. Wikis, blogs, threaded discussions, podcasts, forums, live chats, and video conferencing are all being used extensively and for any number of purposes. These are also used socially and academically, both offering various levels of pedagogical content and experience. In all of these platforms, participants are expected to create their own questions, actively discuss issues, explain their viewpoints, and engage in systems thinking, micro (individual) to meso (institutional) to macro (social), in order to take full advantage of cooperative learning while gaining personally. Some of the platforms are conducive to individual participation or development (wikis, blogs, threaded discussions, podcasts, and forums), while others depend on collective participation and development (live chat and video conferencing).

Plenty of examples and tutorials are available online to help educators and students develop their specialized platforms. It is essential to provide intellectual scaffolding and to engage in constructivist thinking by guiding students through discussion topics they are likely to resonate with, at least initially. The educator must be careful not to overdirect participants at the base of the intellectual scaffold. Educators and leaders are encouraged to raise questions or issues that move students toward more sophisticated levels of thinking, but avoid the desire to provide fixed answers, especially too early in the mining of knowledge. As stated previously in the explanation of roles, educators can shift into any of the participant roles (e.g., observer, builder/analyzer, presenter) as well; thus, it is essential for them to analyze their own positions in the learning process. It is equally important for educators to be critically cognizant of their ethical referent (such as what ideologies/philosophies inform their position) and curricular visions (such as which theories/goals guide their curriculum) as they interact in the VLC.

Case Illustration: Icograda—Creative Waves Project

Icograda, the International Council of Graphic Design Associations, is a partner of the International Design Alliance in collaboration with the Omnium Project,

an Australian initiated online collective (http://creativewaves.omnium.net.au). Omnium hosted the "Creative Waves International Online Student Design Project" in 2005. This project, largely authored by Rick Bennet, Senior Lecturer in Design Studies, University of New South Wales, Australia, was a forward-thinking experiment intended to provide students with a cost-free education in visual studies. This VLC was built on the collaborative goodwill and creative drive of students, administrators, community-based professionals, mentor-teachers (Roymieco Carter was the Jabba Group Mentor), writers, and theorists. Art and design students and educators[6] were selected from around the world with the intent to create teams where no two participants were from the same geographic location; subsequently over 22 countries were represented.

The first course titled "Three < Four < Five: An Integrated Graphic and Photomedia Project" took place in 2005 over a 7-week period. Five stages of image making (gathering, identifying, distilling, abstracting, and resolving) occurred during this time, each with a specific conceptual task. Everyone followed "Omnium time," an agreed upon time where all participants could engage in synchronous interaction. Such interactions involved taking photographs at the same exact global moment, sharing/working on each other's images, conversing with each other, listening to a lecture, or talking with an invited speaker. The virtual space was the only means of communication and the only time/space continuum simultaneously shared by all team members. From the onset, this VLC challenged all assumptions about the types of engagement possible, given geographic barriers and virtual challenges. The project leaders encouraged students and mentor-teachers to expand their creativity, problem-solving abilities, and collaborative capacity while communicating visually. This type of inquiry forced every member to interrogate assumptions and practice multiple methodologies and goals.

Students quickly realized the commitment level required in virtual learning experiences. The wave, a metaphor utilized in the project, linguistically captured the act of over 100 camera shutters going off worldwide at the same time; in other words, the synchronized taking of photos produced a wave of creativity metaphorically speaking, that rippled around the world. The first task required students to generate a series of photographic images that provided creative introductions to the rest of the team. These online postings were discussed both through asynchronous and synchronous communication.

Each week's assignment and discussion provided participants with a deeper emersion into the "Creative Waves" interface as the interpersonal character of the teams actively unfolded. Participants were presented with three levels of content: project data, team discussions and materials, and access to view and comment on the other teams' work. The Web site was designed with various resources and repositories: project introductions, briefs, frequently asked questions, galleries, lectures, articles, mentor explanations, group and participant information, and links. "Creative Waves" provided the basic information to focus the launching point for all teams, but each team grew outward in its own quest for understanding. Knowledge production was the primary activity of all groups without concern for standardization of method or approach. Each group pursued its own way of knowing; as with a wave (following the metaphor of the project) that converges at a distant point, groups converged and shared knowledge via the galleries, threaded discussion boards, and virtual public lectures. These special guest lecture sessions, through "live" chat, offered a unique element of this virtual learning experience. Students listened to guest lecturers and asked questions about the various

topics in the online presentation and team discussions organically flowed from the lecturer's ideas.

The "Creative Waves" project is still growing steadily, leading the way in online education and creativity for other academic institutions. The Omnium project leaders select volunteer students and instructors from different countries to participate in the thematic online courses. The various topics for these creative projects always center on socially connected and reflective challenges that globalized beings encounter.

The "Three < Four < Five" course was followed by another equally successful project, "Visualizing Issues of Pharmacy" (VIP). With a new crop of educators and students, the wave was once again set into motion. It paired approximately 50 pharmacy with 50 graphic design students. The pairs worked online as a community to produce visual public awareness campaigns for health-related concerns in rural communities in Kenya. The primary collaborators and beneficiaries of this human-centered virtual learning initiative were the communities around two remote Kenyan hospitals. The students would rarely have had the opportunity to share their ideas and cross-pollinate between disciplines in most physical academic settings. It is clear to see how VLCs offer previously unrealized benefits to students (such as interdisciplinary connections, hybrid projects, and community involvement), thus the educational experience also has the ability to be a tool of activism and humanity. The virtual learning space is not limited by traditional materials, only traditional thinking. It is paramount to be creative in how resources and technology are integrated into the production of new knowledges. As a working model, this project that includes over 100 participants representing at least 22 countries is a leading VLC project on a global scale.

Steps to Take: Creating VLCs

In creating VLCs, educators need to deliberate over the social, political, cultural, technical, and curricular goals and elements of the space, as well as their own experiences. Brave souls thinking of venturing into virtual learning environments and experienced users alike must consider that "virtual" is only a reference to abstracted distance between an educational leader and a dispersed population of students. Learning is the practice undertaken by members engaged in an educational process, while environments are where the promise of this practice is fulfilled.

Readers should think about the following obstacles and ask themselves if these need to be overcome in developing one's own VLCs or if these instead operate as steps to successful virtual learning experiences. How fixed are educators and students on traditional approaches to classroom practice, curricular objectives, and quantitative evaluation? Does planning for technological integration meet the needs, skills, and available resources for a project's participants? Is there an agreed-upon system of milestones for the project at hand that can be utilized as a measure of success and utility? Does the available technology support educators' desired level of student engagement? How can the learning environment be maintained as a space of knowledge production and not descend into becoming a tech-led/centered experience? How do we best learn in communities and what is our role in them? Interested adventurers will need to be mindful of roles participants may inhabit or perform, the various group structures they can utilize, and the numerous platforms available to configure the virtual learning experience. Educational leaders will need to understand one's theoretical orientation, insight

into how it might guide the virtual experience, and the kind of community one wants to create and join.

Exercise: "Reflection/Deflection Project"

Similar to the "Creative Waves Project", the "Reflection/Deflection Project" we illustrate here is conceptual in nature. But it is also adaptable to any high school or college curriculum. This project is designed to have some face-to-face time in a classroom, the quantity of which instructors will determine. The focus of the project is on the ontological intersection between self and world through image representation. The catalyst query or task is: What do you look like when you are represented by others in popular media? The reflection of an image bounces from channel to channel, similar to the way light ricochets from shiny surfaces. The image refuses to be fixed; it collides with print, film, broadcasting, and virtual environments. How does your image morph when it bounces from channel to channel? The Reflection/Deflection project confronts the archetypes created by mass media channels to represent and possess, isolate, and think for us by examining diverse media outlets from around the world. Through investigative collaborative research activities within virtual ethnographic teams, students seek to uncover assumptions that others recognize as factual representations of "us." Participants set the image analysis into motion by photographing one's own self and gathering imagery from worldwide media channels that enable them to examine their personal cultural perspectives in order to share the images with others. As the project progresses, virtual visitors will provide considerations for group discussion through such means as Web chat and online bulletin boards.

Phase 1 and 2: Launch and Investigation (Weeks 1–3)

Students are grouped into virtual research teams with one nominated member operating as a peer learning coordinator sharing and deliberating over self-images. Each student is asked to take a "neutral"[7] photograph of themselves (project icebreaker). While students investigate the challenges of creating an introspective "neutral" representation of themselves, class hours focus on software and techinical features to support image sharing, and all "neutral" photographs are uploaded.[8] Images are discussed and students are asked to locate media images illustrating a facet of the image. Teams focus on complexity, identify differences through reflexive online analyses, and apply their insights of what "neutral" means, so that the images they produce can take on a living/breathing ethnographic quality. Students must resist producing mirror images. Upon completion of phase 1 and 2, each team submits a written synopsis of its discoveries.

Phase 3: Inquire/Search (Week 4)

Team members are charged with inquiring of the world, "how do you see me?" Students are to use descriptors to collect images that resemble their neutralized images from media sources around the world. Team members share resources during this phase, collect imagery from unfamiliar sources, and interrogate representations while avoiding visceral reactions to preconceived assumptions of identity. The educator and teams discuss issues of culture, time, gender, facility of language and variable levels of engagement.

All groups are required to work collaboratively to collect and post their representations of self from unfamiliar sources.

Phase 4: Excursions (Week 5)

Throughout the excursions, teams develop critical distance as they hear feedback from virtual visitors, through media interviews, and telepanel disscussions via conference calls. Students reflect on where they started and how they came to newfound questions about representation of self in the media. The instructor takes a director's role for this phase, providing students with readings to further their critical analysis. Notes from these experiences should be posted for all team members to discuss.

Phase 5: Synthesis (Week 6)

The final stage brings all of the discovery phases together into an individually submitted visual essay, titled "Reflection and Deflection." The essay is a reflection of the 6-week inquiry project, highlighting visual ethnogaphy, transnational image collection, and critical analysis of representation, self, and other. Through their visual essay, students describe the trajectory of their learning. They post their essays for others to reflect on.

Balancing Possibility and Complexity in Virtual Spaces

VLCs have amorphous boundaries; its digital culture, politics, and the capital exchanged are vital elements that bind people despite technological, geographic, and cultural hurdles. Virtual structures are movable and dynamic, limited primarily by a lack of human imagination or will. Any limitation in respect to resources or available knowledge can be overcome through pedagogical flexibility. We should be able to expand our understanding of cyberspace and technology to accommodate the creative potential in VLCs. Too often VLCs are not used to their full capacity. These are confined by what we know, currently making these borders temporal. The spatial/pedagogical potential itself is limitless.

VLCs are inherently new territories produced within emerging technologies. This embracing of unfamiliar modes of communication is understandably accompanied by reservation and doubt. Suoranta and Vaden (2007) discern "three general expectations towards digital media as a 'teaching machine' . . . [are] threats (or even fears), promises, and possibilities" (p. 144). The threat or fear is of technological rationality or determinism, the rigid ways in which technology dictates pedagogy devoid of substantial content privileging efficiency at the expense of critical sociopolitical human engagement. Digital media also holds promise for improved student-centered pedagogy and for providing new spaces for engaged citizenry. The possibilities of platforms, communication, and actions are many, yet without a sociopolitical and ethical referent these possibilities could fizzle or create counterproductive learning and social experiences.

Returning to the dangers of technocratic rationality, possibilities unchecked can seriously undermine human creativity and freedom. In fact, without the informed consciousness about and within VLCs, these will be no more than remote learning experiences. In the traditional classroom, educators may detect students' subtle clues

about their engagement or quality of learning. Unless educators are able to stimulate communal bonds and create environments conducive to peer-imagined communities, the VLC quickly becomes sterile and disengaging. Many digital media theorists (e.g., Liestol, Morrison, & Rasmussen, 2003) promote increased technoliteracy necessary to maximize the potential in VLCs. It is the politics of knowledge production that are exemplified in the virtual world, where carefully pedagogical designs, as in "Creative Waves" and many other online projects, potentially chart new territory for meaningful global communication in which students become aware of their individual and social impact and agency. Suoranta and Vaden (2007) conclude:

> Without such language of critique, hope, and possibility, it can be impossible to solve the most daunting challenge confronting us in the twenty-first century: that of the gap between our ability to be technologically correct, and our ability to morally and ethically master the enormity of our actions and technologies. (p. 160)

To educate using technology does not mean technology educates. The agent is ever present. As critical educators, our responsibility increases with the constant struggle of transforming learning in virtual spaces and using this medium to empower citizens to be active and socially informed.

Notes

1. We realize Rousseau juxtaposed cities and countries regarding the latter as a way to avoid the "ills" of the city; we are not proposing virtual communities as a parallel notion of romanticism. Rather, we stretch the parallel to focus on what learning might be through the boundless online space, yet with the consciousness of politics and inequity around race, gender, class, etc.
2. Quoted directly from the Web site for The Paulo and Nita Freire International Project for Critical Pedagogy Web site (http://freire.mcgill.ca) under "about us."
3. "Imagined communities" (socially constructed communities or nation states) coined by Anderson (2006) in *Imagined Communities* and used by Mohanty (2003) in *Feminism Without Borders*. Virtual ethnographies allow for ethnographic research methods to be applied through media in virtual environments that are visual and textual, communicative, and experimental.
4. "Lurkers" is cited in Neilsen's (2006, October), "Participation inequality: Encouraging more users to contribute," *Alertbox* (www.useit.com/alertbox/participation_inequality.html).
5. Christudason (2003) discusses "buzz" groups in "Peer Learning," *Successful Learning*, *37*, www.cdtl.nus.edu.sg/success/sl37.htm.
6. Roymieco Carter was selected as a design expert to serve as teacher-mentor for a team of students during the first project ("Three < Four < Five") of "Creative Waves" in 2005, see http://creativewaves.omnium.net.au/030405/outline for further details.
7. "Neutral" is used to challenge students to create the seemingly impossible while making them aware of essentialism, tokenization, and stereotyping in image making.
8. Discussion on semiotics or image making is lacking so students will have to reflect on their visual literacy level through each phase.

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CHAPTER 16

Graduate Students' and Preservice Teachers' Electronic Communications in a Community of Practice

Janet C. Richards, Susan V. Bennett, & Kim G. Thomas

> I am feeling slightly frustrated with you. I emailed you and said, "What reading strategy do you want to do next week?" You emailed me back, "Here's my lesson plan about painting our mural." So, you really didn't understand what I was trying to say. We need to be on the same page.
>
> (Graduate student's e-mail message to a preservice teacher)

Recent research in teacher preparation indicates education majors' professional development is enhanced when education students have opportunities to collaborate in a community of practice (Beck & Kosniak, 2001; Lachance & Confrey, 2003; Richards, 2006). Communities of practice are social units in which members interact and develop relationships over time as they construct knowledge, share expertise, and pursue culturally agreed upon endeavors.

