Coaching in Networks of Schools

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This paper has been commissioned as a background discussion paper for the international team who are meeting in San Diego to develop an evaluation process for the National College for School Leaders (NCSL) Networked Learning Communities initiative in England. For the past 15 years I have been researching teacher change and exploring the elusive theory of why change in teachers' practice is so difficult to achieve. I have worked with teachers and principals, nationally and internationally throughout this time to develop a model of peer coaching. A major piece of research was a three year in-depth study of school leaders working in coaching partnerships for curriculum and educational leadership development. On the basis of these findings I have been continually developing the model. Many graduate students, all experienced leaders in education and business, have studied and researched this model, and in doing so, developed it further in their own contexts. The one outcome in common is that they create ways of working which lead to enhanced critical reflection on practice and subsequent changes in that practice.

The model has been used successfully with teams in early childhood centers, with curriculum development and classroom management in mathematics in secondary schools, with teacher education advisers in Indonesia, in various national development contracts, in higher education departments in New Zealand and Thailand, in Information Communication Technology development with secondary teachers in Hong Kong, with groups of principals in England and in Australia, and with over 300 school leaders in Singapore. Sustained engagement with others in the field of study of professional development in education, internationally, has informed this coaching model which has been used effectively for appraisal and professional development.

The NCSL also uses Kolb's (1984) learning theory as one platform for their work. The NCSL Networked Learning Communities have been founded on the commitment to an enquiry-based model of leadership learning, at all levels within and between schools. The position I will argue in this paper is that all four phases of Kolb's adult learning process – concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation - need to be present, linked and formalized within the Networked Learning Communities initiative, to achieve more than incremental change in teachers' practice, schools and school systems. My premise is that networked learning communities, combined with formal coaching practices, which incorporate the principles of critical action research, will provide the necessary requisites for radical and sustained change to occur, as long as the necessary skills for such practices have also been developed.

I begin by outlining the context of the knowledge age and argue that radical change is essential in education today, and that new paradigms of learning and new practices are necessary for this to occur. The importance of teachers (at all levels, including headteachers) questioning and researching their work, thus making it problematic, is highlighted as a precursor for critical perspectives about schooling to be achieved.

I stress how important it is to move teachers from perpetuating the status quo to achieving real transformation in schools. I purport that coaching practices can provide the vehicle for ensuring that espoused theories of and about practice *do* become theories-in-action and thus complete the adult learning cycle. I finish the paper by describing how coaching between individuals or within groups leads easily into structures for action research which will take teachers from the co-construction of knowledge in critical learning communities, to institutionalizing changes in classrooms and schools as they work collaboratively to meet their goals.

Context for change

Internationally, the effects of globalization can be seen most prominently in the public policies of reduced government control and more privatization of public service provision. Education has not been exempt from this trend. This public policy has created competition between schools in local communities, and a general shift to a user-pays, market-driven ideology for the delivery of education. There have been changes in the expectations of societies, dramatic shifts in demographics with an accompanying increase in mobility among nations, advances in information technology, and changes in employment opportunities and the expectations of employers. The "job" as we now know it, may no longer exist in future years, and indeed, many of the future occupations of the young people in our schools have not yet been created.

Choy and Fatt (1998) stated that more than ever before young people need to learn how to operate in "smart" learning environments, where innovation, creativity, problem-solving and experiential learning abounds. We may well ask, what changes in schools reflect these trends? Bentley and Miller (2003) remind us too, that the future is being made today, and that the future will not be the status quo. They believe it is essential to provoke and evoke peoples' ideas about the possibilities there might be. Caldwell (2002, p. 824) stated "leaders must have the capacity for working with others to create a design for their schools" (p. 829). He reminded us that he and his colleague (Caldwell & Spinks, 1998) offered a design, illustrated in a gestalt, to guide efforts to create schools for the knowledge society – "for a perceived organized whole that is more than the sum of its parts." This model would challenge teachers to completely rethink their ways of working within education. These may be schools with no walls, where boundaries are broken (Robertson & Webber, 2002) and where global learning networks abound. These schools that Caldwell described sound like Webber's (2000) "could-be" schools. However, to re-design schools in these ways, Boyd (2000, p. 243) stated, teachers would need to "challenge fundamental aspects of the paradigm and ideology of public education to which they are wedded."

But these paradigms are not easily changed! Over the past five decades in particular, researchers and theorists have searched for the answer to successfully create and sustain teacher, school and system-wide change. There is, therefore, an abundance of research and literature on teacher development, curriculum development, school development and system-wide reform efforts, and yet despite the research, schools are very similar to those established to meet the needs of the industrial age. Schools are still usually organized with hierarchical management systems more suited to the factory assembly line; teaching

is usually organized for groups of students with one teacher; teaching groups are usually decided by age of the student; movement through the curriculum is usually by levels, year by year; the school day is usually between set hours and days, as is the school year; and teachers usually teach a particular, single body of knowledge, which is seen as residing within the school grounds. Education, perhaps more than any other profession, manages to keep reproducing the status quo in so many ways and yet the societal context of which schools are a part, has changed markedly.

