Cracking the concrete

David Jackson, in conversation with

Madeline Church, reflects on how networks work

across, around and within standard structures

Edited by Christopher Noden
and David Bruce

David Jackson, director of the Networked Learning Communities (NLC) programme, reflects on how the programme came into being, picking out some of the key fields of theory and thinking which influenced its design, and articulating some of the main lessons and learning which have emerged. These are excerpts from a longer conversation between David Jackson and Madeline Church which took place in January 2006.

In the course of their conversation David and Madeline referred to several influential thinkers. Many of these references were general in nature and not specific to particular published pieces. Wherever possible we include full references below. Non-specific references in the text may be taken to indicate general interest reading of publications by the authors named.

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Background - the NLC programme's relationship to theory and practice

DJ: We have gradually become clearer about the areas of originality in the work and the design of the NLC programme, but predominantly it was drawn from multiple theories. The paper that probably most closely explores the theoretical territory we visited is Bob McCormick's piece. We commissioned him to try to pull together a paper that visited the fields of theory that we connected with in designing the programme. We drew, for example, from community of practice theory (Thorpe / Wenger) in the way we designed the work, and we drew from professional learning community theory (Jackson and Tasker). We drew from knowledge management theory (Hargreaves), network theory (Lieberman), theoretical work on capacity-building (Hadfield) and so on. Bob's piece drew a range of theory fields together into one paper.

One of my own 'learning epiphanies' happened whilst doing a Masters programme, when I realised that truth is a mosaic of understandings from a whole range of different theoretical and practical lenses. And these are just lenses on the world that help us to be informed or to put our practice together in ways that are embedded and respectful of prior public knowledge.

MC: For me, a core question is what you see as theory and what you see as practice, if you see them as separate things, and how you defined these in the NLC programme.

DJ: That's a really, really good question! The short answer is that theory informed the programme and we have also tried to draw theory from the practice of the programme. As far as pulling that knowledge together in a disciplined way goes, we have found it hard, working in 'real time', but the ending of the programme is bringing some discipline to that.

The first of the frames we created to help us and the networks move forward with some common understandings is relevant here. We have **three core goals: to create good networks; to learn about networked learning; and to inform the wider system**. It has never been a simple sequence, however: nothing's that clean and easy. But our first priority was to work with the networks and to draw new theory from their practice.

And actually, at the same time the wider education system was increasingly adopting school networks. It's difficult to know how much we influenced the direction of thinking, how much we surfed the tide, or how much we were just there propitiously at a time when thinking happened to be moving – it will be all those things, of course.

In terms of the programme's lasting contribution to theory and thinking about networked learning communities, we have produced a range of reports and summaries, some from our research team internally, others externally commissioned (Research directory). We also commissioned a major three-phase external evaluation of the programme. The Final Report and the Executive Summary from this three year evaluation is now available (Earl et al). It proposes a 'theory of action' of *How networked learning communities work* and goes on to test that theory from practice. Undoubtedly, this report will be a significant addition to the international knowledge base on school networks. There are some extremely positive findings in this comprehensive evaluation – it says that the programme overall has raised learning, achievement and results of pupils significantly, and that there is a direct correlation between the extent of engagement and these improved outcomes. It found that networks can change the deep core of professional thinking and practice – the place that offers lasting improvement. Collaboration and relationships are only the beginning. Rigorous and challenging joint work and collaborative enquiry are the critical core of networked learning. With regard to leadership, the Report found that formal leadership matters (heads need to commit to network.

The three fields of knowledge
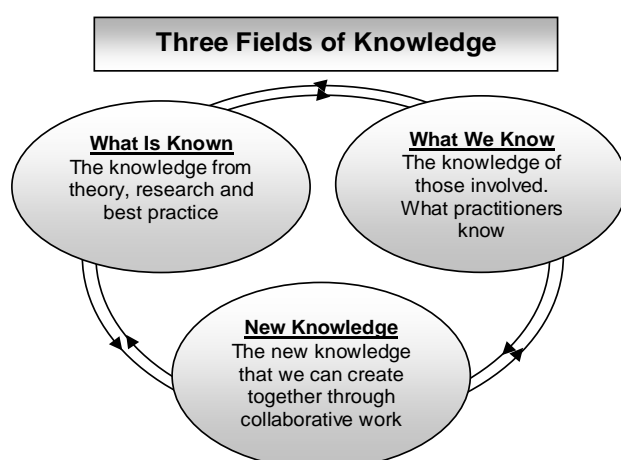
DJ: Of the original design constructs – and there were a number of frames that we used (Learning about learning networks) – the 'three fields of knowledge' is probably the one that I think will really stand the test of time. It lights a fire for people because it illuminates reality for them. **First**, if we are to engage in a powerful learning activity, we have to honour what people already know, the **practitioner and practice knowledge** that they bring to the table, including knowledge from the context in which they work. No-one else has that.