Communication is particularly relevant in a community of practice, largely because reciprocal discourse allows members to transfer technical knowledge and skills associated with a shared enterprise (Beebe, Beebe, & Redmond, 2005; Lave & Wenger, 1991, 1992). However, it is important to note that communication in a community of practice is multifaceted and thus not limited to impersonal discussions about how to complete tasks (Rogoff, Goodman Turkanis, & Bartlett, 2001). Rather, in order for a community of practice to flourish, members must appreciate and provide support for one another; engage in honest, open dialogue; consider the needs, feelings, and values of others; and attempt "to resolve inevitable conflicts in ways that maintain the relationships" (Rogoff, et al., 2001, p. 10). This other-oriented, nonjudgmental mode of interaction that is both honest and caring is termed interpersonal communication (Beebe, et al., 2005).

In this qualitative inquiry conducted in a summer literacy camp, we (Janet, the camp supervisor, Susan, a doctoral research assistant, and Kim, a doctoral candidate

course instructor) analyzed development over time in graduate students' interpersonal communication skills as they used electronic mail to plan and make decisions with preservice teachers. We also studied the specific content of the graduate students' electronic messages to determine encompassing themes. In addition, we investigated the mutually influencing, transactional nature of e-mail communication between the graduate students and the preservice teachers.

Rationale for Our Inquiry

Given the centrality of communicative expertise to teaching and learning, effective communication is particularly significant for both experienced and novice teachers (Cooper & Simonds, 2003; Saunders & Mills, 1999). Since computer-mediated communication in education is still considered "a new frontier" (Beebe, et al., 2005, p. 14), we wanted to explore the potentials of reciprocal e-mail exchanges in a context in which interpersonal communication is paramount. In addition, proposals for the redesign of teacher education call for teacher candidates to work closely with experienced practitioners (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005). Yet, a review of the literature in education shows few investigations have examined how e-mail transactions between experienced teachers and novices might promote interaction and collegial relationships. In fact, little research has examined the evolution of online relationships (Lea & Spears, 1995; Walther & D'Addario, 2001).

Structure and Philosophy of the Summer Literacy Camp

We offered the literacy camp one evening a week for 10 weeks in a small, low income Charter School located on the campus of a large southeastern university in Florida. As part of course requirements, 77 education majors participated as tutors in the camp—14 graduate students in a Practicum in Reading course and 63 preservice teachers in an advanced undergraduate reading methods course. Janet, the first author, taught the graduate Practicum course. Kim (third author) along with another doctoral student, taught the preservice teachers, and Susan (second author) served as a graduate assistant to the camp. Although the courses had separate instructors, during the first hour of the camp, the graduate students and preservice teachers met at 5:00 p.m. as an inclusive community to attend lectures, observe demonstration lessons, and participate in seminar discussions led by Janet, the camp supervisor.

Seventy children signed up for the camp. Fourteen teams comprised of a graduate student and preservice teachers each worked with a group of five children (the same children throughout the 10-week camp). We arranged the groups of children according to grade level, Pre K–eighth grade, and the graduate students and preservice teachers chose the grade level they wished to teach. Since there were more tutors than children, each child in the camp received considerable individual attention.

Participants

The graduate students (13 female and 1 male) whose ages ranged from 30 to 45 were all experienced teachers matriculating in their last course toward a master's degree. The preservice teachers (61 female and 2 males) whose ages ranged from 20 to 45 were

either in their third or fourth year of a 4-year teacher education program. They were participating in their second and final required reading methods course. All of the education majors were proficient in using e-mail as a form of communication.

Community-of-Practice Model for the Summer Literacy Camp

Although questions remain about what constitutes a community of practice in education and exactly how communities of practice promote positive learning outcomes (Schlager & Fusco, 2004), communities of practice provide an innovative framework to examine teacher development (Richards, 2006). In a community of practice, members build relationships through sustained mutual engagements that enable them to share information, negotiate meaning, and learn from one another. Learning is not limited to novices; rather, "a community of practice is dynamic and involves learning on the part of everyone" (Wenger, 2006, p. 3). As Wenger explains, "Members of a community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources, experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice" (p. 1).

Following community of practice frameworks, the graduate students initially coordinated lessons and collaboratively taught their small groups of children with minimal input and help from the preservice teachers. However, in keeping with Wenger's (2006) notion of learning as a process of social participation, as the camp progressed, the graduate students encouraged the preservice teachers to become active participants in the camp community by gradually accepting responsibility for developing and teaching lessons.

Rationale for E-mail Communication

Developing relationships through mediation and working together to solve problems takes time and sustained interactions among members in a community of practice (Wenger, 2006). However, during the weekly camp sessions, the graduate students and preservice teachers needed to focus most of their attention on their groups of children and they had little time to collaboratively plan lessons. Therefore, we concluded the establishment of e-mail correspondence was a priority in order to help solve the graduate students' and preservice teachers' time constraints. Equally important, we recognized e-mail communication has the potential to provide a framework for sustained dialogue, and thus foster quality interpersonal relationships. Electronic mail interactions extend the definition of interpersonal communication and can offer emotional and professional support for community of practice groups (Merseth, 1991; Shlagel, Trathen, & Blanton, 1996; Whipp & Schweizer, 2000). E-mail is a medium that allows participants in a community to discuss common experiences, share ideas, offer advice, seek suggestions, confer about problems, and talk about resources (Bodzin, 2005; Walther, 1992, 1993; Walther & Burgoon, 1992; Walther & Tidwell, 1996).

A review of the pertinent literature also informed us that with the development of the Internet a number of teacher educators have incorporated e-mail communication into their English as Second Language, reading, and science courses (Liaw, 2003; Richards, 2004; Seale & Cann, 2000). In fact, "email is the most commonly used form of computer-mediated communication" (Walther & D'Addario, 2001, p. 324). We, too, wanted to embrace the possibilities of this technological reality. Therefore, as part

of their course requirements, we directed the graduate students to communicate by e-mail at least weekly with the preservice teachers in their group in order to plan and coordinate literacy lessons. We gave no other directions.

Examining Electronic Communication

Theories of Communication and Learning Communities

Our inquiry was informed by the intersections of several related perspectives. Since our study focused on dialogic interactions, we adhered to ideas from interpersonal communication, a theory that examines conversational transactions made between partners and among groups. Genuine interpersonal communication requires a collaborative, interactive climate in which individuals feel understood, safe, and accepted (Beebe, et al., 2005). Current views stress the complex, transactional nature of interpersonal communication in which the content and tone of messages influence what message receivers understand and how message receivers respond (Beebe, et al., 2005). Our study of graduate students' and preservice teachers' messages also highlights electronic communication. In this spirit, we followed contemporary views of computer-mediated communication that explain the interactive nature of technologically mediated environments and expanded the definition of interpersonal communication (Markham, 2005). In turn, evolving computer-mediated communication conceptions have broadened researchers' lenses and provide "a unique phenomenon for study" (Markham, 2005, p. 794).

A community of practice provided the context for the inquiry. Thus, we grounded our inquiry in social learning theory that considers social participation integral to the acquisition of knowledge and understanding (Wenger, 2006). Participation refers to the "encompassing process of being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to those communities" (Wenger, p. 4).

Additionally, we were guided by social information processing frameworks based upon principles of social cognition and interpersonal relationship development (Walther, 1996). This model assumes those who engage in ongoing computer-mediated discourse strive to develop interpersonal relationships similar to individuals who participate in face-to-face sustained interactions. Social informational processing perspectives acknowledge individuals who engage in computer-assisted communication may need more time to develop relationships because there is less processing information to help them interpret a message, such as a communicator's posture, facial expressions, voice quality, eye contact, and gestures. However, research indicates positive quality relationships do develop over time (Walther, 1992; Walther & Burgoon, 1992; Walther & D'Addario, 2001).

We define human communication as a principal means of "making sense of the world" (Beebe et al., 2005, p. 6). Consequently, also we grounded our study in symbolic interaction theory. Symbolic interaction premises exert a significant influence on communication principles by suggesting individual's understanding of self is influenced by symbols (i.e., language) and interactions with others (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934; Woods, 1992).

Moreover, we viewed our inquiry as a holistic context-specific study that focused on a group of individuals in a unique bounded circumstance. Accordingly, we examined

the literature about case studies since intrinsic case studies take place over a relatively short time; these researchers pursue specific scholarly questions that yield data about phenomena under study—as applied to our context, the graduate students' and preservice teachers' tutoring and communication experiences. Generalizabilty is not a goal of case studies. Instead, the goal is to discover the distinctiveness of each case.

Three Inquiry-Based Questions

1. In what ways does the content of the graduate students' e-mail messages portray growth over time in their interpersonal communicative abilities?
2. What themes are evident in the graduate students' e-mail messages?
3. In what ways does the content of the graduate students' e-mail communication influence the preservice teachers' responses?

How We Analyzed the Data

Recognizing that researchers who investigate processes of interpersonal communication must consider temporal characteristics, one of our goals for the inquiry was to study development over time in the graduate students' interpersonal e-mail communication skills. Thus, when the semester ended, as a precursor to data analysis, we chronologically collated the 425 e-mail messages authored by the graduate students. We noted the majority of graduate students wrote at least three e-mail messages per week; since current communication as transaction theories explain human communication as mutually interactive, we connected the graduate students' discourse with 212 responses written by the preservice teachers.

We employed constant comparative analysis techniques to analyze and systematically characterize the e-mail correspondence over the 10-week time span of the camp. Constant comparative methods in qualitative research initiatives entail systematically comparing words, phrases, sentences, and longer discourse in an effort to develop conceptualizations about possible patterns, themes, and relationships in narrative data (Thorne, 2000).

We analyzed the data in three iterations. In phases one and two, we were guided by Beebe, Beebe, and Redmond's (2005) classification continuum of human communication as either impersonal (i.e., asking for or supplying information; responding to people's roles rather than as individuals) or interpersonal (i.e., seeking honest relationships; focusing on others; acknowledging people as unique and worthy individuals). We closely read the graduate students' chronologically ordered messages and highlighted phrases, sentences, and longer discourse that appeared relevant to two broad themes: impersonal communication (e.g., "What do you intend to do?") and interpersonal communication (e.g., "If I can help you in any way, let me know").

During weeks 1 to 4 of the camp sessions most of the graduate students' messages resonated with impersonal dialogue (N = 92 out of 106 messages). Beginning in week 5, although some of the graduate students' e-mail correspondence continued to contain language we designated as impersonal, we noted a distinct shift from impersonal to interpersonal content (N = 262 out of 319 messages).

We then revisited the graduate students' correspondence and identified three overarching themes in their impersonal e-mail messages: giving instructions and

information, questioning and asking for information, and complaining. We identified these four encompassing themes in their interpersonal e-mail: apologizing; offering advice and suggestions; giving compliments and praise, and promoting collaboration.

In the third review of the data, we examined the preservice teachers' responses to the graduate students' messages since "the message of one person influences the message of another" (Beebe, et al., 2005, p. 14). The preservice teachers responded to only 23 of the graduate students' 92 messages we categorized as impersonal communication. The majority of their responses (N = 189 out of 212 messages) occurred during weeks 5 to 10 of the camp in response to the graduate students' messages classified as interpersonal communication. Interestingly, the length of the preservice teachers' e-mail responses and their expressions of feelings, emotions, and self-disclosure increased proportionally to the length, and expressions of feelings, emotions, and self-disclosure of the graduate students' messages. We next make examples of these data visible.

Graduate Students' Interpersonal E-mail Messages

The following subheadings describe major themes extracted from our study.

Giving Instructions and Information

Understandably, the graduate student mentors' initial correspondence to the preservice teachers focused on group organization. Their messages were succinct, purposeful, task-oriented, and straightforward, reflecting their immediate management concerns.

> Good Morning. Here is what I want you all to do next week.
> Pre-reading /Jessica
> During reading/Tony and Sadie
> Post reading/Joan
> Visual art activity/Ramona
> Your Mentor (Jo Ann)

The preservice teachers gave no response to this message from Jo Ann.

Questioning and Requesting Information

During the first few weeks of camp, the graduate student mentors also questioned the preservice teachers. They wrote terse inquiries, and made no effort to establish supportive relationships. Rather, they were self-focused and concerned about accomplishing tasks: "Hello Everyone, I do not need to see your lesson plans. What is everyone doing next week?" (Shana)

The preservice teachers gave no response to this message from Shana.

Complaining

Early in the program, many of the graduate students appeared overwhelmed by their responsibilities as coordinators of their small groups. Some even scolded, criticized, and evaluated the preservice teachers' behavior without considering how their messages might impinge on the preservice teachers' confidence levels.

> Dear Preservice Teachers, You need to communicate more by email. I need to tell you all that you must communicate to me! You also need to learn strategies and how to be flexible. Nancy, Joyce, Susan and Kathy, this is all overwhelming helping you in this camp—informative but overwhelming. It is not easy being a graduate student in charge of a group. (Annilyn)

The preservice teachers did not respond to this message from Annilyn.

Examples of Graduate Students' Interpersonal E-mail Messages During Weeks 5 to 10

Apologizing

The majority of the graduate students' e-mail messages increasingly shifted to interpersonal communication around the fifth week of camp. They disclosed information about themselves and promoted an "honest sharing of self with others" (Beebe, et al., 2005, p. 7), as in "Hello Everyone, I just want to apologize for not emailing you sooner. I was ill and I thought of all of you. Thanks and I'm sorry about Monday night. I was too anxious as a mentor. Sorry." (Josie). The preservice teachers responded with confirming and supporting language: "Please don't worry about us, Josie. We knew you were not feeling well and we understand. Take care." (John, Leslie, Ellie, and Bruce).

Offering Advice and Suggestions

During this timeframe, the graduate students also offered advice in supportive ways, and displayed empathy and sensitivity to the preservice teachers' feelings

> Hi group. Just a few words of friendly advice. Bring glue, markers, etc., next week. Put newspaper down on the large table for art activities so you don't have to scrub paint and markers from the table. Does this sound OK to you? (Faith).

In turn, a preservice teacher wrote confirming responses that acknowledged the graduate student's competence.

> Hello Faith. Next week, we thought we could bring in strawberry cupcakes and pink strawberry frosting to create pigs. We will use half a marshmallow for the nose and little round candies for the eyes. We'll cut ears out of foam. How does this sound to you? Is this all right? We value your opinion. Thanks for the advice about packing and cleaning up with the kids, not after they leave. You have such good ideas. (Beth)

Giving Compliments and Praise

In the later phase of the camp, the graduate students wrote prolific amounts of praise indicating that the professional development of the preservice teachers had impressed them.

> Dear preservice teachers. You are doing a great job interacting with the students. They listen to you. They admire you as teachers. I know it can be stressful when

> your professor observed you, but you were fantastic—awesome! Excellent job guiding Mary with her story illustrations and you kept her focused. She loved the attention you gave her. The children's artwork was beautiful, thanks to you. I liked all of your ideas. What a great group. Congratulations! You are bright, and cooperative and have great teaching potential. As my professor always says, "Seek solutions rather than complain about problems," and that's just what you do now. (Leah)

The following message that a group of preservice teachers sent to Leah is indicative of positive and caring relationships. It illustrates ""emotional closeness" nurtured through communication (Galvin & Wilkinson, 2006, p. 9) and Buber's (1958) concept of the "I–thou" relationship.