Thus, the work of schools is more complex than ever before. Leithwood (1996) believes that the restructuring movements in many countries to self-managing schools has created a shift in power and responsibility to the school level which requires new ways of thinking about work in schools. Leithwood (1996, p. xii) posited that from the decentralization of decision-making to the local level, there "has emerged a decidedly different image of the ideal educational organization…This is an organization less in need of control and more in need of both support and capacity development." Perhaps this is why coaching became an effective form of professional development in New Zealand as decentralization of decision-making in education was established nationally in 1989. I have always argued that decentralization as a philosophy needs to permeate to all levels within an education institution. This type of institution however, requires a new view of leadership and a new type of teacher willing to take up the responsibility for leadership and to demonstrate an intellectual independence for their own continual professional development. This according to D. Hargreaves (2003) is the building up of the school's social and intellectual capital, and a necessary pre-requisite for innovation to occur. Social capital should lead to resilience (Milstein & Henry, 2000), an important precursor to innovation, which now, more than ever before, needs to be the focus in education. Thus there is a need for teachers to be able to work laterally, transferring knowledge and developing capacity at all levels of their institution if schools are to move from incremental innovation to radical innovation (Hargreaves, D., 2003). However, the experience of working laterally is in direct contrast to most teachers' working experiences in schools, with children in the classroom, or with colleagues in the staffroom, where most interactions are within vertical hierarchies. How can teachers move out of this vicious circle of reproduction of the status quo?

It has often been argued that schools will not be transformed unless teachers have had the personal experience of working in new ways. Barth (1991) believed that if teachers experienced a sense of learning community and what it meant to work in these ways, they would be more able and more likely to be able to re-create these ways of working in their own schools and with their colleagues. Lee (1993) also found that the concept of a community of learners could best be developed by bringing teachers together into that situation first. She believed they could then act as role models to others they worked with, and have a sense of the importance of community—a concrete experience of it— on which they could then reflect and transfer to their own school setting. Lee (1993) stated that when "professional developers bring into … programs the kinds of experiences, processes and interactions that characterize a community of learners" (p. 5) they set the scene and create opportunities for teachers to experience new ways of working. Teachers may then be more likely to go back and work in their schools in this new image. A later

international study also challenged planners of professional development programs to think about their *own* pedagogy, why they teach and lead their programs in the way they do, and what the impact of their teaching and leading has on learning (Robertson & Webber, 2000, 2002). Unless new practices are modeled to and with our teachers they will continue to practice in previously learned ways.

Professional learning

What new practices are necessary for the development of the type of learning communities that will lead to radical, transformative practices in schools? Unless teachers are challenged to critically reflect on their personal educational contexts through the breaking of boundaries between theory and practice, between teachers and their groups, between education and other professions, between teachers and students, between nations, and between self and others, they will be less likely to be critically reflective about their practice or to believe that they can make a difference to the quality of education offered in their settings (Caldwell, 2003; Webber & Robertson, 1998). Such "spanning the boundaries" (Caldwell, 2003, p. 27) is vital to achieve even higher expectations from our schools. This involves changed paradigms about learning, which are based on different assumptions and have important implications for the professional development of teachers.

New conceptions of learning	Differing Assumptions	Implications for P-D
Knowledge FOR practice	Research generates formal knowledge for use	Dissemination of knowledge
Knowledge IN practice	Knowledge embedded in exemplary practice and reflection	Focus on experience-based projects and practical knowledge
Knowledge OF practice	Learn by making Leadership, Learning and Research problematic	Systematic and critical enquiry in communities

(Lieberman & Miller, 1992)

Figure 1: Changed paradigms about learning

This new conception of learning for the knowledge *of* practice, requires teachers to work together in different ways, perhaps with others from different professions, where the community is seen as far wider than the school. They need to question and research their practice. If learning is to be made problematic in this way, there are certain sorts of questions that should be asked about the work of teachers. This more easily occurs in learning communities. Vygotskian and other socio-cultural learning theories highlight the importance of the assistance of others in the learning process. Therefore it is important to

base professional development "in the fostering of schools as learning communities and educators as members of the learning profession" (Hallinger, 2003, p. 298).

Teachers' learning communities are different from other gatherings of teachers. Grossman, Wineberg, and Woolworth (2000) say there are three things that are important in a community of learners: Commitment to colleagues' growth; recognition that participation is expected for all; and recognition that colleagues are resources for learning. This type of thinking about learning places teachers at the centre of their own learning and the responsibility for learning firmly in their court. The NCSL Networked Learning Communities program states that it "places teachers, leaders and schools at the heart of innovation within the profession and enables the development of local, context-specific solutions that can be understood and interpreted by schools in other contexts." As D. Hargreaves (2003) also posited, innovation rarely arises individually – it is much more prevalent through group work within learning communities. Incorporating formal mentoring and coaching relationships within these communities would be a natural flow-on from the formal mentoring programs of the LEAs, and NCSL and indeed is evident in some of the Networked Learning Communities already established. There is a developing capacity of leaders experienced in coaching which would be further developed in the learning communities. This would be vital to successfully establish a *critical* community of learners (Monsour, 1998; Robertson, 2000).

Status Quo?