The **second** is what we called **public knowledge**, and we defined that as the knowledge of theory, research and the best of practice elsewhere. Just as we have to respect what practitioners uniquely know, we also have to build from what is known. The **third** field, related to the social construction of knowledge and also related to your 'network knots' metaphor (Church), is the **new knowledge** that we can create together through collaborative and enquiry-based processes. If we use the knowledge we bring to the table and the public knowledge and engage in enquiry and real work together, then we are able to create new knowledge of value to our local situation. This is well expressed in a piece that Matthew Horne and I wrote together – "What is Networked Learning?"

Taking networks to scale – spreading practice across the wider system

MC: We are in a world that is still fundamentally constructed inside organisational boundaries and within hierarchical structures. Working in networks in this world creates a set of tensions which are very obvious and become very challenging to manage. What have you learned about managing these tensions and so helping networking to spread?

DJ: There are two parts to your question. One is about mode of spread – networks are lateral while the system habitually uses a vertical 'delivery' model. The second issue is about how innovation spreads and goes to scale. They are linked, of course!

I've just read a piece by [Bryan Hassel and Lucy Steiner](#) from Harvard which looks at two system-wide educational reform efforts that have been successful in America. It's an analysis of why these two things have been successfully implemented on such a scale. And it's so beguilingly simple that it's profound. It says there are a set of internal factors and a set of external factors and that successful reforms distinguish themselves by addressing both. Most reforms at their initiation stage only address the internal factors because they're small-scale (eg issues of pedagogy, ownership and commitment, professional development, leadership, or of organisational change).

The external factors are described as being things like the intermediate system, the funding systems, policy, incentives and drivers, and accountability expectations. And very rarely at scale do programme instigators address both of those things. It has thinking in common with [Michael Fullan's](#) work on 'tri-level change' where he says that you have to address simultaneously issues at the school, intermediate system and policy level – or more powerfully, they need to co-design with one another. It also links with [Cynthia Coburn's](#) work on scale, which highlights 'depth', 'spread', 'sustainability' and 'transfer of ownership' as key characteristics.

In our model the NLC programme has to some extent been the buffer between individual schools or networks and the external system and its established hierarchies. The real test is, have we managed to achieve sufficient change in the policy domain and the intermediate system? *Can policy-makers see the network as an organisational form that becomes a new 'unit of meaning', and a new 'unit of engagement' that has its own capacity for taking hold?* A local authority might previously have had a hundred schools and

they've now got ten networks – what opportunities that creates! But it requires a massive change within themselves, their own modes of thinking, the way in which they design policy, generate incentives, hold people accountable, deploy resources. Everything about it requires change.

MC: I'm not sure that the system has shifted enough for it not to get lost in what I think is a world still dominated by forms that resist the subversive nature of networks. Networks are like tendrils: they will crack the concrete over time, but at the moment I think the level of professional support that people need in order to be able to hold in their minds what it means to have networks as a new unit of engagement or a new way of thinking is actually quite a lot.

DJ: I convince myself that we have gone beyond the tipping point now, to the extent that a central agency like NCSL is no longer required. But you are right that there is something by way of support that a networked system still needs. People believe in this way of working. I saw it even, going in as an outsider, in some work I did in Australia – the system just needed brokering and mobilising and informing. It needed somebody to facilitate the opportunities for people. Here, to some extent, the programme created those spaces, as you say, but they will still need local brokerage and facilitation. ([LEA involvement in school networks](#)).

The programme as a design intervention

DJ: We've always thought of the programme as a design intervention, so we just wanted to give people a framework, a design scaffold to hang their thinking around ([Learning about learning networks](#)). The 'levels of learning' were a key element of that design. What is fundamentally different from traditional change programmes is our inside-out approach. The first level is the *classroom* – each network had its own pupil learning focus. The second level is what *adults* need to learn to be able to do these different things in classrooms. The third level is what *leaders* need to do to create the opportunities for adults to learn those things. Then it's how the *school* needs to change in order to be a hospitable environment to such different practices, and fifthly how schools can learn from one another in building the *network*. And finally our role at the last level is how can we orchestrate learning from *network to network,* so that learning about practice travels around the system. We just gave people that framework and said you

have to write your project under each of those six headings, start with what you want to achieve for pupils and then build it out, and you have to do it together, collaboratively, as a network.