> Leah, we decided to get together and create a poem for you because you are a fabulous leader of our group.
>
> Leah, Leah
> You're the one
> Who has made our teaching fun
> You taught us how to think things through
> Leah, Leah
> We admire you! (From Your True Admirers!)

Promoting Collaboration

In these e-mail messages, the graduate students clearly consider the preservice teachers as equals. Their correspondence and the preservice teachers' responses resound with mutual connections and trust, a sense of common purpose, depth of interactions, and an honest sharing of self. In addition, as the messages below reveal, the graduate students and preservice teachers came to depend upon one another and had formed strong feelings of group identity.

> Hi all, our group has formed up nicely. We email after each tutoring session and we plan collaboratively regardless of who is in charge for the overall session. I always want you to critique my teaching. I want your opinions about what went well and what did not. We are together in this endeavor. Next week we could all write together about whatever animal the kids choose. We also need to choose some books. When we do things together we do a great job of teaching. I finally got the Sponge Bob snacks for the kids. Can one of you bring the drinks? I'll bring the chart paper. Notice I am putting more and more responsibility on you preservice teachers and giving you fewer directions. You can do it. You have turned into teachers. (Mary)

A preservice teacher responded,

> You are the best, Mary. Yes, it was rough at the beginning of camp. We had a lot to learn. We had never done this before and I guess you hadn't either. And, we are now together like one group. But, the first few times of camp sessions we were not

together at all. We were into our own selves. Some of us did the right thing and prepared lessons. Other just did nothing. Probably they did not know what to do. But now, we are all working together, thanks to you. (Elise)

Implications for Teacher Education and Teacher Inservice Programs

This inquiry fills a void in research that has overlooked e-mail correspondence as an option for development of interpersonal relationships (e.g., see Chenault, 1998; Lea & Spears, 1995). While "it is increasingly common for people to use the Internet as one among many channels for communication" (Walther & Parks, 2002, p. 556), how technology affects relationships is not well understood (Walther & Parks, 2002). For example, although some scholars suggest computer-mediated dialogue may be ineffective in the development of interpersonal exchanges (e.g., see Walther, 1996), the results of this study indicate e-mail interactions can support quality relationships and offer social support (Walther & Parks, 2002). As social information processing theory explains, it is possible for quality relationships to evolve through computer-mediated communication; however, the evolution of such relationships may take more time than in face-to-face relationship development (Walther & D'Addario, 2001; Walther & Burgoon, 1992).

This research also supports communication scholars' notions that "email messages convey information about the nature of relationships among the correspondents" (Beebe, et al., 2005, p. 350). The chronologically ordered correspondence of the graduate students and preservice teachers illuminates a distinct trend from impersonal self-focused messages during the first few weeks of camp to interpersonal nurturing, "other-oriented" communication in later weeks of the project. These messages correlate with the development of quality relationships among the graduate students and preservice teachers. Over time, many "relationships move from impersonal to increasingly personal as closeness develops" (Galvin & Wilkinson, 2006, p. 8).

Another explanation for the gradual changes in the graduate students' and preservice teachers' correspondence resides in community of practice structures that provide opportunities for all participants to gain knowledge and experience. As the graduate students increased their knowledge about teaching literacy to children at risk and became skillful managing small groups of children in a supportive community context, in all likelihood they concurrently developed socially constructed understanding of their supervisory roles and became more comfortable with their responsibilities. As one consequence, they likely found it easier to collaborate with the preservice teachers in a shared endeavor. Accordingly, the graduate students' e-mail communication shifted from formal and top down, cautious and impersonal messages in which they did not reveal information about themselves to relationship-building, informal communication in which they shared their feelings and experiences. In turn, the interpersonal "I–thou" dimensions of the graduate students' messages enabled the preservice teachers to feel accepted and understood. As a result, they were willing to reveal their concerns and problems and authentic selves to the graduate students: "Disclosures commonly occur when the other is perceived to be trustworthy" (Tidwell & Walther, 2000, p. 324).

Current interpersonal communication views stress how the complex, transactional nature verbal or written communication mutually affects message receivers' reactions,

perceptions, and feelings. The content and tone of messages influence what message receivers understand and how message receivers respond. If individuals view communicators as supportive, in all probability they will respond in a similar and increasingly open manner.

Implications of this research apply to both teacher education and teacher inservice programs. This inquiry demonstrates that e-mail communication can extend the definition of a community of practice by providing additional opportunities for graduate students and preservice teachers to interact and develop close relationships. Therefore, teacher educators might consider adding an e-mail component to their course activities in which teacher candidates have opportunities to communicate electronically with experienced teachers in geographically distant contexts to discuss teaching concerns, share ideas, and offer support in a risk-free atmosphere. In addition, faculty in teacher inservice programs might wish to pair up teachers in diverse teaching environments as e-mail partners or initiate a virtual online community of practice in which classroom teachers have access to enhanced professional development opportunities beyond their local districts.

The study also demonstrates the mutually influencing, transactional nature of interactive dialogue. With this in mind, teacher educators and teacher inservice providers might want to help future and experienced teachers develop awareness of the reciprocity of communication and model ways to overcome barriers to effective communication with students from diverse cultures, backgrounds, values, and perspectives. As Beebe, Beebe, and Redmond (2005) note, "It is impossible to be other-oriented without being willing to acknowledge diversity" (p. xvii).

Steps to Take

This research demonstrates that that considerable learning can occur in a social context as a result of shared experiences, problem-solving opportunities, collaboration, and negotiation. E-mail communication has the potential to expand preservice and beginning teachers' opportunities to work with experts in an electronic community of practice network, thereby extending their educational perspectives and practices. Teacher educators and teacher inservice leaders might consider adding electronic networking to their courses and school professional development content. For example, preservice teachers in rural areas might pair up with experienced teachers in inner-city classrooms to learn what problems children and teachers face living and learning in urban environments. In the same way, neophyte teachers of students at risk for academic failure might correspond with veteran teachers of students with learning difficulties to discuss effective strategies and best practices for promoting student achievement.

Try This

Initiate a semester-long electronic community of practice among preservice teachers and graduate students or among beginning and experienced teachers. Participants might engage in free discussions or their communication might center on designated topics. At the end of the semester ask participants to reflect on how taking part in an electronic community of practice facilitated opportunities for collegiality, peer support, and professional development.

Authors' Notes

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All participant names herein are pseudonyms.

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SECTION IV

Mentoring and the Learning Community

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Introduction to Section IV

In this final section of the book, the authors of the three chapters explore mentoring relationships within learning networks and across different educational contexts. The development of professional learning communities that include inservice and preservice teachers, teacher-leaders, and university faculty members are described. Underrepresented groups and heterogeneous networks are also given recognition. Mentoring activist practices are made visible in organizations committed to operationalizing mentor preparation and peer learning.

In "Leadership in K–12 Learning Communities: Activism and Access Through Intergenerational Understanding" (Chapter 17), Davis, Green-Derry, and Wells examine issues of intergenerational relationships and leadership in two K–12 learning communities. They investigate the impact of mentoring relationships among teachers and educational administrators of different ages, addressing work style and leadership differences. Also examined is the intergenerational diversity of learning communities and their potential use for creating demographic parity within education, as well as building stronger staff morale and outcomes. The two mentoring programs they describe provide insight into increasing productivity among generationally diverse community memberships. The authors encourage the development of learning communities as avenues for intergenerational understanding and expanding access to leadership development for underrepresented groups. Included are steps that can be taken by K–12 practitioners interested in making activist mentoring a centerpiece of their learning communities. Also provided is an exercise that brings focus to the demographics of learning communities.

In Chapter 18, "Facilitating Professional Learning Communities through Mentor Teacher Preparation," Myers and Fives offer a comparative case study of developing female teacher leaders in a diverse, high-needs secondary school. The authors discuss how involvement in a teacher-mentoring program facilitated their leadership styles and activities. They contrast two teachers' approaches to teaching, leadership, and program involvement; illustrate processes involved in developing teacher leadership; examine how the teachers define teacher leadership; and trace each teacher's developing leadership stance using Bradley Portin's triadic model of leadership. Additionally, they discuss how involvement in onsite professional development coursework fostered their leadership styles and self-perceptions as leaders. Steps to take revolve around conceptualizing teacher leadership within the context of mentoring. A question guide is provided for encouraging dialogue about the various leadership actions teacher-leaders perform.

Finally, Pryor and O'Donnell, in "Peer Learning Communities in Action: Coaching to Improve Preservice Teaching" (Chapter 19), describe a community reflection process enacted with a cohort of early childhood math/science preservice teachers. The design of a semester-long coaching assignment is described, along with instruments used to guide reflection and analysis. Participants are preservice teacher candidates, arranged into pairs, and observer-coaches composed of faculty members teaching mathematics/science and philosophy courses, classroom mentor teachers, and a university supervisor. The authors provide information about the efficacy of scales as prompts for reflective discussion within field-based community learning contexts. They also include ideas for building a peer-coaching community and an exercise involving preservice teacher-interns' use of a philosophy of education scale.

Carol A. Mullen

CHAPTER 17

Leadership in K–12 Learning Communities: Activism and Access Through Intergenerational Understanding

Dannielle Joy Davis, Lisa Green-Derry, & Jovan Wells

Learning communities offer staff development with the goal of academic excellence for all students, teachers, and administrators. Development of teachers requires professional learning that moves beyond a workshop-driven approach (National Center for Educational Statistics [NSDC], 2008). Staff development proves most powerful during ongoing regular meetings with teams for the purposes of collaborative lesson planning, learning, and problem solving (NSDC, 2008). These teams, often called learning communities or communities of practice, are committed to the norms of continuous improvement and experimentation while encouraging their members to improve their practice via establishing a culture of professional development. Learning communities can play a unique role in strengthening work relationships and providing access to leadership opportunities for traditionally marginalized groups (Davis, 2008).

Through our reflections and content analysis of program documents, we review two K–12 learning communities and examine issues of intergenerational relationships and leadership within these featured programs. We conclude with the goal of encouraging the development of learning communities as avenues for intergenerational understanding and expanding access to leadership development for underrepresented groups.

More specifically, we examine the intergenerational diversity of learning communities and the potential utilization of them as a strategy for creating demographic parity within education, as well as building stronger staff morale and outcomes in educational settings. We address an understudied area in educational leadership: work style and leadership differences among various age groups in educational environments. The two mentoring programs we feature may offer educational leadership practitioners insight into ways of increasing productivity among generationally diverse members of a given learning community. We ask, how have learning communities helped or

hindered mentoring relationships among teachers and educational administrators of varying age groups?

Learning Communities: A Teacher Leader's Viewpoint

Serving as a practicing teacher leader for a mentoring program offers coauthor, Green-Derry, a unique perspective on leadership, mentorship, and organizational productivity. A northern Texas school district's design for the mentoring program comprised seven learning communities divided by region. Seven executive directors currently oversee schools within the geographical proximity. Many of the participating schools mirror the district's professional learning communities' model. For instance, several middle school leaders in the district assign teacher teams to specific areas in the building, which in turn helps establish communities of educators and their students. Within this organizational design, a teacher leader designee facilitates academic and social interactions among colleagues, students, and parents. The teacher leader, in some instances, functions as a liaison to campus administrators.

This district in Texas serves more than 150,000 students in an urban setting. Approximately 84% of the student population is from racially diverse backgrounds. These demographics dictate a need for large numbers of teachers skilled in all content areas, with the ability to provide appropriate and sustentative instruction to a diverse student body. As is the case in many school districts, teachers with skills and knowledge of specific content are in short supply. School district leaders have countered this problem by hiring professionals whose expertise lies outside of education but who are willing to be trained in teaching and learning. The district learning community and mentoring program are geared toward offering professional support that will increase teacher retention while improving educators' skills and ultimately ensure educational success for students.

To ensure that nontraditional, second career teachers, as well as traditionally university trained teachers, receive adequate support and remain in the profession, the district leaders assign formal mentors. Although the intent is admirable, challenges often deter these facilitators from meeting the goal of teacher retention. Seeking a solution, this district's leadership put in place components of professional learning communities that include placing colleagues with the same instructional contents in proximity to one another (groups of specific grade-level teachers and students in designated areas of the campus) and scheduling common planning times to facilitate collegial interactions and support. These interventions provided a network that has the potential to foster strong collegial and interpersonal relationships among teachers and staff. It is within this framework that support for new teachers is intended to occur.

As is inevitable in large schooling organizations, implementation and program success vary from campus to campus. Statistics from the mentoring program show that new teacher attrition continued to decline in 2004–2005 from 16.1% in 2003–2004 to 11.8% in 2004–2005. Here we define new teachers as professionals with less than one year of classroom teaching experience. Comparisons we make between new teachers and mentors of varying age groups are based on definitions of Baby Boomers and Generation Xers. We contend that differences between the Silent Generation (born 1925–1944), Baby Boomers (born 1945–1962), Generation X (born 1963–1980), and Millennials (born 1981–2001) hold potential to positively or negatively influence school climate and collegiality among school staff. Varied perceptions are most evident

between the Silent Generation who married at younger ages and respected authority or hierarchies versus "Gen Xers" who question authority and either remained single or married later in life (Bickel & Brown, 2005).

Our discussion of the mentoring component of the district-wide learning community includes interactions and activities from the micro perspective, focusing on support provided to new teachers on a specific urban secondary school campus. Attention will also be given to similarities or differences between how new teachers in Generation X and those from earlier generations respond to mentoring from educators with different backgrounds.

Mentoring Program: Experiential Aspects

The district leader's original focus for the mentoring program resided in the development of a cadre of trained mentors to assist new teachers on their campuses. However, the growing challenges of recruiting, supporting, and retaining highly qualified teachers led to the mentoring program's expanded scope, which encompasses a broad array of activities and services.

For one of us, entry to the mentoring program was as a protégé, not as a mentor. Arrival from another state necessitated designation as a "new" teacher, despite almost 20 years as an educator. In this teacher's mind, being mentored in terms of teaching was unnecessary. Yet the desire for support and assistance with acclimating to the new district and campus was paramount. Several brief conversations with a colleague served to launch the mentoring of the veteran teacher. Such perfunctory actions are what many teachers, both novices and veterans, have experienced as mentorship. Consequently, because their needs are unmet, career changes are often inevitable. Considering differences in experience levels between protégés when forming mentoring dyads would have better supported this veteran teacher new to the state, district, and campus community.

Although this "Baby Boomer" teacher's experience as a recipient of mentoring support was negligible, it piqued a desire to provide something more meaningful for others new to the profession, school district, or individual campus. An opportunity to make this dream of providing quality mentorship into a reality came in the form of an administrative internship project. One project goal was to assume the chairperson's role of the new teachers' support team and serve as a teacher leader. Accepting this leadership challenge caused the teacher to reflect on previous experiences of being a new teacher. She felt determined to avoid denying new teachers a meaningful mentoring experience and was committed to learning from the district's mentoring program. Hence, she was being trained while providing leadership. The mentorship preparation she received from the program served to sharpen her leadership skills through training modules geared toward preparing mentors to give specific and generic support to new colleagues. Modeling classroom management strategies, sharing organizational forms, reminding new teachers about timelines, and offering encouraging words are examples of support teacher leaders were expected to provide.