There could be a tendency for networked learning communities to be focused on professional sustenance and system maintenance and restructuring, rather than professional transformation. Dempster and Mahony (1998), in an international study, found that educators face many ethical dilemmas on a daily basis. These included such issues as student selection, streaming, access, staffing profiles, inclusion, reporting and marketing. These were the issues that were a major concern and therefore dominated their dialogue when in learning communities. How then, could we ensure that networked learning communities do lead to the type of professional transformation necessary for radical innovation to be institutionalized in schools, as well as the system maintenance and professional sustenance which is also important to teachers in their daily work? The NCSL Networked Learning Communities focus on the importance of adult learning and emphasize "the value and effectiveness of practitioners enquiry and collaborative approaches to staff learning, including but not restricted to study groups, enquiry partnerships, work shadowing, coaching, mentoring, classroom observation and school visits" (www.ncsl.org.uk). D. Hargreaves (1991, p. 499) also put forth that mentoring and coaching are "vital mechanisms for sharing intellectual capital and building social capital" and argues that these have been overlooked in the school effectiveness and improvement literature and need to be reinstated.

These coaching practices need to be formalized in teachers' work as they are unlikely to occur without outside facilitation and support (Robertson, 1997). Sackney and Mitchell (2001, p. 907) argued that "…building a community of leaders or a community of learners does not happen by saying it should be done. Instead, all people in the

educational community need to focus their attention on the sorts of knowledge, skills and activities that can extend learning capacity and leadership capacity." Coaching at the individual level in schools would be an important extension of the work of networks but "the coaching approach suggests that there is a need to develop such skills within the profession" (Tomlinson, 2002. p. 1186). Rather than leave goal-setting, peer observation and feedback to individual initiative and to chance, as research indicates it most often is (Robertson, 1998; Tomlinson, 1999) networked learning communities can be strongly enhanced by establishing formal coaching relationships. Describing the power of emotional intelligence and the importance of coaching skills for the New Leaders, Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2002, p. 60) suggested that "By making sure they have personal conversations…coaching leaders establish rapport and trust. They communicate a genuine interest in people". These authors go on to say (p. 62) "coaching boosts not just employee's capabilities but also their self-confidence, helping them function both more autonomously and at a higher performance level." Teachers need the skills and theory of adult learning to more ably facilitate their own learning and the learning of other adults. In this way, transformation – changes in teachers' practices and in schools – may have a greater possibility of occurring.

Or Transformation?

The challenge to providers and leaders of professional development, has always been how to achieve sustained change in teachers' practices in classrooms and schools. In this complex adult learning environment, Kolb's learning theory provides a framework to explore successful transformation at the individual and at the school level. He stated that for successful learning and subsequent changes in practice to occur, there should be four clearly defined and linked phases of the learning process: concrete experience; reflective observation; abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. Praxis - informed committed action leading to transformation of that practice - is the desired outcome of Kolb's model of learning theory when all four aspects are given an *equal* weighting. Networked Learning Communities may not provide teachers with all four aspects of the adult learning process.

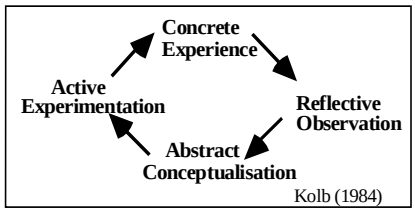

Figure 2: Kolb's (1984 Learning Cycle

Each of these four phases has essential elements for new learning to occur.

Experiencing

Work experience itself has great value in professional development, especially when linked to a critical learning network. The transformation of a teacher's concrete, daily experiences can become new learning. Professional development begins when the teacher makes the most of an experience by considering it carefully and listening to feedback from a coaching situation, from others he or she works with, and then combines his or her information with this outside information to develop new principles and concepts and theories to use on the job. When the teacher experiments reflexively with these new theories in their practice, new learning is likely to have taken place.

The daily roles, tasks and experiences of teachers provide the opportunities for effective learning to occur. This type of learning is more likely to enhance intellectual independence and self-direction in the professional development process. Self-directed learning is "a form of study in which learners have primary responsibility for planning, carrying out, and evaluating their own learning experiences...and is the way most adults, including professional educators, go about acquiring new ideas, skills, and attitudes" (Caffarella, 1993, p. 30). Drawing on these experiences, and building on prior experiences and knowledge, assists with the construction of new learning.

Reflecting

Reflection on previous actions will help to bring teachers to a state of openness in which they are prepared to seek out new strategies and behaviors. There are times when teachers' attitudes and values need to be challenged before they will be open to changing the ways they act, and there are other times when new experiences will initiate a change of values and beliefs, and therefore future actions. Reflection on and about practice, within a networked learning community, and within coaching practices, can assist in this process. To encourage reflection on practice, teachers need to be given opportunities to relive their experiences through effective prompting and questioning. This may need to be more individually focused than that of the group work within the learning community, but the multiple perspectives of the community are important for teachers' development as "once they have brought to a level of conscious awareness the strategies and values which were previously implicit, they are in a position to modify them and then to try them out again in another situation" (Candy, Harri-Augstein & Thomas, 1985, p. 115). The use of the "learning walks" by some of the NCSL Networked Learning Communities is one vehicle for developing the ability to critique practice. The subsequent development of descriptive statements or generating questions about teachers' practices can assist in developing critical thinking *about* practice. To move beyond the new understanding about practice that can be developed in learning communities, I posit there needs to be ongoing coaching at the individual or small group level, to create new practices in teachers' work – critical reflection *as* practice. The skills of coaching are necessary prerequisites for teachers to be able to develop effective strategies to ensure such reflective questioning occurs, both in individual and group situations. Skill development for the facilitation of adult learning is an important requisite for the development of

effective learning communities focused on professional transformation and is often an overlooked factor in professional development activities.