So in the design there are the **six levels of learning** I've just described. Then there are really only four more key parts to the framework: there is **the model of learning** (the three fields of knowledge which I described earlier), there is a commitment to **shared leadership**, there is a commitment to **enquiry-based practices**, and there is, most importantly, what we call the **'guiding moral purpose'** because, as Ann Lieberman might say, "people unite in networks around a compelling idea". We're professionals, so we've got to care for all the children in our locality, not to compete for the kids in our school or behave in such a way that prevents all children from succeeding.

MC: If you think 20 years down the line, what might be the effect of thinking about learning networks as the unit of engagement rather than schools, let's say? What kind of structures might you have? Might you have a school at all?

DJ   It is not hard to imagine that a network-based system would break down institutional walls over time! I'm involved with a project with the Innovation Unit called Next Practice Leadership Beyond a Single Institution, and we've come up with four frames of thinking for it, one of which is 'other than school'. I don't know whether you've ever heard of a Stephen Hepple, but he's a completely lateral thinker. One of the things he works with is an award-winning project called 'Not School' (Hepple). They've developed an online community of young people who've been rejected from school or can't cope with it, and they have developed a personalised curriculum with each 'researcher' (as they are called). They support one another as a community of learners. He, too, has built it from the inside out and supported lateral connection.

MC: And that goes right to the heart of the pieces to which you have referred, which are to do with what learning means. I mean what do you mean, what does this programme mean when it talks about learning?

DJ: I'm going to come at this obliquely if I might.

Decentralising power and influence

The dilemma we have is that we struggle to break out of the current structure where the paradigm of learning and organisational and operational norms is about decisions made at the centre.

In Sweden about 30 years ago they did away with the local authority structure and moved to a 'commune' structure. A commune is a locality unit, and the locality unit is responsible for the governance of all public services in that locality. It receives a one-line budget and it is where policy is determined, where incentives and resources are distributed, and where personnel are recruited and deployed, because they have that local knowledge. And it has become an innovation structure and a knowledge management structure for the system. It is also an educator for the centre in that the centre knows that in a complex system it doesn't have all the answers any more. The answers are context-specific and they are in the communes. So government asks good questions. They don't tell, they ask.

In this sense, learning takes place when people collaborate around real tasks, applying their own context knowledge and the wider public knowledge to create new solutions. Ideally, in a learning system that knowledge is also made publicly available.

MC: Currently in my management of a network of organisations working on HIV and AIDS, we have this thing called the AIDS portal which we've developed and designed. The way we are imagining it is that this whole process will only work if we have a set of core *organising principles* and then everything else is managed locally at the local level, so that the people in Kenya have a little steering group, a commune, if you like, of how they are going to manage the knowledge section of the site for Kenya, and that's done by the Kenyans.

Our criterion for success is that this portal should grow without any growth at the centre of the organisation; the growth has got to happen in the places where it matters. Nothing will work if you hold on and dominate from the centre. It's a constant battle with people to say, 'our job is to give the system, give the people the tools to make it happen and then hold some very simple process bits and be able to see it all, but not control it.'

DJ: Absolutely right. In fact, one of the weaknesses of our programme, in truth, is that we became too big in the centre, too strong. Stephen Hepple, again, says that the twentieth century was the century during which we built large organisations (with silos and hierarchies) to do things for people. The twenty-first century is the one in which we help people to help one another.

MC: Indeed, and there's one crucial lesson: that the more you load up the centre, which is the bit that co-ordinates things, the less likely you'll be to have an active network going on.

The learning in networked learning communities

DJ: You asked me specifically about learning, so let me answer that. I was initially appointed as Director of Research at NCSL. When I was appointed a great systemic change theorist, Per Dalin, wrote to me to say: 'There is no new gold to be mined. Everything that is known about leadership is being lived out daily in your schools. One of the things that you need to do is to mine it, orchestrate it, to make it visible and usable by others.' So, one of the things that we did was to try to redesign the conventional research paradigm with a practice orientation. Where we got with that was interesting, but it still doesn't change the fact that even if we had the holy grail in our hand the wider system wouldn't yet connect with it because it's not a learning system, it's not configured for learning, even about itself. It has been trained to be top-down dependent.