Chairing the new teachers' campus support program meant guiding other "Baby Boomer" colleagues as they mentored mostly "Gen X" teachers. Specific responsibilities included facilitating workshops and social activities, performing informal observations, giving feedback on teaching, observations, and modeling classroom management strategies. All of these responsibilities occurred while the teacher leader fulfilled other tasks

associated with instructing sixth-grade students. These types of multi-leveled responsibilities were problematic as they lessened teacher leaders' effectiveness in mentoring and individual classroom instruction.

New teachers need time and attention to develop the skills needed to be successful in the field. Despite commitment to the mentoring process, the veteran teacher-mentee realized there were realities to be dealt with on the school's campus and that mentoring would continue but at a higher level. If new teachers are mentored, they need to see how inextricably intertwined are the roles of classroom teacher and being a teacher of teachers or adult learners. Neglecting one or the other was not an ethical or a professional option given the relationship among professional development, practice, and student outcomes.

Challenges of new teachers noted in the teacher education literature further substantiate the need for effective teacher mentoring programs. For instance, Fluckiger, McGlamery, and Edick (2006) address workload manageability as an issue of concern for new teachers. According to the researchers, poor management and organizational skills contribute to attrition for new teachers, who sometimes exit in order to pursue a different career. Manageability and workloads are sometimes problematic for mentors as well, resulting in the impoverished mentorship of newcomers. Consequently, responsibility for protégés' career changes must be shared by veteran teacher-mentors and mentoring program administrators.

The featured district employed general professional development activities designed to give mentors strategies and tools to share with new teachers. As noted earlier, many of the professional development activities addressed instructional tools and strategies, methods of handling required forms, and suggestions for classroom routines and procedures. More difficult issues such as organizational or workload management strategies and skills were simply not addressed. For instance, assumptions made based on mentors' high levels of classroom expertise and their ability to manage additional workloads associated with mentoring threatened the likelihood of positive outcomes for protégés and subsequently these novices' students. An approach that gives attention to the skills, strengths, and weaknesses of both mentors and protégés may lead to a more effective program design.

Comparing Baby Boomer and Generation X Teachers

Needs of any new teacher, barring age, may depend upon individual situations and level of expertise. For instance, nontraditional and second-career teachers are usually of the Baby Boomer generation. Conversely, Generation X teachers represent those whose relative lack of experience may require more quality mentoring. Differences and similarities among Baby Boomers and Generation Xers should not be relegated to the mentoring new teacher relationship where the mentor is usually older than the new teacher, but should extend beyond assumptions associated with age, knowledge, and skill.

Teaching shortages combined with career change decisions by professionals outside education have resulted in a reversal of roles: Generation X mentors are sometimes younger than their Baby Boomer protégés. Mayer (2006) suggests a need to change leadership practices to accommodate the different work environment preferences of Generation Xers. Support for continuous individual learning and greater value of "action learning" or "incidental learning" are priorities for Generation Xers. This

difference in learning styles implies counter traditional, formal training that often do not meet Gen X needs. What type of mentoring will best benefit the two generational groups? We respond to these questions herein.

The Knowledge-Based Encounters Ensuring Professional Success Program

The Mansfield Independent School District Knowledge-based Encounters Ensuring Professional Success (KEEPS) program (Mansfield, Texas) is an example of an established learning community in its infancy stage, primarily developed to help support a rapidly growing district. The KEEPS program was established in 2002 to provide a mentoring and professional learning community for new teachers entering the district. The program, in its sixth year, has experienced exponential growth. Several components contributed to the need for the program. The primary focus was the growing residential population of school age children and the need to address the district's goal of recruiting and retaining quality professional educators to support the increased student enrollment. The program is designed to provide a tiered support system to all newly hired professional educators and knowledge-based encounters in order to ensure professional growth and success. Existing teachers throughout the district participate in the program in a variety of different roles such as mentors, campus advisors, and campus administrators.

Professional employees (referred to as "mentees") new to the district are grouped into either Tier I (little to no experience) or Tier II educators (2 or more years of experience). The goal is to provide mentees with an invaluable support system through active participation in the program, in addition to professional resources. The mentoring program provides collaborative opportunities, seminars relevant to new teachers, ongoing participant training, celebratory or recognition activities, support for acclimation to the campus and district culture, as well as information on policy and procedures. Each aspect of the program addresses a specific need of a first year teacher or teacher new to the district. The program also provides current research-based resources regarding effective classroom management techniques, diversity issues, special education, and classroom technology. Preassessment questionnaires and advisor interviews reveal that many inexperienced new teachers consider a mentoring program as a requirement when considering a new job opportunity.

KEEPS mentors are preselected through an application process and training is required prior to assuming the role as mentor. As an incentive for active participation, mentors are provided a stipend payable biannually and afforded collaborative opportunities designed to promote mentor–mentee interaction. Ideally, mentees and mentors are matched with similar assignments (i.e., subject area, grade level, etc.). However, with several new campus openings and the shuffling of employees, this endeavor is not always accomplished.

The campus advisors of this program are assigned to campuses using a ratio formula (10:1) according to the number of new employees at each campus. Advisors are also provided an incentive to participate in the program through the use of a biannual stipend. The role of the campus advisor is to serve as a liaison between the campus and the district. The duties of a campus advisor includes selecting campus mentors, maintaining communication among the principal, mentors, and the district coordinator, coordinating campus level new teacher seminars, and serving as an advocate for supporting all new teachers on the campus. KEEPS campus advisors are recommended

for the position by the principal of each campus. Ongoing training opportunities are provided for advisor participants to successfully contribute to the overall enhancement of campus leadership. A number of campus advisors have become successful administrators. Moreover, informal contacts suggest that campus administrators also reaped the benefits of improved morale and that the structure of the program aided in the development of both current and new faculty staff members.

The program has also had its fair share of challenges. As a result of the district's rapid growth, several campuses were faced with mentor shortages. In these cases, campus advisors were forced to match two to three mentees to one mentor and assign unwilling employees as mentors. Advisors served additional roles as mentors. According to end of the year feedback from mentoring dyads, an overload to the system's structure led to an unfulfilling experience for all parties involved. Mentors experienced burnout as a result of being responsible for too many protégés. Advisors or mentors who undertook both roles began neglecting other aspects of their responsibilities. Similar to the previously featured program, other challenges imposed by rapid growth were age differences in regards to veteran teachers new to the district having been categorized as mentees. Often times these employees were assigned to a mentor that was younger or more inexperienced in the field.

Administrator support at the campus level served as an integral factor in determining the success of the program at each location. Administrators who did not support or enforce the importance of attendance and participation in professional development training opportunities provided by the program indirectly encouraged apathy among teachers. As a result, some participants failed to attend planned learning opportunities and ongoing professional growth was hindered. Participant observation from one coauthor reveals the need for careful future selection of campus advisors, as selecting an unwilling or unmotivated advisor resulted in some instances of program ineffectiveness and disorganization.

In terms of participating teachers' responses to this mentorship, Generation X members, who often held a more relaxed work ethic, tended to often question authority even more than usual. They would want proof that a given strategy would work. Nevertheless, they were eager to learn new teaching techniques. Contrarily, veteran teachers of the Silent Generation often believed themselves to have mastered the art of teaching and thereby were somewhat resistant to change. Despite this resistance, these veterans were rule followers in regards to working with those in authority.

An educated and supported professional is a necessary ingredient for continued district-wide improvement. Overall, the program is designed to benefit and sustain the quality of personnel. As a result of the embedded support systems designed to retain and continue the growth of district employees and despite the challenges described, the program has experienced success. Overall, the KEEPS model promotes ongoing collaborative learning and shared knowledge among educators across generational lines.

Suggestions for Future Practice

In order to ensure sustainable success, mentoring programs must effectively address generational issues related to teacher retention. Suggestions for future practitioners in K–12 settings are as follows:

- When employing learning communities as a mentoring strategy, consider the multifaceted strengths and challenges of generational outlooks and varied leadership styles of both mentors and protégés.
- Remember that mentoring is reciprocal. When working in learning communities, encourage leaders and mentors to realize that the one who teaches learns.
- Avoid making assumptions about veteran teachers' ability to parlay classroom management skills into leadership mentoring skills. Just as age is not a conclusive determinant of maturity, ability to mentor affectively should not be conclusively determined by years of teaching experience.
- Refrain from assuming new teachers' reasons for leaving the profession is the result of inadequate mentoring. Some new teachers, especially those of Generation X, have predetermined that teaching is only temporary, not lifelong. Exit surveying or interviewing of teachers leaving education could provide further insight into reasons for attrition on a given campus.
- Note that mentoring programs alone will not meet the needs of all teachers. Just as differentiating instruction is necessary to address skills, learning styles, and instructional needs of students, attending to the individual needs of professionals is essential for maximum occupational success.

When incorporating these suggestions, it is key for administrators to acknowledge the importance of having a culture of professional development present at school and district levels that facilitates success of learning communities centered in mentorship. Support of such initiatives requires the appropriate allocation of time and resources.

Concluding Thoughts

Learning communities and mentoring programs must be developed in ways that attend to the various needs of teachers and administrators, regardless of age. The second-career, Baby Boomer professional who has never taught, for example, may need mentoring just as much as the recent Generation X college graduate. Forms of mentoring may vary and should take into consideration both generation and individual needs. Whatever methods are used, they must allow for inevitable differences that stem from age, job experiences, and individual professional expectations.

Acknowledging differences in teachers' experience levels and using learning communities to highlight the strengths of diverse groups in terms of age, race, and other demographics promises to yield positive outcomes in terms of staff morale, productivity, and campus climate. The mentoring that emerges from a learning community holds the potential to not only retain teachers, but to foster the professional relationships and development needed for advancement in the field. This is particularly important for traditionally marginalized populations. Nationwide, women and racial minorities are underrepresented in the principalship and superintendency (NCES). In essence, as our chapter's title suggests, employment of learning communities may be viewed as a form of activism in efforts to increase access to faculty and high-level administrative positions for these populations.

Steps to Take for K–12 Practitioners

According to the NCES (2006), only 15 states in the United States require districts and schools to allocate time specifically for professional development. This failure to focus upon development of professionals suggests the limited commitment of some states to their employees in education. Steps practitioners can take to implement learning communities centered upon activist mentoring that supports expanding professional access requires consideration of these macro nationwide conditions, as well as micro district and school factors.

First, facilitators of learning communities must assess the condition of their campus climate environments with regard to the status of professional development on these. If the culture reflects indifference of members' toward continued learning, they should work with administration and staff to develop a more learner-centered climate. Modeling from leadership and placing value on professional development via the allocation of time and available resources should help facilitate this shift. Second, when establishing a learning community, whether these be in the form of mentoring programs, informal teaching circles, or other activity, challenge the group to draw upon the unique strengths of its members. Consider how individuals' age, race, gender, and culture might add to their contribution. For instance, a Generation Xer may lead the group to incorporate technology on a given collaborative project, while a Baby Boomer might offer strategies for retaining and motivating group members. Finally, be informed of policies related to professional development at the state level, utilizing all available resources from the state and district. In resource-challenged contexts, facilitators may need to draw upon creative strategies and external support (e.g., donations, grant funding) for learning group activities. In addition to financial support, commitment of group members toward a common professional goal is critical to forming and sustaining communities of learning.

Exercise

Individuals within both K–12 and university contexts can explore the demographics (e.g., race, class, gender, and/or socioeconomic status) of their learning communities. In what ways might individuals' strengths be utilized for the overall success of the community? With the group, a chart can be created, noting how the diversity of its members can be used to strategically improve performance as teachers and administrators. This exercise can also be undertaken by individual members to assess their unique strengths, which can be shared with the group. Such an exercise can provide a road map for guiding future professional development activities that mirror the strengths of each teammate within a community of learners.

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CHAPTER 18

Facilitating Professional Learning Communities Through Mentor Teacher Preparation

Susan D. Myers & Helenrose Fives

This writing is a comparative case study (Merriam, 1998) of two teacher leaders who participated in a university-based Master Mentor Teacher Certificate program (MMTC) partnered with a high-need secondary high school. The purposes of this work are to illustrate the processes involved in developing teacher leadership, examine how these teachers define teacher leadership, and trace each teacher's developing leadership stance using Portin's (1999) triadic model of leadership. Additionally, we discuss how involvement in on-site professional development coursework facilitated their developing leadership styles and perceptions of themselves as leaders. The two women in this study represent a compelling contrast with respect to their professional experiences, career goals, and leadership stances.

Professional learning communities (PLCs) are powerful avenues that can allow teachers to influence student learning through their own experiences of inquiry-based learning. The literature on learning communities describes several components for successful implementation of school-led professional communities (Erickson, Farr Darling, & Clarke, 2005; Wells & Feun, 2007; Woods, 2007). One of the structures needed is a school culture conducive to engaging in meaningful conversations (e.g., Aubusson, Steele, Dinham, & Brady, 2007; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; Zeichner, 2003). However, a school's climate can become so intractable that it creates a challenge to building the trust inherent in developing productive collaboratives. Teachers desiring participation in learning communities are not always provided the opportunity to do so or the chance to develop their own leadership capacities that would help them develop such communities on their own. Additionally, they may not feel empowered or encouraged by school administrators to schedule additional time for facilitated discussions about student learning (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Hipp, Huffman, Pankake, & Oliver, 2008).

We propose that providing on-site professional development, in the form of a structured approach to mentoring, can facilitate the beginning of a PLC at a high-need, secondary school campus. The mentoring courses, designed to inform teachers about the process of mentoring as well as to facilitate their own mentoring practices, provided multiple opportunities for these teachers to engage in professional discussions concerning their classroom teaching practice and the struggles they encountered mentoring teacher candidates. Through these discussions the teachers shared how they initiated the establishment of PLCs within their own school environments. The learning community model also allowed these teachers with a conduit for identifying strategies to develop and maintain a community of practice within their own professional contexts.

What Is Teacher Leadership?

Defining Teacher Leadership

Relevant to this discussion, we recognize teacher leaders as "teachers with significant teaching experience, are known to be excellent teachers, and are respected by their peers" (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 267). Further, we focus on the ways in which teachers lead through mentoring preservice, novice, and experienced teachers within their own school contexts.

York-Barr and Duke (2004) determined that one challenge in studying teacher leadership is the lack of a clear and consistent definition of what teacher leadership is in the field. This challenge was attributed to various ways that teacher leadership has been studied, such as teachers' roles, support systems for increasing teacher leadership, and the complexities of teaching. Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan (2000) offered a three-wave description of the development of teacher leadership as a field of study that helps to explicate how this term is defined. Within each of the waves of research on teacher leaders, investigators have shifted their conceptualization of these professionals and their functions within schools. These shifts while necessary in the development of the field have also added to the disparity in how teacher leadership is defined. For example, first-wave teacher leaders fulfilled traditional roles of management, whereas second-wave teacher leaders build on their pedagogical skill and knowledge to serve as mentors and lead staff development (Silva et al., 2000). The third and current wave of teacher leadership is focused on changing the culture of schools into communities of practice that both support and facilitate the practice of teaching for student learning.