Conceptualizing

The linking of theory and practice is important for teachers to begin to formulate new concepts about their practice. These new concepts often need to come from outside the school or learning community, to provide challenges to previous ways of knowing and thinking about learning and leading. Critical reflection should begin to take place when the teacher is in this phase of the learning process. When teachers can free themselves from their taken-for-granted ways of viewing the world they may be able to start "seriously entertaining and evaluating alternative possibilities" (Berlak & Berlak, 1987, p. 169). This process is abstract conceptualization and is the phase in adult learning in which teachers can create a type of psychological distancing from the issues under reflection. The collaboration with others assists them in the deconstruction of the dominant, prevalent discourses and the effect they are having on their role (Foucault, 1977). This leads them to the awareness that there are others who are experiencing the same difficulties and dilemmas. This then helps them to deal with the issues as a critical learning community rather than to deal with the lack of confidence that they may have been experiencing in their own ability, before the psychological distancing and the collaboration assisted them to find solutions to shared problems. Networked Learning Communities can play a very important role in this phase of the learning process if teachers are challenged to think critically about their work.

Coaching and learning communities also provide opportunities for affirmation and validation of practice, which is important in teacher development. The self-esteem of the learner is paramount, and any form of professional critique needs to have a careful balance of positive and negative feedback. Again, adult learners must have the skills necessary to provide effective evaluative feedback to their peers, and these coaching and communication skills are necessary for the effective development of transformative learning communities.

Experimenting

After abstract conceptualization teachers are more likely to have the readiness to try new experiences and they should now feel confident to actively experiment with different concepts and ideas. This experimentation with new ideas would then be based on the learning from reflection on previous experience and the critical reflection following that reflection. The experimentation becomes the new concrete experience as the professional development learning cycle begins again. This active experimentation is, therefore, not uninformed action but praxis. When teachers are involved in experiences in which decisions have been made based on prior experience, reflection on that experience and abstract conceptualization, Schön (1983) called this knowing-in-action. "It is this whole process of reflection-in-action which is central to the "art" by which practitioners sometimes deal with situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflicts" (p. 50). Reflection-in-action is the essence of praxis and essential to a growing

knowledge of practice. Schön (1983) said that this reflection-in-action "consists of on-the-spot surfacing, criticizing, restructuring, and testing of intuitive understandings of experienced phenomena; often it takes the form of a reflective conversation with the situation" (p. 242) and leads to the "knowing-in-action" which is so important in nonlinear conditions within a work context such as that found in education. Teachers who are reflective practitioners can then act with a degree of confidence in new situations as they make informed decisions about their actions.

Coaching assists teachers to be reflective *in* action, *on* action and *for* future action, which results in a knowledge *of* practice, which is essential in a complex environment such as that in education today. Identifying and then closing the gap between espoused theories and theories-in-action is a necessary precursor to changes in practice occurring, and as Argyris (1976) also argued, this double-loop learning can only occur when others are involved in the learning process, giving feedback on practice.

Networks and Coaching

Networked Learning Communities can provide the forum for the critique of current practice. Coaching in the learning communities and in the teachers' own contexts is also essential, and is indeed occurring naturally in some of the networked learning communities. The motivation for change is evident in the emerging research and literature on the Networked Learning Communities. Coaching can provide the individualized critique necessary to influence values and beliefs that impact on current practices in schools. Because "coaching is about change…and that change requires motivation. If change is really to come from within, then those in schools really have to want to change" (Stoll, Fink & Earl, 2003, p. 184).

Coaching and networked learning communities are both constructivist approaches to learning, between professionals, in a social interactive context. Stein and Spillane (2003) define learning in such social interactive contexts by stating that as individuals exchange ideas and views, listen to and critique other's contributions, and expose their own beliefs and assumptions, they together create a shared, new understanding. Hallinger, Leithwood and Murphy (1993) believed that because of "the social construction of understanding and the critical importance of the setting in shaping practice" (p. x) there needed to be a clear understanding of the context that the process of change and development is taking place in. Harris and Hopkins (2000) argue too, that school level and classroom level change are inextricably linked and the answer to school improvement is building capacity from within. It is important for learners to have "encounters with others who define themselves differently (so) that one can participate in dialogue with many voices, a dialogue in which the self can engage in ongoing definition and redefinition" (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2001, p. 86). The coaching situation and the learning community which develops between groups of coaches will provide such encounters and will challenge teachers to move beyond self (Webber & Robertson, 1998) to a bigger, more critical perspective on education. These dialogic encounters with others with differing perspectives on issues can help teachers to become critically reflective about their own practice, which they may not otherwise be challenged to do, but they also need to

experience scaffolded learning in new practices in a supported, authentic context – their own schools.