The dominant paradigm has to be situated and contextual learning. We have to enquire into our practice, learn through what we do and how we do it – create habits of learning. If we create learning environments, then people may then go off to training programmes and come back, and what they learn there will have some purchase. But if they go off on a training programme and come back into a sterile environment, the historical culture takes over by Wednesday.

MC: Absolutely, yes.

DJ: So we became occupied with how we could generate the configurations of a learning system within which external knowledge would be drawn down. What we wanted was for teachers and schools to behave like a learning system. And so we had this model of learning that we generated, and we had a sense that it had to involve people wrestling

together with the complexities of the real issues that related to their practice. What we know about learning is that powerful collective learning happens when people can hang their thinking, collectively, on metaphors, or mental models, or frames of thinking – cognitive constructs. Unless we use different language and different frames, people can't generate different constructs around it.

MC: Well, that's right.

DJ: For example, you've no idea how much time it took us to come up with the term 'networked learning communities'. We were trying to generate a term that was both literal and also a metaphor resonant of theoretical understandings. We wanted a term that people could hold as a construct. Now, you could take those three words and use them as an accountability tool couldn't you, because each word has a body of theory and evidence underpinning it?

MC: Yes, you could – and they ought to be. For me, that's where you start from. You start from a place which is very simple, which is: this is a networked learning community, so what's the network? What's the learning? What's the community?

Putting pupil learning at the centre and challenging the current curriculum

DJ: That's absolutely right. We also surrounded the networks with materials that we provided and introduced which had the potential to inspire. One of the reasons why we engaged with Lauren Resnick's work, which is interesting because it's so different from ours, is that Lauren is one of the world's leading cognitive psychologists. She says that intelligence is not fixed, it can be grown; every child can be a powerful learner. That's a very inspiring construct for teachers because we instinctively know it to be true – in ways that the profession probably didn't when I started teaching 30-odd years ago. Then, the whole system was constructed around the fact that not all children could be successful. Internally, schools were constructed – banded and streamed – on that basis.

MC: Which I think links with what Charles Desforges talked about, the futility of occupying people with meaningless work. And really it has got nothing to do with whether they can

apply what they know. They can do the maths but they can't transpose it into a context that actually has any meaning.

DJ: Absolutely. Harold Benjamin, in *The Sabre-tooth Curriculum,* makes some of the same points. It's a wonderful article, written, I guess, in about 1940, about an ancient tribe which decides it's important to continue to teach children the planned curriculum about how to kill sabre-tooth tigers long after the tribe has made them extinct. That's where we are. What on earth has this ancient construct of subjects got to do with the contemporary world? We are still teaching subjects separately and in the abstract: it's a madness. Pupils go from a physics lesson to an art lesson to a history lesson without making any kinds of connection.

Breaking down hierarchy and distributing leadership

DJ: Another redundant concept that we have tried to challenge is the idea of a person's place in hierarchy, which we mentioned earlier. One of the things I love about the 'networked learning knot' image in your work (Church) is the way that people with positional roles in their schools in the institutional hierarchy can come together in a potentially 'status-free zone' in a network work group. The second-year teacher can lead a network knot and the headteacher can be a member, and they're just in a learning relationship together, not a positional relationship. We wrote about that in *What is networked learning?* (Jackson and Horne). I know power's not that easy to shed. I understand that, of course so, when we start, I as a second-year teacher will be terribly aware that you're a headteacher from another school, but over time I'll forget it because we'll just be working together. I tried to write about this also in a piece about distributed leadership called *The Spaces Between the Pebbles in a Jar* (Jackson 2003).

MC: One of the challenges is to do with this notion of distributed leadership, which is one of the things that you talk about a lot in the programme. However, in my experience, lots of responsibility can get distributed without any power to make the decisions, and this is unbelievably problematic if you don't pay attention to it.

DJ: Yes, it is. But it's not *either or*, it's *both and*. One of the things that is really strong in a book about networks by Allen and Cherrey is the idea that hierarchy and network have to co-exist. Hierarchy is not going to disappear. Transference of both responsibility and

power can occur if the network-based form becomes illuminating for the hierarchical form. In such cases the hierarchical form gives away that power or bestows that power.