Theoretical Context of Teacher Leadership

Teacher leadership and the development of teacher leaders are described and investigated in the research literature on effective PLCs (Harris, 2005; Hord, 2004; Lieberman & Miller, 2004; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Over the past decade, researchers of school reform and change revealed that teacher leadership is a critical factor influencing student learning (Beachum & Dentith, 2004; Bennet & Marr & Marr, 2003; Cowdery, 2004; Hutinger & Mullen, 2007). Topics examined include defining teacher leadership (Hess, 2008), describing the various roles teacher leaders take on within schools (Lieberman & Miller, 2004), identifying the support needed to develop teacher leaders (Cowdery, 2004), using the faculty study group format

for supporting teacher leadership (Hutinger & Mullen, 2007), and providing an organizational perspective on teacher leadership (e.g., Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996) that extends to the role of administrative leaders in building capacity for developing teacher leaders who are simultaneously democratic and accountable (Mullen & Jones, 2008; Woods, 2007).

In their extensive review of the relevant literature, York-Barr and Duke (2004) traced how teacher leadership has become an integral part of school reform issues. Reform issues such as district-wide mentoring plans, expanded PDSs, and shared decision making have emphasized the importance of teacher leadership and have markedly increased teacher participation in school governance. Other leaders in school reform issues (e.g., Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996), as well as organizational development and leadership researchers (e.g., Cowdery, 2004; Harris, 2005; Hutinger & Mullen, 2007; Lieberman & Miller, 2004; Mullen & Jones, 2008), have asserted that teacher leaders are essential to both developing and sustaining strong PLCs.

Portin (1999) provided a triadic model of leadership that identified three conceptions of leadership: transactional, transformational, and critical. Webb, Neumann, and Jones (2004) applied this model to teacher leaders and used qualitative data to explicate the leadership practices within each leadership stance. They concluded that transactional teacher leaders reflect a traditional top-down managerial form of leadership. These leaders demonstrate an autocratic perspective on decision making, emphasize leader-centered action and vision, recognize power as authority, and see the leader as the framer of meaning. This leadership stance is reflective of the first-wave of teacher leadership that Silva and colleagues (2000) described.

In contrast, transformational teacher leaders are interested in leading change and transformation within their school contexts. These leaders accomplish change via the implementation and facilitation of learning reforms and initiatives (Portin, 1999; Webb et al., 2004). These leaders emphasize a democratic perspective on decision making, focus action on leader–follower relationships, negotiate shared vision among leaders and followers, view power as influence in the organizational context, and perceive leaders as those who enact change within their specific contexts. The transformational leadership stance is similar to the second-wave of teacher leadership research, which emphasized teachers as mentors and master teachers who share their knowledge of teaching strategies to affect change (Silva et al., 2000).

The third conceptualization of leadership, critical leadership, departs from the others by re-centering the role of leader, deemphasizing the individual, and focusing on the collective group (Portin, 1999; Webb et al., 2004). With a critical conceptualization of leadership, decision making is established through the autonomy of the group. Here there is not one leader but a collection of individuals who may at any time lead or follow, and through this collective action learning environments are enhanced. Hence, in a critical leadership stance, action is centered on ideas rather than individuals or relationships; power is recognized as the capacity of all members of the organization to be involved; vision for the organization is established through dialogue among all members; and critical reflection and construction of meaning may be initiated from any source in the organization. Parallels between critical leadership and the third-wave teacher leaders can be made. However, Portin's (1999) model emphasizes *how* this leadership stance is evoked in practice whereas the discussion of third-wave teacher leaders is focused more on the goal of changing the culture of schools (Silva et al., 2000).

Webb and colleagues (2004) presented evidence of teacher leaders as models of each of these conceptualizations, arguing that the critical conceptualization of leadership may provide the best results for learning contexts. However, we see the role of teacher leaders as more fluid and believe that few teacher leaders are successful if they maintain and act on a rigid conceptualization of leadership that prevents them from adapting their leadership activities to meet the needs of a given group or task. Additionally, as PLCs develop, teacher leaders may need to work through the expected roles of transactional and transformational leadership in order to facilitate the construction of critical leadership communities based on idea-centered action. We contend that teacher leaders are more likely to move between these leadership stances as the needs of their school environment shift and as they themselves develop as leaders.

Although encouraging teachers to take a stronger leadership role in shared decision-making activities is one of the primary themes in the teacher leadership literature, established school-level PLCs remain uncommon in American schools. In an attempt to merge the structures needed for PLCs with the necessary supports for teacher leadership, researchers have studied the development of teacher leaders (Fullan & Hargreaves 1996; Hord, 2004); their preparation as peer coaches and trained experts (e.g., Hemphill & Duffield, 2007), and the ability of teacher leaders to foster PLCs (Henning et al., 2004).

Mentoring as Leadership

Mentoring at all levels of the teaching profession has been documented as an effective means of retaining highly qualified teachers (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006; Ackerman, 2007), and providing renewal for seasoned professionals (Bennet & Marr, 2003; Lieberman & Miller, 2004). Preparing mentors for leadership roles is necessary for them to become effective participants in PLCs (Hess, 2008; Hord, 2004; Lieberman & Miller, 2004). Providing learning experiences for mentors creates a unique form of leadership opportunity that may be particularly salient to the development and maintenance of PLCs.

Methods

The research questions for this study emerged from Susan's (the first author) engagement at the school sites with the teacher participants for 18 months: (1) In what ways did the two teachers demonstrate transactional, transformational, and critical conceptualizations of teacher leadership in their mentoring activities? (2) How did their participation in a PLC supported by the MMTC program facilitate their developing leadership stances? The questions served to guide our examination of the data and emergent results.

Data Sources and Analysis

Our data sources consisted of class documents (written participant reflections, participant journals, electronic communications, and text from archived, threaded discussions). Additional sources included the first author's personal journal entries during 2006 and 2007, extensive field notes, including notes from informal conversations and

individual interviews. Data were collected over 18 months, that is, through the two semesters the teachers were enrolled in the MMTC program.

Susan began the initial analysis process by reading through all of the documentation collected from all 13 teachers enrolled within the first class offered in the MMTC. A first reading of the archived online discussions, transcripts from the notes taken from focus group interviews, field notes, and other sources established the initial coding for major categories and descriptive phrases. A second analysis of the data revealed more detailed themes and categories. These themes and categories were audited by a qualitative researcher familiar with the MMTC program but unaffiliated with this study. Triangulation of the data was employed through follow up interviews and member checking.

During the data analysis process, Susan identified two teachers as candidates for close investigation. These teachers were selected because they demonstrated both a great deal of similarity in their professional roles and unique perspectives on leadership and their own development as teacher leaders. These teachers belonged to the initial cohort of teachers in the MMTC program (Beachum & Dentith, 2004), were department heads at the same school, and were actively engaged in multiple roles within the school and district (Lieberman & Miller, 2004). These characteristics helped us with establishing parameters for this bounded case study.

General Context of the School and Teacher Profiles

The participants in this study served as both classroom teachers and department chairs at the same high-need secondary school. This school was engaged in a school–university Professional Development School (PDS) partnership and both teachers served as clinical faculty to the PDS since 2005. They were enrolled in the MMTC program offered by a research-focused southwestern university that was taught on-site at their school. We next describe each teacher and use pseudonyms for them.

Sarah

Sarah, a seasoned teacher of over 20 years, was in her late 40s and had taught mathematics at this campus for 12 years. She was the department chair and worked with five other math teachers in her unit. Sarah completed her master's degree in educational leadership and all courses necessary for administrative certification for the state of Texas. She applied and interviewed for several administrative positions within the school district for the 4 years prior to this study, but had not been offered one. She was actively involved in other extracurricular activities at the school, served as a liaison for the school–university PDS, and assisted with placing student observers with mentor teachers during the semester.

Lisa

At the time of this investigation Lisa was the chair of the history department, with 8 teachers in her unit. Many of the teachers she worked with were also coaches, or part-time instructors, and six of the teachers were new to the school and district. Lisa came to teaching as a postbaccalaureate teacher candidate in her early 30s. She taught at this

campus for 6 years and was in her first year as a department chair when data for this study were gathered. She was actively involved in other leadership activities on campus, such as grant writing and student organizations. Lisa joined the PDS leadership team in 2006 and presented workshops to preservice teacher candidates enrolled in the partnership. In contrast to Sarah, Lisa had decided that she did not want to leave the classroom for the ranks of administration at the time of the study. Instead she planned to complete her graduate degree and considered pursuing a position at the district level within her content specialization of social studies.

Discussion of Results

Four themes emerged from the data analysis: the ways leadership was defined (including roles and activities), the connection of mentoring activities with leadership stances, the influence of the school organizational structure on their perceived effectiveness as teacher leaders, and the experience of a PLC on the development of these teachers' perspectives on and practice of leadership as mentors. Within each of these larger themes, we found evidence that these two teachers reported and demonstrated leadership activities reflective of transactional, transformational, and critical conceptions of leadership (Portin, 1999). Thus, across these themes, we noted that these teachers seemed somewhat fluid in their conceptualization of leadership as the needs and stresses of their contexts varied. Figure 18.1 details evidence from each teacher demonstrating instances of the triadic model of leadership.

Defining Leadership: Transactional versus Transformational

The themes derived from our data analysis suggest that the two teachers had strong convictions and perceptions about themselves as leaders and mentors. Sarah exhibited a transactional or directive approach or stance in defining her leadership style. Alternatively, Lisa described her leadership stance as more transformational in nature.

As a transactional leader, Sarah saw herself more in a managerial role of leadership. She would often hold faculty meetings during the lunch period in her classroom where she would direct the meeting according to her preplanned agenda that was reflective of goals and vision she had for the department. At these meetings, there was very little conversation or dialogue among any of the other teachers, and other points of view were not often entertained. In Sarah's reported interactions with teacher candidates, she would make such statements as "I find it hard as a veteran [experienced] teacher sometimes to let a new teacher go and find their way when it is not exactly your way." Thus, even in her mentoring role, she still felt the pull of a transactional conception of leadership in which she held the position of power via her authority and knowledge of the "correct" means of teaching.

In contrast, Lisa articulated her stance as more transformational in nature. She described herself as an optimist stating, "As many can attest, I am the eternal cheerleader and will give everyone praise if I think they need a boost in their day." She later reinforced her statements about the value she places on relationships by saying, "I love to see what others have to offer. New people in the profession bring a sense of enthusiasm and new ideas!" We think that these statements reflect a transformational perspective of leadership and that they emphasize the importance of facilitation and leader–follower-centered relationships.

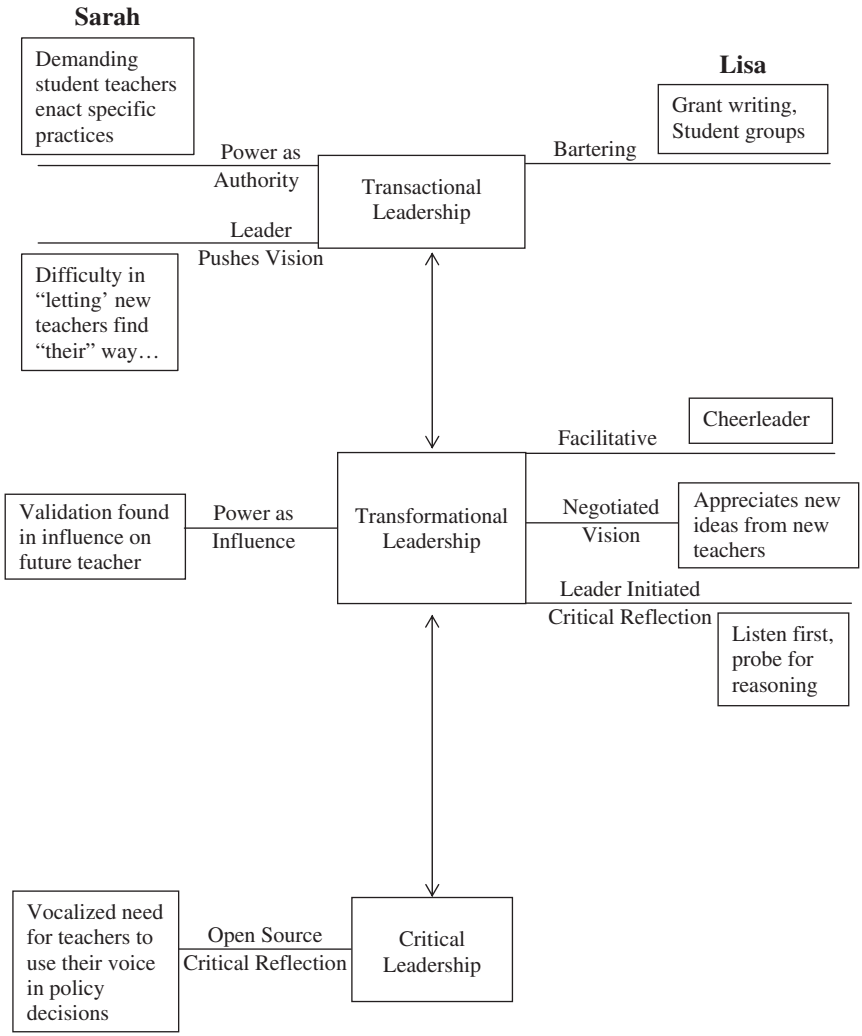

Figure 18.1 Evidence of Teachers as Transactional, Transformative, and Critical Leaders
Source: Fives, 2008

Sarah acknowledged that she struggled with how best to communicate with others. In one of her reflective documents, she shared how difficult it was to deliver constructive feedback and how she would ultimately resort to leader-centered action and autocracy to bring about change. This struggle is illustrated from her work with a teacher candidate:

> In the beginning I tried to start with the positive, then move to the "problem," hoping she [the student teacher] would "catch a clue," then seeking feedback/questions/suggestions as a collaboration. This process quickly ended and

> I advanced to a "No more Mr. Nice Guy" approach. I no longer beat around the bush, but spoke directly—not suggesting, but demanding certain practices be put into place. This eventually led to hard feelings and separation. (Online discussion posting, September 2007)

Lisa presented a somewhat different and more transformational view of providing feedback to colleagues and teacher candidates. She described how she often "liked to listen first, to see what everyone has to say," and would often ask questions to probe the reasoning and perceptions of those with whom she was working. Through this process, Lisa provided her mentees with the opportunity to join in a negotiated vision. However, as a transformational leader, in this instance at least, Lisa also maintained her role as the initiator of critical reflection. That is, after listening to varied perspectives, Lisa identified key concepts or common themes to guide future discussions with her preservice teacher mentees around improving their teaching practice or engaging adolescent students.