Critical perspectives

Lieberman and Miller (1992) stated that there are three important places for learning to occur. There is the "direct teaching" outside-type of learning, such as at conferences, courses and workshops – often by charismatic teachers. There is the learning in school: such as peer coaching, action research, meetings, and learning sets; and thirdly, there is learning out-of-school: such as in reform networks, school-university partnerships; study at University, study groups, and collaboratives. I believe that for effective networked learning communities, there needs to be support and challenge from all three types of learning. The "outside" is important so that research theory and literature and other new professional knowledge, is brought to bear on teachers' thinking; the "inside" learning is necessary to ensure the right challenge and support are present to assist changes in everyday practices, and the inter and intra school learning through creation and transfer of professional knowledge is vital for the critical thinking and research community that precedes radical innovation, and system-wide change. This becomes then the knowledge and reflection *about* practice and *as* practice (praxis). Similarly, the NCSL networked learning communities acknowledge that there are three important fields of knowledge: the craft knowledge of teachers; the public knowledge of research, theory and international practice, and the generated knowledge that practitioners can co-construct. My research has indicated that teachers need to be assisted with the skills to "learn *with* each other" and that a combination of these factors is necessary for sustained innovation to occur in schools. The outside-in, externally generated reform agenda must be supported by professional energy and support at the inside level of teachers' work. The Networked Learning Communities initiative at the National College for School Leaders has the core belief "that the knowledge and the will exists to do these things [be collaborative, aspire to continuous learning, build learning communities], and that what is required are coherent models, a facilitative policy environment and a commitment to learning at all levels of the system" (www.ncsl.org.uk/nlc). Coaching is one of those coherent models that will support teacher change in their own contexts.

The requirement of each Networked Learning Community to utilise a critical friend – an active member of another network or NCSL – may bring the "experience and skills needed to provide an evidence-informed perspective" for the intra and inter school learning. This provides *outside* learning. The *type* of outside learning is important to consider. Different types of professional development activities have differing impacts on leadership for learning. Increasingly today, options for professional development have to be assessed and priorities set, due to time and resource implications. Dempster (2001) identified four types of professional development, two of which relate to systems development and two that are more focused on people development. The first type of professional development is that related to *system restructuring*. This type is often related to government priorities and values as well as system-determined directions. The second is that which relates to *system maintenance*. Usually this involves just maintaining the status quo. It usually causes minimal disruption and only incremental change. The third and fourth categories, more often than not, rely on the personal initiative of the teacher

and the support of colleagues. Dempster called the first of these categories *professional sustenance.* This was the type of professional development that was focused on issues from on-the-job practices. The second people-related category was *professional transformation.* This is professional development that is about the achievement of human goals such as personal growth, social justice, and equity. Such leadership and teaching that may ensue is particularly important in a context of neo-liberal education (Strachan, 1999). This type of professional development usually always requires organizational and social critique and requires the necessary challenge and initiation from outside the school system, for example, from partnerships with higher education institutions and their researchers, or from corporations or social services, who can assist with the social critique.

The NCSL non-school partners – Local Education Authorities, universities and community groups – perhaps provide this function within the Networked Learning Communities. Cuban (1992) believed that a partnership between university academics and practitioners could assist teachers to make their work problematic and would therefore help them to find better ways of dealing with the dilemmas and situations faced in schools. But he had grave doubts that such partnerships would ever eventuate. "Whether my dream of communities of scholars and practitioners devoted to the study and improvement of teaching will become more than words, I cannot say" (p. 10). Learning communities that form effective research and/or academic partnerships may be moved to a greater level of critique. If teachers are to be critically reflective in learning communities, what sorts of questions could they or should they be asking about their work? What sorts of conversations should they be having when they meet together? Richert, Stoddard and Kass (2001) found that school-university partnerships provided multiples viewpoints and challenges to teachers' ways of thinking about their work. Teachers found the strength to move from being a "victim" in the system to having the power to speak up against the status quo. Robertson and Webber (2002) also found that creating a counter culture in which the views of students, parents, administrators, board members, teachers and community members were heard, had a powerful effect on participants' sense of agency - the belief that they could make a difference in schools. Scholar-practitioners can also play a very important role as change agents in teacher development, as they often have the credibility, understanding and background knowledge of the schooling system, and a bigger picture perspective about schools, schooling and their own leadership within this system. The debate on outside-in or inside-out reform, or top-down versus bottom-up reform has also long been a topic in the literature (for example. Scheerens, 1997; Silins & Mulford, 2002) as has the importance of partnerships with outside change agents (for example, Fullan, 1993).

If we believe that knowledge is constructed, co-constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed, by people at both a personal and group level, teacher development requires a pedagogical theory that is based on these social-constructivist principles. This necessitates a generative, constructivist approach to the learning curriculum in which teachers can relate the research theory to their developing practice. Stein and Nelson (2002) put forward the construct that there needs to be leadership content knowledge to assist educational leaders' development. Coaching, using a reciprocal model between

professionals, leads to the development of leadership content knowledge, which is essential for curriculum leadership. Teachers primary focus should be students' learning and inherent in that is how to help teachers improve students' learning experiences. Teachers who are able to become co-enquirers of their leadership and pedagogy, should be able to critique that practice and then more ably develop it in others. Coaching provides challenges to teacher leaders' own pedagogy, and their own abilities as leaders of pedagogy.