So I would like to think, if you take our organisation as both a hierarchical and a network-based organisation, the Networked Learning Group (NLG) itself, I would like to think that people feel that they are empowered – I'm very aware there's a kind of autocracy of ideas. You know, the innovative leaders who are in power positions and have access to the whole picture will always retain a privileged place. There is also a level of autocracy, too. In our work, for instance, there's a set of beliefs about the work and those beliefs are not negotiable.

MC: You all have to hold something, and the core organising principles should be the thing that holds it together. As long as you can account to those principles, you see, you ought to be able to release the power to make decisions. And that's my point – I'm not sure any of us have sufficiently understood that, actually, and can give up the responsibility and trust that we can hold people accountable simply to these core organising principles and let them, therefore, make decisions about the day-to-day stuff. I'd question whether you've managed to do that completely.

DJ: Yes, that's probably fair. Another 'epiphany' – a blinding insight – for me as the head of a school was realising that when we have collectively agreed a set of what we call 'shared values', they then act as a set of non-negotiable statements about what we will hold each other to account for.

MC: All you have to do is to say 'these are our values'.

DJ: Yes. You just have to ask, 'is that consistent with what we all said we believe in?' It's that simple. And it is just such a values congruence that is so powerful for the networks. They came together because they believed in some things together – and they knew they could achieve more through collaboration than alone. That is also one reason why we believe that '**voluntarism**' is so important to networks (Lieberman).

Enquiry at the centre of NLCs

DJ: For me enquiry is a good metaphor for illuminating the 'core principles'. Enquiry is a
       vehicle for liberating both power and responsibility – and doing so within a learning
       framework. Enquiry is about emergent learning. So, the organisation or the network can
       describe the direction it is seeking to travel, and the enquiry groups are a means to forge
       that direction of travel, but where it will actually lead, who knows? Roughly west,
       perhaps!

MC: It goes back to this business of what the difference is between research and enquiry. The
       paradigms of research that I don't understand and don't get involved in really are ones in
       which you expect to find an answer to your question. Whereas, for me, enquiry is about
       the question, it's not about the answer. It's about refining the question and letting it lead
       you to another question, whereas research seems to be all about the answer.

DJ: Absolutely, and this difference is not currently well understood. One of the things that we
       have written well about, I feel, is networked enquiry. Both a book (Street and Temperley)
       and articles (Jackson 2002) have been written. Enquiry itself is a pursuit of learning, but
       not as an end in itself. It is a pursuit of learning with a change orientation. The enquiry
       question reflects our dissatisfaction with the world as we know it. The enquiry itself is a
       way of moving forward. So in an enquiry group which is empowered to implement its
       findings, to actually enact the changes beyond or as a part of the enquiry, you've
       incorporated change management, leadership of others, complex implementation issues.
       This is the really difficult role that an enquiry group has. (It just is not the old 'working
       party' idea.) The whole process, done well, develops as a model of capacity-building for
       leadership – and it is an authentic form of leadership, not a positional leadership at all.
       There are loads of people in positional roles that call themselves leaders that I don't
       think have the first understanding of what leading in collaborative learning contexts
       means.

Networks encouraging the growth of leadership capacity

MC: One of my own 'aha' moments was when I really understood that leadership in the
       network context is about quality of input, it's not about control.

DJ: Yes, absolutely. It's like power through influence, yes.

MC: And anyone can lead on anything if they have the quality of input in order to move things on.

DJ: Yes, and what networks do is not only to create environments for distributed leadership. There are also two other things that are crucially important. One is that they open up access to people with different leadership characteristics, so people who have never thought of themselves as leaders, because they didn't want to ascend a hierarchy, suddenly understand the significant and important role that they can perform. And the second thing is that capability becomes visible in a way that leadership potential customarily isn't. Those that lead in networks make their work visible by definition. It is so public. So you look at a network and you just see the leadership capacity growing.

Keeping formalised structure to a minimum

MC: You've talked about trying to have the minimum number of rules and structures necessary for the thing to function.

DJ: That's right. You do have to do some definitional things, but they should always be kept to a minimum. Just look how powerful that is for a network of schools, where they define collectively what they value, what they really believe, and none of them, none of those schools or the people in them will behave in ways that contradict that.

MC: Yes. In the networks that I'm working with at the moment, the structures are unimportant at this stage. What's absolutely important is that you have this set of four or five values that say what you share. And then you start to think about what structures help you to realise those values. But if you start from the structure it won't work.