Leadership and Mentoring

Both teachers revealed that they were learning more about themselves, not only as teacher leaders but as mentors, and that specific skill sets are essential for becoming effective leaders. Interestingly, when focusing specifically on the notion of mentoring as a form of leadership, both teachers seemed to shift into a different conceptualization of leadership as identified by Portin (1999) and Webb et al. (2004). For instance, when discussing her role as mentor and personal experiences in the MMTC program, Sarah demonstrated a more transformational leadership stance. She indicated desire for a negotiated vision and an ability to initiate critical reflection, as reflected here:

> I would hope that I share with others my love of teaching, offer words of encouragement, demonstrate classroom management skills, and communicate my content. . . . Our discussions have made me reflect on where I have been and where I am now. I even reevaluated where I am now and how I can improve at this level. (Interview notes, November 2007)

Sarah reported that in developing as a teacher leader, she desired validation for her work. Moreover, she felt validated through the recognition received of her influence as a mentor of student-teachers. Webb and colleagues (2004) indicated that transformational teacher leaders see power in the form of influence they have over others in their field. Sarah related an incident where a teacher candidate she had mentored returned one day to ask for advice, suggestions, and materials, all of which helped to confirm her worth as a professional: "This brief encounter *validated* me! That someone valued and respected my thoughts was great. I conquered the world the rest of the day."

Structures for Facilitating Teacher Leadership

Both teachers indicated that the school's organizational structure and climate directly affected their capacity for developing their own leadership as well as that of other teachers. Sarah was more vocal on this point, demonstrating some evidence of an initial critical leadership stance (Portin, 1999; Webb et al., 2004). She felt strongly that

teachers' voices were not heard by policy makers or others in authority, thereby indicating the need for judicious reflection from any and all sources in the organization. This stance is illustrated in Sarah's posting:

> I believe, that in education, teachers have very little to do with making policies—and how sad for us. We rarely use our voices to speak up for ourselves. Those of us in the trenches have the most knowledge as well as the most experience to make, or at least contribute to, policies. The soap box is now free. (Online discussion posting, September 2007)

Interestingly, Lisa approached the organizational challenges she faced from a more transactional stance. She identified ways in which she could contribute to a positive school climate while improving her own professional growth. This demonstrates more of a bartering relationship with administration that is reflective of a transactional leadership stance (Portin, 1999; Webb et al., 2004). We see Lisa's actions as bartering or transactional because Lisa agreed to perform tasks for the administration that she found useful to her personal professional growth. She enacted this exchange by taking on greater responsibilities and leadership roles within our research-based PDS activities, developing a mentoring handbook for her high school campus, and initiating involvement in conference presentations.

During the two semesters this study was conducted, a complete turnover in administrative staff occurred. The new school-based administrators were much more authoritative and directive, and many teachers at the school perceived them to have "come here to fix us." This negative perception of the administrators directly influenced how the teachers perceived themselves as teacher leaders. While Sarah and Lisa were committed to staying at this campus, Sarah felt obligated to "go to bat" for teachers in her department. She took on additional responsibilities and represented her colleagues to the administration when they felt there was an injustice. Lisa appeared to still be navigating her way through the complex relationships that were evident on the campus, reporting that she was trying to "get a feel" for the new administrators and the evolving relationships among school faculty, staff, and students.

Influence of a PLC on Teacher Leaders' Development

One characteristic PLCs share is that members of the community are able to articulate a common vision or goal to be achieved as a result of collaboration (Eaker & Keating, 2008; Hord, 2008). However, there is another aspect to a PLC that may be overlooked, but is nonetheless an important feature of successful communities of practice. Teachers who can formulate, as reported by Eaker and Keating (2008), a "collective commitment" can help to establish roles and responsibilities for each member of the group. The primary difference between a vision and a commitment within the structure of PLCs is that the vision provides a guide for how members of the PLC envision the future of the school and statements of commitment indicate how each member is willing to contribute individually to facilitate that positive change occurring.

The MMTC courses supplied a structure for the development of a PLC that enabled these two teachers to add to the construction of a vision for their school and articulated their commitment to change. For example, MMTC courses allowed Sarah to move,

in discussion if not practice, from a transactional to transformational leadership stance. These courses and the resulting PLC created by them allowed her to explore her role and responsibility as a mentor to all levels of professionals within her school community. For example, she stated:

> I find the concept of acceptance of others [professionally] to be the most difficult one for me. It is the one I have to work on the most and have the hardest time trying to practice.
>
> It's easy for me to be accepting of my own children. It's not even that difficult for me to be accepting of the students I teach. But I realize that I am not always accepting of the other teachers I work with daily. (Interview notes, October 2007)

The comment above demonstrates how participation in the PLC allowed Sarah to voice one of the obstacles that may be hindering her ability to use more critical or transformational approaches when working with others. Her ability to discover and articulate a specific role for herself, and becoming more accepting and positive in her interactions with colleagues, was a first step in helping to establish a more positive result for the PLC's vision.

Implications for Practice

Herein we provided two snapshots of how teachers see themselves as leaders. While both have the potential and capacity to be leaders at the building level as mentors and teacher leaders, the current organizational structure and culture of their school and district often leaves them feeling invalidated and powerless.

Sarah reported having resigned herself to not being offered a position of leadership in an administrative capacity in the near future. As a result, she has begun to search for other avenues to express her beliefs about what constitutes good mentoring and teaching practice. She started teaching for the university as an adjunct instructor and conducts her undergraduate course on diversity at her school site. The need for autonomy and validation she referred to in her interviews seems to be an outlet in this venue. Sarah still struggles at times with the relationships within her department. Since the beginning of this study, she has acknowledged trying to become more aware of how she communicates with her colleagues and the teacher candidates. As she attempts to move into a transformational stance of leadership, her conceptions of leadership appear to be more about relationship building and acceptance.

Lisa continues to grow in her leadership stance as a transformational model. She reaffirms her position that she is more of a facilitator than a manager; both with her professional colleagues as well as with the teacher candidates she mentors. As she begins her fourth semester as a clinical faculty/teacher leader for the PDS, she uses her conceptions of leadership by modeling promising practices in teaching and PLCs. Lisa has offered to make presentations at national conferences about her activities and has become more involved in campus-wide, grant-writing activities.

Administrators who wish to build capacity and encourage shared decision making can learn from the stories of these women educators. PLCs rely on teachers who are committed to improving student learning and achievement through their own learning. When seasoned teachers, such as Sarah, do not perceive that they have ample

opportunities to engage in meaningful conversations about teaching, then the school climate and culture can suffer. Lisa also needs to be encouraged to become more engaged with her colleagues by sharing her creativity and transformational conceptions of leadership.

Ending Thoughts

PLCs and teacher leadership require more than collaboration to flourish in schools and ultimately influence student learning (Hord, 2004, 2008). PLCs need to support from administrators and leadership from multiple members of the community, particularly teachers. Teacher leaders, especially those who teach in urban settings or schools with highly diverse student populations need encouragement and continued mentoring themselves as they try new roles and navigate different ways to develop their leadership skills. What was unique about these teachers' perceptions of the complexity of leadership was that they emphasized (1) the importance of relational aspects of leadership and (2) the validation of themselves as effective instructors. Interwoven within these two motifs, we also found a fierce commitment to teaching within both of these teacher leaders.

Aside from the descriptions of the time-consuming nature and complexity of the changing nature of PLCs, these teachers' insights also shed light as to why mentoring-types of relationships are of such importance to teachers in helping them to increase their capacity for leadership. Sarah and Lisa articulated personal leadership stances vis-à-vis mentoring within the culture of their secondary classrooms and school. Although the school culture at their campus was not conducive to creating PLCs, their participation in the MMTC provided them a venue to at least begin collegial conversations about teaching, mentorship, and personal growth as professionals.

Our documentation of Sarah's and Lisa's perceptions about teacher leadership and their behaviors suggests that engaging teachers in dialogue about their leadership stance may increase the likelihood that they will take on greater leadership roles within their schools. Teachers' ability to articulate and model a collective commitment as to specific roles within the PLC will help to further the collective vision for a more positive school culture. Additionally, teachers, like Sarah, who do not receive access to traditional leadership roles within the school or district administrative structure, may be able to express their capacity for leadership by tapping into the power of teacher leadership.

Steps to Take

To assist in developing the conceptualization of teacher leaders within the context of mentoring, we suggest the following action steps:

1. Provide opportunities for professional conversations about leadership experiences with mentees (e.g., student teachers, first-year teachers, novices)
2. Share articles, books, and other professional resources for guiding these professional dialogues
3. Recognize and explore the fluidity of leadership within the triadic model of transactional, transformational, and critical leadership conceptualizations

Exercise

Explore understandings of the kinds of leadership actions taking place on your campus for teacher leaders. Through implementing small group discussions using protocols established in the PLC literature, engage faculty in dialogue using these questions as a guide:

1. Considering your current role and/or position, what conception of leadership (transactional, transformational, critical) do you most frequently act on?
2. Share events or instances that you have shifted between leadership conceptions based on the task and/or context in which you are working
3. Reflecting on the three conceptions of leadership, which best reflects the type of leader you would like to be (i.e., transactional, transformational, or critical)? Why?
4. Transformational and critical conceptions of leadership often require a change in the school culture. How can you begin to influence these types of changes in your school?

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CHAPTER 19

Peer Learning Communities in Action: Coaching to Improve Preservice Teaching

Caroline R. Pryor & Barbara D. O'Donnell

Professors of preservice teachers (interns) often hear students express apprehension about demonstrating their teaching skills. This concern can be compounded by long-held beliefs developed as a K–12 student observing what it is like to be a teacher (Lortie, 1975). Unfortunately, these early observational experiences do not readily translate into effective teaching practices. Feiman-Nemser (2001) suggests that as interns critically examine their beliefs about teaching, they develop powerful images that helps shape their future practice. Foundational knowledge such as history or philosophy of education has long afforded teachers a means for self-knowledge about their beliefs—self-knowledge that leads to clarity in making classroom decisions (Fenstermacher & Soltis, 2004; Pryor, Sloan, & Amobi, 2007).

To interns, however, the benefits of reflection on the underlying philosophies that drive their approach to teaching sometimes appear oblique, as they seek to master the practical aspects of their practice, such as lesson delivery. As Pryor and colleagues (2007) explained, "In the everyday realities of classroom life, teachers are not always guided by *episteme*—a theoretically created procedural of teaching. Invariably, teachers' reactions are driven by . . . *phronesis*, that is, situation-specific knowledge of teaching created by the teacher" (p. 9).

Here we describe a collaborative coaching process designed to enhance the abilities of (a) interns to identify and critique their philosophical approach to teaching, and skills for improving their teaching and (b) peer-coaches (interns, cooperating teacher, university supervisor, and instructor) to communicate about effective teaching and learning.

Components of a Peer Learning Community

Collaborative Field Experiences

Preservice teacher education programs are well-suited to provide their students collaborative experiences, most typically during the school-based field-experience component

of these programs. Such field experiences typically offer many opportunities for interns to elicit feedback about their teaching (e.g., lesson plans and implementation) and develop communication skills representing their beliefs about teaching (Guyton & Wesche, 1996; O'Hair & O'Hair, 1996). Moreover, the field experience can provide a beneficial context wherein interns learn new skills, such as collaboration, multiple approaches to teaching, and knowledge of subject matter (Byrd & McIntyre, 1996; Fernandez & Robinson, 2006). Studies indicate reflection on teaching during the field experience can enhance learning of pedagogical skills (e.g., Guyton & Wesche, 1996; Huling-Austin, 1992). Kragler and Nierenberg (1999) note three variables underlying effective reflection opportunities during early field-based programs, prior to student teaching: coursework, teaching activities, and guidance and feedback.

To promote in-depth knowledge about teaching during these field experiences, Feiman-Nemser (2001) urges framing interns' core learning tasks around "what teachers need to know and care about" (p. 1016). These tasks include examination of teaching beliefs, content areas, learners and learning, strategies, approaches and assessments, and tools to study teaching.

Peer Coaching

Peer coaching is defined as support that one teacher provides to another for the purpose of improving teaching skills, strategies, or techniques. LeCornu (2005) notes that peer coaching can help interns overcome the isolation of a one-on-one environment in learning to teach. Peer coaching is supported by tenets of the National Science Education Standards (National Research Council, 1996) and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) (2000), advocates of creating communities of learners that foster diverse teaching perspectives, decisions, collaboration, and discussions.

Following the suggestion of Feiman-Nemser (2001) that teachers need "serious and sustained learning opportunities" (p. 1014), we believe that peer coaching is a process that can provide these experiences. Studies indicate that *collaborative peer coaching* can enhance use and remediation of (a) research-based techniques (b) positive classroom practices, (c) less effective practices, and (d) shared language and general understandings of new ideas (Hunter & Russell, 1989; Miller, Harris, & Watanabe, 1991; Morgan, Gustafson, Hudson, & Salzberg, 1992). In addition, collaborative peer coaching offers interns a view of their teaching they might not otherwise have (e.g., Byrd & McIntyre, 1996; Fernandez & Robinson, 2006).

In this present study, our collaborative community is defined as learners in the methods course (interns and university instructor), along with the school-based cooperating teacher and university supervisor. Additional informal school and cultural learning and exploration are an expected part of this learning environment. Collaboration embedded into program designs such as learning communities provides interns practice in evaluating multiple strategies to improve their teaching (Taylor et al., 2007). Green (2008) suggests that learning communities offer the long-lasting benefit of socially constructed (or shared) knowledge—in which participants debate, frame, and evaluate knowledge with others. To facilitate the exchange of ideas, LeCornu (2005) suggests a careful review of the construct in which educators frame the field experience, recognizing how power structures might impact communication within a learning community.

Communication to Enhance Coaching

The peer coaching process also emphasizes communication among participants (Bowman & McCormick, 2000). In this context, communication has been described as the (a) oral exchange of ideas (NCTM, 2000) and (b) ability of the speaker to interact with others in acts such as justification, analysis, or argument (e.g., Knuth & Peressini, 2001). The NCTM (2000) standards extol communication as "a way of sharing ideas and clarifying understandings . . . [allowing ideas to] become objects of reflection, refinement, discussion and amendment" (p. 60). The process of how ideas are exchanged, however beneficial, might well benefit from examination and reflection to understand the meanings underlying ideas.

The methods class assignment in this present study provided interns with a *peer coaching learning community* in which they practiced using *prompt*s to evaluate and discuss perceived areas of teaching improvement. To counter the difficulty of creating situation-specific teaching knowledge, Petress (2003) suggests the use of guideposts (i.e., prompts) for students to draw upon when thinking about classroom instruction. To more thoroughly suggest the impact of this project, we report interns' philosophical change in beliefs about approaches to teaching and their emergent communication skills.

Learning from Our Coaching Community

The 27 first-semester college seniors who participated in our fall 2007 project at our mid-western regional university were enrolled in a Mathematics and Science in Early Childhood Methods course. Interns were assigned to their field placements in cohorts of three to five in one school building, selecting two to three peer-coaches to join their cooperating teacher and university supervisor in a learning community. Interns followed a five-part class assignment of goal setting, planning, teaching, debriefing, and reflection for a peer-observed lesson, once in math and again in science.