Crossing borders

Reciprocal coaching, involving shadowing in different education contexts, requires learners to cross over professionally formed "borders" to view others' ways of working. Giroux (1992, p.26) has defined the concept of border pedagogy as:

> challenging, re-mapping, and renegotiating those boundaries of knowledge that claim the status of master narratives, fixed identities, and an objective representation of reality … (and) recognizing the situated nature of knowledge, … and the shifting, multiple and often contradictory nature of identity.

Giroux identified an element of border pedagogy as being the need for "pedagogical conditions in which students become border-crossers in order to understand otherness in its own terms" (1992, p. 28). These are the conditions that networked learning communities and coaching establishes and legitimates. Access to others' work is often limited. Toole and Seashore Louis (2002, p. 263) advocate the importance of both school-based and non-school based communities, with permeable boundaries to connect teacher learning, to "parents, community, nation and worlds." Robertson and Webber (2000, 2002) and Webber and Robertson (1998) call this "Boundary Breaking" pedagogy which they believe is an essential component of effective leadership learning methodology. Each leadership context, including within the same school, has its own culture of rites, artifacts, and taken-for-granted practices. It is not until teachers are able to cross the borders and share their unique narratives that they are challenged to critique their leadership practice. Jasmin (2002) described five research studies where teachers are involved in a variety of border crossing practices. She found that the way in which the border-crossers journey within the new territory impacts on the ease with which the new knowledge context can be 'known' and 'learnt'. The learning experience is affected by the amount of familiarity, respect, trust, experience and knowledge of the context that the traveler is moving into (Silins & Mulford, (2002). The greater the amount of trust, the greater the transfer of knowledge across borders, and the close individual relationships established through coaching, will increase the amount of trust developed in the learning community as a whole. Challenge and support is essential in this process.

Educational institutions have many borders established within them and around them, such as between departments, between neighboring institutions and organizations, for example. Tomlinson (2002) challenged us to look to other professions to see what can be

learned about ways of working. Medicine and law do provide different examples of adult learning. Border crossing is extremely important and one way to achieve this is through creating opportunities and experiences that break down the boundaries between these borders. Professional learning arises from teachers building partnerships with other teachers (Harris, 2002, p. 109) and others in the wider community.

Networks are effective vehicles for creating opportunities for border crossing across domains of learning but coaching is also necessary to assist in understanding the gap between espoused theories (from co-constructed knowledge) to new theories-in-action. "Coaching bridges the gap between aspiration and achievement…since coaching is about change, it will support high performance through the process of change" Tomlinson (2002. p. 1188). Skills are essential to the coaching process, because it is the use of these skills that will assist teachers to *create* new ways of learning with their professional colleagues.

Coaching skills are the passports

The importance of knowledge of the skills for successful coaching and the subsequent development of coaching practice within the profession cannot be overstated (Tomlinson (2002). Teachers' interactions with their colleagues become more in-depth as they develop the skills to work effectively on critical reflection on practice. The skills in the coaching program I have developed over the past decade (Robertson, 1998) are founded on the principle of the importance of reflection for firstly, self-awareness but ultimately self-efficacy and agency, through a greater understanding of teaching, curriculum leadership and the social and political influences on education. The skills are designed to lead the community of coaching colleagues towards praxis and therefore become an intentional bridge between theory and practice. The development of these skills required getting to know the teachers in depth, over time, in their own contexts, understanding their relationship with their coaching partner, and the resulting impact on their practice. These teachers also formed a community of learners, and the research focused on their reactions and ways of responding, and how they learned and developed as teachers, as leaders and as a learning community. The search was also for a greater understanding of how educationists are best supported to learn and change throughout their careers. The skills were developed, trialed, reflected upon, refined, and reflected upon again by the participants in the research study as their coaching relationships developed in unique ways. This personal and interpersonal skill development was essential to the development of the critical thinking about practice, as a learning community. Silins and Mulford (2002, p. 566) also found that "the key to success of professional learning communities is seen as the increased efficacy *within* [my emphases] the community."

Lambert (1998, p. 24) stated that building leadership capacity at all levels in schools requires "reflective, inquiring practitioners who can sustain real dialogue and can seek outside feedback to assist with self-analysis. These learning processes require finely honed skills in communication, group process facilitation, inquiry, conflict mediation, and dialogue…and must be refined on the job." Isaacs (1999) purports that there are four skills of dialogue: Listening, respecting, suspending, and voicing, and that these skills are

needed in groups to honor multiple perspectives, gain critical perspectives and assist in the co-construction of meaning. The more teachers work together, the more skills they can develop and if they are given the opportunities for practicing the coaching skills together, the more they will be able to work in different ways. These skills need to be taught, practised and coached, perhaps with the assistance of an outside facilitator, who may be another educational leader in the school with the ability to facilitate these coaching skills. The skills for effective coaching in the model I use include: self-assessment, goal setting; developing action plans; setting time frames; observing and describing practice; active listening; reflective questioning; giving evaluative feedback; critically reflecting on practice and using the action research process for school development**.** When there is regular coaching teachers move beyond conversations and simple day-to-day problem solving, into cycles of action research as they work towards achieving their school goals and vision of innovation. They are able to keep a desired outcome in sight as a focus for their daily actions. Although some of the professional goals may be achieved in a short time frame, teachers who have a desired outcome for which they plan action steps, will reflect upon these and evaluate their actions to modify their development plans. They will continue acting and planning further actions in the light of those previously carried out until their goal has been achieved. They will begin to search for opportunities to gain the information and skills that they require. Teachers enjoy being able to share ideas with their coaches and learning communities to help establish the best courses of actions within these long-term plans.