DJ: There's an organisational theory construct that is framed in terms of maintenance and development. (The Improving the Quality of Education for All programme (IQEA), which some of the NLG team had worked with, uses this theoretical work well.) It's not a complicated construct – that you have to tend to the maintenance, in other words you need to ensure that the place is stable and secure and functioning and effective. And in a way the more your maintenance is normalised then the more space and capacity you

have for development. The maintenance structure is the skeleton, the thing that holds the organisation together. It's where all the positional roles are, but it's only half the structure. The rest is a development structure that has no relationship with maintenance other than serving it with learning. It's a very powerful structure – and it provides a theoretical construct for why 'networked learning knots' are so effective. It connects with the Allen and Cherrey notion that networks have to work across, around and within the hierarchical. Development wraps around and serves maintenance – but it is also empowered by and liberated by maintenance structures.

Relationships, trust and communication: the critical ingredients

DJ: One of the really interesting ways in which you use language is when you talk about the relationship between the knots, the threads and their 'tautness' (Church). The tighter the threads, the stronger the knots. And what you're playing with there is this whole idea of needing high levels of trust in a network. Well of course you do, but that's not actually definitional, it's more causal, more an outcome than it is an input. What I would want to say to people is that we know one thing for certain: if you hang around waiting until you all trust one another, you will be waiting for ever.

MC: No, the crucial thing is that the joint activity creates the trust that holds the network together.

DJ: Absolutely. Find things you believe in together, engage in some work, do real work.

MC: Do some work, and suddenly you've made something out of it.

DJ: Although there's a part that people don't get always, because you have three things in your threads haven't you – relationships, trust and communications – and they don't always understand the significance of the third, to have sophisticated, interesting, original, open and inclusive ways of communicating.

What tends to happen is that networks operate in a new 'structural' zone, but there is a temptation to go back to the old zone for the communication structures. So the communication gets put into the old power structure, and then it becomes corrupted by it. If we really want people to know, why don't we apportion people and talk to them?

Why don't we say "Let's each talk to ten people, and when we go and talk to them let's actually listen as much as we talk, and then we'll really be communicating won't we?" It's about designing those new ways to communicate.

MC: Networks also grow from relationships. One of the things I say to everybody, you cannot do networks with fewer resources. It takes more time and more communication and more involvement, not less, to work the networks.

DJ: It's true, although I'd phrase that differently. I'd say you have to contribute more in order for it to become less.

Trusting the practitioners; encouraging growth of social capital

DJ: Another thing I wanted to raise was Judith Warren-Little's interesting piece that she wrote for the programme. It's interesting because it tackles some of the cost-benefit issues that you have just mentioned – the extra work. Networks are often criticised for this. Judith breaks it down into transaction cost and opportunity cost, because they're interrelated. Another thing she deals with – because it is the way she believes that evidence can justify the 'cost' – is how we can evidence the transfer of knowledge from host environment through knots to other environments. These issues are interesting and worth raising. A third area she's really strong on is the construct of 'warranty'. How do we know the knowledge of the network is good knowledge?

MC: Do you mean quality assurance?

DJ: Yes, what's the warranty? How do we know that teachers in a network are not just engaged by the social dimensions, just enjoying working with new people? In terms of traditional research, the warranty lies in the methodology doesn't it? Was a statistically valid sample chosen? Are the methods sound? Those kinds of checks. One of the things Judith asks is how do we know that networks are not just doing low level stuff? She said that we need to remember where the construct of warranty came from, back to the time when people used to come together around a campfire and tell each other stories. And their narrative was true – believed because they were telling it. They were the warranty. So why shouldn't the collaborative stories of a group of practitioners be perceived to be true? Judith Warren-Little is one of the world's leading researchers, and it is such a

powerful construct for her to say this because it introduces a level of peer validation. I admit that if one teacher was the warranty he or she might well get it wrong, but if a collaborative group of teachers is saying "this is true", let's give them the benefit of the doubt. Let's believe them. That is how Wikipedia works.

MC: One of the things that you haven't at all mentioned is the notion of social capital, which is in one of the papers you use. Again, I don't respond too well to this in my own thinking - it's a language thing, it's about 'capital'. It implies to me that it is about resources.