Caroline Pryor administered the *Philosophy of Education Scale* (POES) (Pryor, 2004) after she presented interns with philosophical-historical content, information about reflection on their teaching beliefs and strategies for using the indicators on the *POES* as prompts for conversation. Course instructor Barbara O'Donnell, having used a process titled "lesson study" in other classes (Taylor et al., 2007), drew on theoretical constructs of collaboration to improve teaching (Chokshi & Fernandez, 2005; Lewis, Perry, & Murata, 2006) for the development of the *Coaching to Improve Teaching Scale* (*C^2IT*). Community peer-coaches used the *POES* and the *C^2IT* Scale (described next), as prompts for discussion after each observed lesson.

Philosophy of Education Scale (POES)

The *POES* is composed of seven dimensions of teaching derived from the core standards of the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Council (INTASC) (1992) of effective teaching: classroom environment, lesson plans, classroom management, activities, grading/evaluation, knowledge, and teacher's role. These dimensions are triangulated across five philosophical teaching approaches: executive (behaviorist), humanist (student-centered), subject specialist (content-centered), citizen-teacher (community participant), and explorer (inquiry-technology) (e.g., Fenstermacher & Soltis, 2004). An example of

dimension-indicator scoring is found in Appendix 19.1 (*Philosophy of Education Scale* and Sample Scoring).

In all, the POES is comprised of 105 indicators, each independently rated and 35 philosophical approach items, each appropriately ranked. Reliability for this present study was calculated at $r = 0.075$, well above the benchmark range of 0.50 to 0.06 suggested by Nunnally (1967) for an instrument intended as an analytic tool. Within each dimension (e.g., grading/evaluation), five cells represent each approach; each cell is composed of three indicators representing a particular approach. Each *indicator* is independently *rated* using a five-point evaluative scale, after which the cell is compared across the five approaches of a dimension and each approach is *ranked* using the five-point scale. The summated ranked scores derive an overall philosophical orientation score. These ranked scores portray the contribution of each dimension to overall philosophical approaches.

Coaching to Improve Teaching Scale (C^2IT)

The *C^2IT* is composed of 12 variables of teaching improvement based on Schulman's (1986) model of pedagogical reasoning. Each intern is required to use the first two scale items in each lesson he or she teaches, use of (1) thought-provoking questions and (2) challenging children to think and reason. The remaining items (3 through 13) are selected by the cooperating teacher and intern: (3) K–3 students will investigate a concept effectively, (4) students are engaged and actively participating, (5) lesson is developmentally appropriate, (6) assessment practices are appropriate, (7) lesson is student-centered with an appropriate balance of activity, (8) evidence of knowledge of math or science content, (9) information is presented clearly, (10) learning activities fosters student learning, (11) evidence of organization, and ability to anticipate problem areas, (12) appropriate timeframe and adjustments, and (13) other areas.

Each of these 12 variables (and one open-ended variable, item 13) is rated on a five-point scale. The open-ended item functioned as a prompt for two questions used in community discussion after an observed lesson: perception of overall improvement and influence of the *POES* on teaching improvement or change in approach. All of the interns completed the *POES* and the *C^2IT* Scale at the beginning and end of the semester.

Making Sense of Teaching Approaches

To learn about the teaching approaches of our interns, we evaluated changes reported on the *POES*. Each philosophical approach (e.g., executive) calculation was determined by classifying individuals into approach types—termed an "identifier"—if their obtained score reached one half of one standard deviation above the mean score of the total sample score; the total score possible is 105. For example, if the average score for the executive approach was 80 (SD = 10), then a score of at least 85 will result in an executive categorization. Prepost change in philosophical beliefs by teaching approach category was determined by paired-sample *t*-tests.

Our 27 interns used the *C^2IT* Scale to identify and discuss their most critical improvement needs; the highest rated items (score ratings of 4 or 5) served as prompts for peer-conversation about next steps in improvement. In order to provide context about how these prompts functioned in a learning community, samples of highly rated

items are reported as part of two case studies. To understand possible nonreport bias of the 12 items, the open-ended responses based on the *C²IT* Scale were analyzed using Creswell's (1998) suggestions for grounded theory analysis. A seven-step process was employed: (1) iterative reading of end-of-semester data, (2) identification of initial categories and interpretations, (3) a second reading, (4) identification of emergent themes, (5) axial coding, (6) plotting themes on a grid, and (7) recategorization through the lens of the *POES* teaching approaches. This process illuminated relationships, events, and conditions of the participants' actions, ideas, and communication, reported in the section titled "Learning in the Peer-Coaching Community."

Fostering Communication in a Peer-Coaching Community

What happens when a course is designed to foster collaboration to inform teaching? Although research (Hunter & Russell, 1989; Miller et al, 1991; Morgan et al, 1992) suggests that peer coaching benefits participants, not all experiences are either equally formed or result in quality coaching (LeCornu, 2005). Herein we describe the overall change of our interns' philosophical beliefs about approaches to teaching. We also present two cases illustrating implications of collaboration during the field experience.

Changes in Cohort Beliefs about Approaches to Teaching

Similar to other studies (e.g., Fernandez & Robinson, 2006; Pryor et al., 2007) in which participants are immersed in reflection on their approaches to teaching, these interns' overall philosophic beliefs changed. As noted in Table 19.1, the executive approach postscore ratings increased significantly and the most highly rated pretest approach, humanist, decreased significantly. None of the other approach categories indicates significant belief change.

A Case: Student and Community Coaching Communication

Rebecca, Lesson 1: Self-Analysis

Rebecca, an intern, and her cooperating teacher identified two improvement criteria on the *C²IT* Scale for her first grade math–science lesson: student engagement and developmentally appropriate activities. Rebecca was critical of the lesson, pointing to modifications she believed diminished its cognitive demand: "I left out parts that were not developmentally appropriate . . . how muscles lose energy and oxygen." In her view, the science lesson became a physical education activity.

Table 19.1 Interns' Change Scores: Philosophy of Education Scale (POES)

Approach	*Pretest*	*Posttest*	*t*	*p*
Executive	60.70	65.52	–2.17	0.04*
Humanist	90.81	86.96	2.47	0.02*
Subject Specialist	69.48	69.44	0.02	0.99
Citizen Teacher	76.78	74.74	0.96	0.35
Explorer	64.96	66.26	–0.87	0.40

Note: * $p < 0.05$

Peer-coach response. Catherine offered little in the way of oral critique to Rebecca, instead praising Rebecca's ability to engage students. The course instructor attributes Catherine's limited response to two as yet underdeveloped skills: Catherine's lack of confidence in her own teaching abilities and inadequate understanding of how to participate in the collaborative process. After debriefing her lesson outcomes with Catherine and her cooperating teacher, Rebecca's verbal response indicated that she drew on the *POES* and *C²IT* prompts to help her identify and discuss potential improvements to her teaching. For example, by using the *POES* dimension *Teacher's Role,* she was able to focus her conversation with her cooperating teacher on her beliefs: "[I should] increase students' responsibility for learning and increase science content." She remarked, "[I should] support students with higher level questions (*C²IT* item 1)." Rebecca then used the *POES* dimension *Activities* and *C²IT* item 4 to discuss how she might increase student engagement and whole-group discussion in her lessons.

Lesson 2: Self-analysis. Using the same criteria as her first lesson (student engagement, developmentally appropriate activities), Rebecca was determined to improve how she taught the math topic of spatial visualization. She modified a textbook task to allow for more student involvement and cognitive demand. After teaching her lesson, she identified two lesson successes: student engagement and creativity, and areas where improvement was needed—questioning skills, directions/visual aids, and more challenging extensions (*POES: Activities*).

Peer-coach response. Rebecca, intent on improvement and unhappy with Catherine's lack of focused verbal critique, asked another peer-coach to observe her second lesson. This coach offered additional insights to Rebecca about (a) managing the classroom, (b) conducting student presentations, (c) giving directions, and (d) modifying the textbook task. A major concern, this coach remarked was, "there were not that many adaptations made to the textbook lesson . . . there are better ways to teach the concept." She added, "the lesson and materials were student-centered and student friendly." Rebecca then used the project scales as prompts in her verbal response to this second peer-coach: "[I would] further increase student participation and responsibility" (*POES*: *Classroom Environment*, *C²IT* item 4), not trust a textbook lesson to be developmentally appropriate for all students (*POES*: *Lesson Plans*, *C²IT* item 5), clarify directions with examples (*POES*: *Knowledge/Instruction, C²IT* item 9), and facilitate deeper math connections (*POES*: *Teacher's Role*, *C²IT* item 8).

Catherine, Lesson 1: Self-Analysis.
Catherine and her cooperating teacher identified two *C²IT* items as problem areas for her first-grade lesson on classifying zoo animals: student engagement and clear information. In her postteaching debriefing, Catherine reported student engagement (*C²IT* item 4) as her strength using the rationale that students understood what to do. She stated, "[I] presented directions clearly . . . going through each step of the activity" (*POES*: *Knowledge/Instruction*, *C²IT* item 9). Catherine then decided to improve her lesson, making it more cognitively demanding, by using a Venn diagram that not only "compared zoo and non-zoo animals but what they both have in common" (*POES*: *Activitie*s, *C²IT* item 5).

Peer-coaches' response. Acting as a peer-coach, Rebecca differed with Catherine's perspective that the lesson objectives on Catherine's lesson plan were well-implemented in

the pedagogical lesson design. However, Rebecca agreed that Catherine "required them [students] to think and reason on their own" (*POES*: *Activities*). She noted, "There could have been more for the students to do on their own so they could then explain the concepts back to you . . . It would have shown you whether or not the students truly understood the concept." Rebecca thought Catherine should become student-centered (humanist). As the course professor, O'Donnell realized that although Rebecca's feedback focused on improving Catherine's lesson plan, Rebecca found it difficult to express candid critique directly to Catherine. Catherine responded to Rebecca's verbal feedback by agreeing in a general manner ("I need to improve"), but she did not use language specific to *how* she would modify her teaching. It appeared to the instructor that her interns needed additional guidance about how to provide conversational feedback.

Lesson 2: Self-analysis. For her math lesson, Catherine and her cooperating teacher decided to repeat the target criteria from lesson one. Catherine remarked that her *C²IT* item analysis skills were improving. She remarked, "For the most part, the students were engaged, curious and actively participating. There were a few students that were off task, but I walked around and helped them with the lesson." Discussing this improvement with her peer-coaching community, Catherine's verbal response included explanation and synthesis; her analysis twice referred to *C²IT* items. She pointed to item 4 (engagement) and item 9 (clarity), stating: "I must continually search for ways to make lessons . . . interesting to students."

Peer-coach response. In their debriefing, Rebecca praised Catherine for finding an alternate way to approach teaching and believed her strength was "allowing students to explain their answers and justify what they are doing." Rebecca offered Catherine these suggestions: (a) provide extension activities to keep students on task (*C²IT* item 11), (b) challenge students with more difficult math problems (*POES*: *Lesson Plans*), and (c) control excessive noise (*POES*: *Classroom Management, C²IT* item 5). The instructor responded to Rebecca's suggestions by reassuring Catherine that Rebecca was trying to urge her to reexamine her beliefs and think deeply about learning outcomes. Catherine agreed with Rebecca's suggestions: "The coaching experience was helpful because it gave me another perspective . . . It is hard for me to realize what mistakes I am making and how I can improve. . . . Rebecca helped me see what I was missing and how I can make lessons more successful." To expand these insights, Catherine reviewed the indicators on the *Classroom Management* and *Teacher's Role* dimensions, reviewing each philosophical approach, searching for indicators that would help her *explain* how she planned to expand her repertoire of strategies. In the case of a novice teacher, often hopeful that executive-direct instruction will result in on-task student behaviors (Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch, & Enz, 1999), learning to analyze teaching approaches provides interns with options for meeting student needs.

Learning in the Peer-Coaching Community

Student Coaches: Prompts for Conversation

Through Rebecca's coaching, Catherine reported that she learned to improve lesson plans and experiment with different teaching approaches. During the semester, her

focus became classroom management, however, she believed she needed "to have high expectations for students and use manipulatives as often as possible." Although she had observed *explorer* or inquiry learning—Catherine continued to report that it is difficult for her to implement because of classroom management. In response to her perceived teaching shortcomings, Catherine reported that she would more likely draw on *executive* behaviors. Rebecca (a *humanist)*, remarked in her debriefing that she understood the importance of questioning her teaching practices and strived to include developmentally appropriate activities. Prior to this class assignment, she believed "students could learn all they needed to know by listening and doing short summary activities . . . because that is the way I was taught and learned."

Instructor Coaches: Prompts for Teaching Approach Analysis

The instructor learned that she could enhance interns' exploration of teaching approaches with discussions about the *POES* dimension indicators, especially among *executive*-oriented students. For example, Catherine (somewhat hesitant in initiating teaching performance) used *C^2IT* feedback to analyze her lesson. The critique from her peer-coaching community was an initial event prompting her cognition-into-action response (Bowman & McCormick, 2000).

Catherine then searched for indicators on the *POES* to help her *explain* how she might change her teaching, and she began discussing these changes with her coaching community. She used the project's two scale items as prompts to provide verbal feedback to her peers and in turn receive feedback, a reciprocal practice we believe she might incorporate in her future teaching.

Early in her field experience, it was evident that Rebecca understood her role as a peer-coach and the necessity of offering peers helpful feedback. However, she was not familiar with language to affect this feedback. As the semester progressed, she began to use the *POES* and *C^2IT* Scale to provide *task-specific* verbal feedback to focus her peer coaching. Increasingly, when Rebecca coached her peer about an observed lesson, she verbally recognized a well-implemented *specific task* (e.g., student-generated questions), followed by specificity in areas for her peer to reflect on or improve.

This case study of Rebecca and Catherine is a portrait of two interns learning to explain the philosophical approaches underlying their teaching decisions. These explanations were framed in a peer-learning community in which peer-coaching prompted conversations about motives, strategies, and philosophical shifts, a conversational process O'Hair and O'Hair (1996) call "the adhesive connecting our understanding of good teaching and its practice" (p. 162).

As this project progressed, philosophical shifts were evident in the increase in students' rating of the *executive* teaching approach and use of improvement criteria on the *C^2IT* Scale: planning/organization (n = 18), classroom management (n = 6), integration of content (n = 8), and critical questioning (n = 11). Yet, even with a community of peer-coaches and referent prompts of two scales, the *humanist* approach to teaching diminished on the *POES,* and *C^2IT* criteria of student engagement/hands-on activities (n = 6) and developmentally appropriate activities (n = 11) were not frequently selected by interns. It appears that interns' belief in a singular teaching approach or practices (e.g., *executive* instruction) at the end of their field experience is not uncommon (Pryor et al., 2007; Steffy et al., 1999). However, understanding the nature, derivations, and

potential shifts of interns' beliefs provides a community of learners with a means from which they might draw clarification when selecting teaching strategies.

Summary

Peer-coaches in this project were engaged as a community of learners in discussions linking reflection on observed lessons with underlying theoretical teaching approaches (Kragler & Nierenberg, 1999; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981). Studies suggest that when teachers learn to work collaboratively, their K–12 students have a greater potential for success (e.g., Chokshi & Fernandez, 2005; Greene, 2008). Through this process, a climate of trust and collegiality develops, teaching becomes less isolated, and teacher performance improves (Robbins, 1991). Given these benefits, we suggest several steps for developing a peer-learning community.