From networks and coaching to action researchers

In this way coaching leads participants into action research methods. There should be evidence of longitudinal goals and a vision of desired outcomes that the teachers are working systematically towards meeting in collaboration with their coaches. Teachers will not necessarily have set out to undertake “action research”. Their systematic processes and action plans should evolve naturally over time, as they work towards their goals, supported by the regular meetings of the networked learning communities and their coaches. At this stage of their work the theory and principles of action research can inform their practice and give them the necessary structures for understanding the change process. They should also begin to realize they are involved in the development of theory.

The process of action research

The beginning and continuing processes of action research can be fostered by allowing teachers the time to reflect upon the goals they are setting in the networked learning communities. They will all start with a perceived outcome or professional goal that they want to achieve. They then develop an initial plan, of which the first step is usually more data gathering of the current situation. The teachers then carry out their first action(s), with or without the observation and feedback from their coach, and then reflect on the outcomes of the action and the necessary directions to take from this stage. This reflection is more like the reconnaissance that Lewin (1948) described which involved evaluating the action, gathering new insight, planning the next step and modifying the overall plan.

Teachers have described this ability to reconnoiter as one of the most important aspects of the professional development during involvement in the coaching program:

> [The most important things that happened to me were] Being made to examine my actions reflectively and the action research program and how it is going—having to look at outcomes objectively—Is this what I want? Where do I go now?

They evaluate, they learn from their actions, they plan the next step and then they modify their overall plans. In learning-centred schools, teachers need to be involved in “ongoing cycles of feedback, support and evaluation” (Dimmock, 2000, p. 276). They work most successfully when supported, and work collegially in a demanding but enjoyable environment (Hargreaves, A. 1994).

The teachers then carry out their second action, and go through cycles of action steps and reconnaissance before arriving at the desired outcome. The coach provides descriptive and evaluative feedback. The following diagram is the conception of the action research developed from earlier research (Robertson, 2000). It most closely relates to the processes described originally by Lewin (1948) most importantly in that although teachers start with a perceived outcome, the way to get there is not always identifiable in easily defined steps. It is the reconnaissance after each action which helps the teachers decide "Where to from here?" They will sometimes require outside assistance to achieve their next actions but they will be aware of the desired outcome and can be assisted to work systematically and collaboratively towards it.

The Action Research Process

Developed from the coaching research studies and from Lewin's (1948) conceptual framework for action research