DJ: I know. The problem is that the language comes from a different field of research, from knowledge management research – as written up by David Hargreaves and others. And knowledge management research says that if we want people (teachers, for example) to do new things (teach better, for example), then they need to learn new things. This requires an increase in the 'intellectual capital' in schools, which comes from people learning from one another. How do people learn from one another? Well, we learn from people that we engage with, both inside and outside our schools (West-Burnham and Otero). This engagement means that we also need to increase the social capital. The language is problematic, I grant you, but the constructs are true.

One of the informing experiences for the NLC programme was an OECD seminar in Lisbon written up by David Hopkins. It gathered the 'best' educational networks from around the world at that time. From it we generated a collective knowledge base. One of the networks, from Canada, had a mantra that 'people work well together who break bread together.' Ultimately, that is what knowledge management people talk about in terms of social capital. We're not talking here about everyone having the same values. We're talking about identifying where they overlap such that we can all engage around those, where they are consistent with the organisation's mission or its world view. We can also say that in these areas we are one, we're together, and it's incredibly powerful. It creates social cohesion. And David Hargreaves in his work on knowledge management would argue, I'm sure, that starting with people working well together to share what they know is helpful.

Beyond the NLC programme

MC: The only other question I have for you, then, is where you see this work having life in the political context that we're currently in, and how you think it can continue to have life.

DJ: Articulating it in this room today has shifted my own thinking, funnily enough. I'll explain how. I constantly rail against the capacity of our political masters to include network-based and collaborative policies within their armoury. A prevailing part of the narrative in recent government policy has been about competition and institutional autonomy and all that sort of thing. So they always, even in the policy arena, live in an uncomfortable juxtaposition don't they? collaboration and competition? Once you've accepted that it isn't *either or* and actually the network-based form, the collaborative form has the capacity to be superimposed upon (or integrated within) the dominant hierarchical and instrumental forms (Bentley, Hopkins & Jackson), then the solutions are easier. So, funnily enough, I'm less anxious at the end of this conversation than I was at the beginning of it! I think we've reached a critical mass, beyond where we were when we first designed the programme.

And this programme was like that. The programme was about 'can we'? As soon as it moved to scale, it was about can we create sufficient operational images that will resonate across their areas? In other words, people will look at them and say: "I can see how it can be done. That's how it can be done. We could do that. We could go and talk to those people and learn how to do that." If we believe in networks, then we have to accept that laterally is how they will spread.

And I don't worry about it because we've got a migrant profession. Teachers move, and in 10 or 15 years a critical number may be saying: "Well of course, I was a young teacher in a networked learning community and I learned how to work like this then." So I believe the system will continually nudge itself forward – just as network theory says it does!

MC: As long as you keep nudging, as long as it's got the momentum, the system will move.

DJ: Yes, it will if it becomes broadly based.

The Moss Canter piece I like is interesting on the subject of making collaboration successful. In her original study she looked at 17 major corporations in 11 countries. She

translated it all beautifully into very natural metaphors about marriages or rituals. She concluded that corporations come together usually because the chief executives know one another and feel that there is a synergy, or because the finance managers believe that it will be in the best financial interests. But the collaboration is never acted out by those people. Where you find successful collaboration is where the collective belief system (the value chain through to the end user) is sufficient to motivate the whole organisation to build relationships and to sustain work habits together. This illuminates our situation in a way. It tends to be the group of headteachers who agree that they're going to be a network, or local authority people (the finance officers), but unless they give dignity to participants in allowing them to shape and define the network, unless the partnerships (marriages) are ritualised so members can make their own commitments, it cannot work.

And I guess it's because network-based activity is a mode of being, isn't it? It's a belief system partly about learning and partly about human dignity. If I'm truthful that is how I feel about it. I've never understood organisations that value people in a way that relates to position. It just doesn't seem to make any sense to me – that is what the spaces between the pebbles are all about (Jackson 2003).

When we started the programme, we said to the networks that we wanted them to come up with a name, a metaphor for something they believed in. We wanted them to enshrine their compelling purpose. We also said that we would give a programme-wide metaphor. We used Lauren Resnick's statement about intelligence being able to be grown, and talked about 'network child' as the programme metaphor. How can one child in your network be successful? Network child is any child, in any classroom, in any school in the network. Networked learning then becomes a constant set of enquiry questions around that aspiration, doesn't it? How can we help every child (any child) to be successful? (Jackson & Desforges) Networked learning is a sustained enquiry into those questions.

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