Steps to Developing a *C²IT* Community

It is important to for anyone attempting to build a peer-coaching community to include interns' perspectives about what they might want to improve when developing the evaluative rubric criteria for coaching activities. One way to support this process is to model these criteria in the university classroom. Also, collaborate with the peer-coaching community so that members experience developing criteria to guide observations and discussions. In the development of your rubric, use language that acknowledges that interns develop at different rates, particularly as success is not always immediate for some participants. Provide for flexibility in the composition of the coaching team so interns might gain additional insights. Build relationships within the coaching community. Peer-coaches and cooperating teachers should be guided to work together to develop a common language of debriefing and critique.

Exercise: Using the Philosophy of Education Scale

Discuss the relationship between teaching approaches and classroom decisions. Administer the *POES,* asking interns to identify their most and least favored approach on each of the seven dimensions. Ask if they wonder or are surprised if they might change their approach to teaching once in schools. Pair students and provide them opportunities to practice discussing their favored or least favored approach and why it is so ranked; follow this paired activity with a reflective journal entry.

During the field experience, invite students to identify their cooperating teacher's philosophical approaches using the *POES* indicators as communication prompts for discussion and rationale for ranking. With experience in discussing teaching approach and rationale, all peer-coaches can be guided to complete the *POES* as an additional prompt for reflection and communication. Finally, administer the *POES* to interns at the end of the field experience in order to further discuss changes in approaches and rationale.

Appendix 19.1: Philosophy of Education Scale and Sample Scoring

Check as many as apply:
Sex (M/F)_____ Preservice teacher ___ In-service teacher___ School principal or assistant principal___ Other leadership role (department or grade level chair, curriculum team leader) ___district or government leader (superintendent, state department curriculum leader or other)___. Number of years in each position. ___. Grade I teach now (K–12, other)_____. Other grades I have taught _____. Total number of years teaching_____ School location (urban, suburban, rural) ___ Grade I plan to teach _____ Education (check highest attained degree) ___Baccalaureate Degree, ___ Masters ___ Doctoral___ Are you enrolled in a university program to attain a degree? ___Baccalaureate Degree, ___ Masters ___ Doctoral___ Specialist Certification (English as a second language, reading, special education or other?) Yes___ No__ List each_____
Teaching certification: Alternative certification program____ Traditional university program_____

This form has five rows (e.g., "Classroom Environment") of large boxes. Each large box has a small box and three descriptors of teaching beliefs and practice. First, start with the descriptors. Rate each of the three descriptors in each large box in the first row, going from left to right, using the scale below as a guide. Rating numbers may be repeated.

Most like me 5 4 3 2 1 least like me

Second, rank each of the five large boxes in across each row from the one *most* like you (5), to the one *least* like you (1) using the scale above. Use each ranking number only once; place this number in the small box. Repeat this process for the remaining rows. Third, add the small boxes (down), for each column (Pryor, 2004).

Sample Scoring across One Dimension of Teaching (Lesson Plans)

Rate Indicators *Rank* Approach	*Rate* Indicators *Rank* Approach	*Rate* Indicators *Rank* Approach	*Rate* Indicators *Rank* Approach	*Rate* Indicators *Rank* Approach
Lesson Plans				
4 Specific objectives and standards clearly defined 4 Essential elements of instruction are addressed 5 Meets district guidelines, scope and sequence **5**	1 Long-term, broadly structured outcome 1 Thematic and integrated curriculum 1 Student-centered learning **1**	3 Emphasis on depth of knowledge 3 Instruction extends beyond standardized testing 2 Extensive resources (field trips, guest speakers) **3**	1 Open-ended objectives 2 Inquiry 3 Emphasize technological skills and information interpreting techniques **2**	2 Flexible goals based on community and citizenship needs 3 Practical knowledge and life skills 5 Higher-order, critical thinking and problem-solving **4**

Note: To determine *overall* philosophical approach, sum total only the small boxes down each column.

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CHAPTER 20

Conclusion: Community Change Through Activism—Insights and Lessons

Carol A. Mullen

In this final chapter, I synthesize major insights and lessons from *The Handbook of Leadership and Professional Learning Communities*. This writing was supported by a process of data analysis whereby I coded key words and phrases in the chapters in search of potential themes and messages. I sought feedback on my analyses and interpretations from colleagues to ensure that my presentation of ideas is as comprehensive as possible for the allotted space.

Finding: Learning Community, a Promising Educational Reform

An overriding message from the authors of this volume is that the professional learning community (PLC) initiative offers a promising approach to educational reform for schools, in particular, but also for universities. The authors write from organizational, cultural, technological, and mentoring perspectives; however, the categorization of the chapters into these four areas is somewhat artificial, especially as the authors' perspectives throughout incorporate sociocultural lenses, values, and considerations.

Organizational Perspective

The organizational perspective presented on leadership and PLCs is variable, dynamic, and diverse, just as it should be. The authors call for critical attention to and close monitoring of this movement. Critique of school improvement reforms, including the PLC, is best captured by Johnson (chapter 2), who argues that zealots "hop on" what is working organically in schools and reduce their potency by institutionalizing or mandating reform through policy initiatives and other means. Thoughtful advocacy is upheld too, as in the case provided by Sudeck, Doolittle, and Rattigan (chapter 5), who assert that PLC development cannot happen in a vacuum—instead, it must be supported through shared vision, a purposeful agenda, and members' understanding of the change process. The bandwagon mentality encompassing PLC innovations and

the evangelical attitude toward these are vigilantly monitored by the authors as they solicit deeper and critical understanding of this rapidly growing phenomenon. The researchers who are most directly involved in developing, implementing, and assessing PLCs, in addition to those who prepare aspiring teachers and leaders to engage in these complex activities, are nonetheless affirming of PLC development as a worthy educational and societal aim. However, for all the contributors, this initiative must be thoughtfully undertaken and must satisfy certain conditions, some of which I address herein and reinforce in list form.

Notably, these organizationally minded theorists and practitioners believe that the PLC movement should be aligned with democratic aims and agendas that promote equity, inclusion, and success. In addition, they know from the relevant literature and their own contributions to it that this intervention has yielded organizational capacity and human capital for schools, districts, and universities, particularly where insider resources are complemented by outsider resources and where the contextualized content and pedagogical knowledge of teachers is extended but not overshadowed by the expertise of outsiders (Klein, 2008). They also know from firsthand experience the ins and outs of building a successful PLC, incorporating a decentralized structure, partnership alliances, and teacher leadership.

Cultural Perspective

Building PLCs involves not just transmission of cultural values but "growing pains" where the "challenge of learning, unlearning, and relearning" is inevitable as PLC members negotiate and formalize their beliefs, values, and plans for action, and as they formalize the informal and make explicit what was implicit (Klein, p. 88). They must allow themselves to become vulnerable and stretched through newly evolving relationships with each other and outsiders.

The contributors who write from a cultural perspective use social justice language and concepts and encourage PLC members to democratize their community arrangements and group processes from the outset. Critical democratic groups are not just introspective—they are self-interrogating; they proactively adopt social justice stances, understand the dynamics of change, and recognize that learning communities are not automatically self-sustaining—instead, they require hard work, ongoing support, and personal commitment. Culturally relevant education within demographically changing schools is an example of this practice in action (see chapter 9). Another manifestation focuses on aligning democratically practiced places of learning with the processes, resources, and activities necessary for transforming the social space of schools (see chapter 10). Organizational activists engaged in the change process must grapple with issues of cultural diversity, difference, and inequality if they are to prepare teachers, leaders, students, and others to interface with a pluralistic constituency.

This group of authors does not believe that institutions naturally awaken to the need for change; rather, activists jump-start and propel the change process. Leaders and teachers are educational reformers who bring integrity to the inner world of the self and the outer world in which they live as they create communities for learning and support (see chapters 11 and 13). They have reimagined the nature of teaching and learning as a cooperative social and political practice enabled by active partnerships with constituents. While they report cases and examples of partnership development within schools and universities and between these organizations, they are committed

to a larger view of PLC development as environmental, cultural, and social. Attitudes toward group membership through which such activities as critical reflection on hegemonic discourses and practices occur (see chapter 12) have great potential to permeate the conditions of our workplaces. Changing the culture of the teaching profession and higher education should lead to the reform of education more generally.

Technological Perspective

Authors with a technological perspective use cultural frameworks and ideas to inform our thinking about new kinds of communities of practice. They urge educators of digital technology to support active learning, constructivism, critical reflection, collaborative inquiry, and more. They offer examples of highly influential thinkers (e.g., John Dewey, Michael Fullan, Ivan Ilich) whose transformative ideas about education can be adapted to virtual and online learning. They believe that human beings are social creatures whose cultivation of creative intelligence, selfhood, self-actualization, and activism depends on the freedom to engage in experimental and experiential learning and community-oriented environments that are not left to chance; rather, these are designed organically by insiders in partnering relationships and with democratic goals (e.g., equitable practices, tolerance of and respect for different cultures). Where such conceptual orientations are evident and practiced, the authors see PLCs as potentially supporting continuous learning and improvement within and across organizations. They talk about technology as value-laden, meaning that our decisions about and uses of technology communications shape how we see the world, and others and ourselves.

Systems thinkers focus on the creation of system-wide collaborative cultures among schools, universities, and outside agencies. PLCs are viewed as entities, then, to be intrinsically linked from the classroom to the school and beyond. To this end, digital communication systems (e.g., high-speed digital networks, wireless telephones, modems, compact discs) enable social and cross-institutional networking (see chapter 14). The virtual learning community is an example of what digital environments have produced. Where embedded within a social justice framework, this reform practice encourages critical thought, human connection, open and honest dialogue, conflict resolution, and respect for difference (see chapters 15 and 16).

Mentoring Perspective

The chapters in the mentoring section address collegial mentoring issues relevant to the educational spectrum of preservice teachers, beginning teachers, and in-service teachers. Activist mentoring is approached in leadership and learning terms and as a peer-based community innovation. Mentoring relationships within schools occur among teachers and administrators of different leadership styles, ages, generations, backgrounds, and ethnicities. Thus, the mentoring-oriented PLC initiative fosters cross-cultural and intergenerational understanding, in part through the inclusion of historically underrepresented groups (see chapter 17).

Another noteworthy benefit, PLCs provide a forum for teachers to influence student learning through their own experiences of inquiry-based learning. Social justice–minded educators are intent on improving student performance, preparing them as critically minded citizens, and creating inclusive, academically challenging classrooms (McKenzie et al., 2008; Mullen & Hutinger, 2008; Shields, 2008).

The learning community arrangement also provides opportunities for teacher leadership and participation through such means as collaborating, coaching, and induction (see chapters 18 and 19). Mentoring cultures depend on such activities to turn places of work into flourishing learning environments. Formal induction programs provide mentoring-based social networks for beginning teachers through which support, growth, and success are rewards (see chapter 17). In the PLC arrangement, veteran teachers are not solely responsible for mentoring novice teachers and newcomers—the responsibility is also shouldered by experienced university faculty members who have the necessary pedagogical content knowledge and interpersonal skills to function as mentors, collaborators, and advisors (Klein, 2008).

The contributors to this book explore underlying epistemological models of leadership (e.g., transactional, transformational, critical—see chapter 18). They also share philosophies of education (self-knowledge, constructivism, or shared knowledge—see chapter 19) that influence the work of educators, leaders, and preservice teachers committed to peer coaching. Importantly, they acknowledge the important role of administrators in culture-building efforts that support teacher development and leadership. Principals and other administrators can help build and sustain communities of practice through ongoing encouragement, collegial participation, and resource allocation (for specific steps taken by principals and methods used to facilitate teacher leadership, see Mullen & Jones, 2008).

Lessons Shared and Recommendations for Practice

Educator-activist Parker Palmer's (as cited in Lantieri, 2001) ideas about community development in schools encapsulate lessons shared in this book. Viewed as stages, in stage 1, PLC members experience rewards from learning more about their identity; in stage 2, reward comes from being involved in a learning community; in stage 3, benefits are realized from living a more expansive life; and, in stage 4, members live their own truth, which is greater than any other reward. The various programs and projects represented in this book do not use the stage metaphor but in a powerful way they bring these stages to life, with the more mature programs revealing benefits of stages 3 and 4 (see chapter 6 for discussion of a PLC initiative in its early stage and chapter 4 for a mature example).

Finally, I hope that the following highlights gathered from my analysis of this volume will prove stimulating and useful for PLC activists and organizations alike. Our collective lessons and recommendations revolve around these key points.

- Human service organizations share certain features, such as a decentralized structure; diverse, multiple, ambiguous goals; and a value-infused lens. When planning change, consider these and other organizational features. Also identify your individual and collective assumptions and mindsets; address principles of democracy and learning community and their fit with the vision, mission, and direction of the organization; assess the change and its potential effect on teaching and the environment; and examine how the proposed change might affect workloads (see chapters 2 and 11).
- PLC implementation is outcome based, not just process oriented. Develop an action plan that includes such elements as who or what will be included in the development of the PLC, what resources are needed for the community initiative

(e.g., staff assistance), what professional development would best support teacher involvement, and how the PLC's effectiveness will be assessed (see chapters 3, 11, and 17).

- Collaboratively craft your mission and goals; use various types of data to promote, document, and assess student learning, and identify leadership practices that foster teacher collaboration and collective action (see chapter 4). Also closely attend to democratic decision-making in order to ground the learning of your community in open and respectful dialogue, consensus-building, and shared leadership (see chapters 5 and 9).
- Learn about theories of leadership, community, and change, and philosophies of education, relevant to your learning community, in addition to documented practices of educational change. Encourage the participants' development as leaders and change agents so improvements in the culture of teaching can occur (see chapters 5, 18, and 19).
- Forge partnerships between university faculty and school personnel to discuss shared purposes, plan programs, and identify guiding questions. Carry out research focused on school improvement and culturally responsive agendas (see chapters 6 and 9).
- Actively recruit diverse members inside and outside the organization, including parents, families, students, and teacher candidates/interns (see chapters 6 and 9). Be mindful of exclusionary practices and subcultural and sociocultural expectations that do not embrace, as examples, persons of color and women (see chapters 12 and 13).
- Within mentoring-based PLCs, approach differences in age, generation, gender, leadership style, and more as a strength and resource for mentors and protégés. Avoid relying solely on mentoring programs to foster professional learning—support professionals' individual and varying needs to maximize outcomes (see chapter 17).
- Utilize computer-mediated communication in such forms as digital systems and virtual learning communities in order to advance your mission and goals. These allow for experimentation with the more traditional form of PLCs and, at their best, promote the creation of new democratic spaces, increased political participation, the inclusion of marginalized groups, synergistic (reciprocal and collegial) mentoring interactions, and the construction of new personal and professional identities (see chapters 14, 15, and 16).
- With aspiring or practicing teachers and leaders (via higher education courses and/or workshops), identify benefits and barriers that PLC members have encountered. Create activities that will move participants outside their comfort zones (e.g., role-playing; issue-based debate formats; story writing about such issues as social justice, equity, power relations, and in/visibility) (see chapters 7, 8, 10, and 13).

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