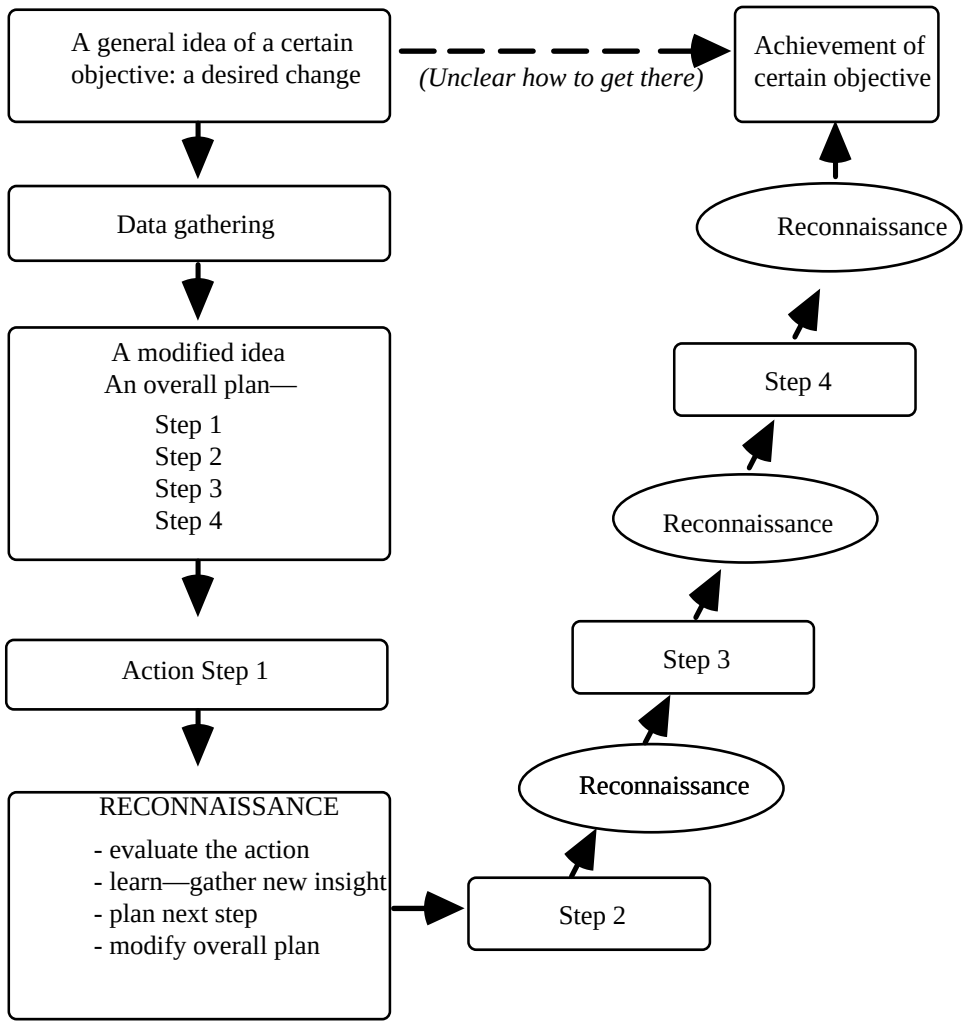

Figure 3: The action research process (Robertson, 2000)

The collaborative nature of any coaching program is a key feature in leading educators into action research processes. The 'conscience' type effect of the coach and the learning

community helps to keep them focused and to move systematically ahead towards their goals. One teacher said:

> At the end of this session I find myself thinking about the next step, the goals I want to achieve and the ways that I could help [partner] achieve her goals/objectives.

Teachers can be quite specific about how their coach will assist them:

1. Monitor introductory process and see if goals are clear.
2. Evaluate the degree of change.
3. Assist with evaluation through reflective interviews with staff.

Acting in this conscience-type role is an important aspect of creating and supporting change in teachers' practice. The intensification of teachers' work has meant that they get sidetracked by the short-term issues and sometimes have difficulties keeping the momentum up to achieve their long-term goals.

> It is the immediacy of the trivia. What you do is you try at that point of time to clear it up because our jobs are a whole series of time, put together by interruptions. The interruptions tend to catch your attention at that time.

Getting sidetracked by the trivia and managing "time put together by interruptions" often means that teachers are unable to stand back and look at education planning and the amount of progress that is being made towards school and classroom goals. School improvement plans are not always followed with any sort of structure or time frame. Coaching can help teachers to set action plans and the dates to action them by. The coach becomes the interested party who monitors their progress towards their goals. The conscience effect of the next coaching session becomes an impetus for scheduled actions to be carried out. This can alleviate the good ideas and intentions developed in learning communities being lost on return to the reality of the workplace.

The *critical* learning community is achieved when the teachers come together to explore their new learning and to share their experiences. "The possibilities for critical self-reflection and critical collaboration should not be bypassed…if those involved truly wish to initiate change and sustain improvement" (Cardno, 2003, p. 25). As they share ideas and transfer knowledge between institutions, more ideas are co-constructed in this generative learning environment. Teachers begin to see that there are different ways of working and begin to seek out new ideas for their own practice. This is the teacher-as-research paradigm, and the NCSL program in this area will prove invaluable to the learning networks. Coaching is paramount to take teachers from the context of the "ideas generation" of the networks to the transformational change that is needed at the individual level for school-wide and system-wide change to occur.

In summary

Therefore, the important principles to be kept in mind when developing any framework for teachers' development, will be to maintain enough structure and expectation for transformational development to occur, while allowing for the professional sustenance of teachers, and the autonomy, professionalism and ability of teachers , as school leaders, to lead the process. The Networked Learning Communities provide the structure for professional autonomy and leadership. This is paramount for the development of the profession, and for the recognition of the importance of professional knowledge. However, it is equally important that we do not just continue to reinvent the status quo and homogeneity in education – and that we are able to be innovative and transformative in our work. The Networked Learning Communities provide an important vehicle for the co-construction and the transfer of knowledge. Changes in individuals' practices may be where, then, the focus needs to lie. Coaching skills and practices will not only enhance the work of dialogue in the learning community groups, but can also support and challenge teachers to change systems, policies, and practices back in their own context. Many questions arose for me as I worked through this paper – it may have generated others for you. Our task of "Creating an evaluation plan that is both responsive to the dynamic nature of the NLC and grounded in leading edge knowledge and theory about the nature of professional learning in schools" will perhaps be guided in part by some of these questions and ideas, and form some basis for our dialogue. I look forward to meeting and working with you all.

Q: Will NCSL Networked Learning Communities provide an effective structure for new paradigms of public education to develop? Is there evidence of radical change?

Q: How are new practices developed in Networked Learning Communities?

Q: What evidence of critical thinking is there in the learning communities? How is this supported at the school and classroom level?

Q: What part does skill development for adult learning play in the development of networked learning communities?

Q: Who plays the part of critical friend to individuals in the learning communities? Is coaching evident?

Q: Is there a focus on the scholarship of the pedagogy of leadership development in learning communities?

Q: Do the principles of action research influence the work of learning communities?

Q: How is change in teachers practice supported, monitored and recorded, through the Networked Learning Communities?

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