Australian Teacher Education Association
Annual Conference Proceedings Archive

Dr. Maggie Clarke
School of Education
University of Western Sydney
Locked Bag 1797
Penrith South DC1797
New South Wales
Phone: 02 4736 0247
Email: m.clarke@uws.edu.au

Dr. Deb Clarke
School of Human Movement Studies
Charles Sturt University
Panorama Ave
Bathurst NSW 2795
Phone: 02 6338 4475
Email: dclarke@csu.edu.au

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Title:

Connecting Communities: Emerging communities of practice with schools and universities in partnership.

Abstract

Communities of practice challenge the traditional notion of learning as receiving knowledge which is essentially disembodied from practice. A community of practice is grounded by two central tenets: essentially that learning is situated, and that practice is made meaningful through reflection with others who engage in the shared experience.

In this study professional partnerships were formed between academics from the University of Western Sydney, Charles Sturt University and teachers from a cluster of four schools in the Parramatta Diocese. The purpose of the professional partnerships were to create dynamic learning communities committed to reflection and to enhancing teaching practice to improve student learning outcomes. Acting as *brokers* in the emerging *community of practice* (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), the academics engaged with school project teams and whole school staff in professional development activities including professional learning plans and authentic assessment.

This paper reports on the creation and sustainability of the community of practice from the perspectives of one of the academics involved in a secondary school and the school project team in one primary school.

Introduction

This project was developed with four schools (two primary and two secondary) in the Parramatta diocese in New South Wales. The purpose of the project was to support teachers in the development of Professional Learning Plans. Professional Learning Plans as described by Yale University (2003) return to the teacher or groups of teachers the opportunity to determine the content and purpose of their professional learning. These plans are put in place as part of a vision of authentic professional learning. *Communities of practice* (Lave & Wenger, 1991) acted as the overall framework for nurturing these school-university partnerships.

The University of Western Sydney managed all four projects and reported to the CEO at agreed points in the project. The two secondary school projects were facilitated by Academics from the University of Western Sydney and the two primary school projects by Academics from Charles Sturt University (CSU), Bathurst, New South Wales. Academic partners across the two universities were selected because of their expertise in specific research areas and matched to the professional learning requirements of each of the schools.

Literature Review

Communities of Practice

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A community of practice is grounded by two central tenets: essentially that learning is *situated*, and that practice is made meaningful through reflection with others who engage in the shared experience. Situated learning acts as a framework for understanding how learning occurs as a socio-cultural phenomenon. If we accept this premise, learning then is undertaken by a means of locating oneself in a social community and making meaning of the knowledge, the community's practices and the world. Learning is not considered then as an individual endeavour undertaken in an isolated context, rather according to Stein (1998) learning is grounded in our everyday activities and cannot be separated from the multifaceted environments in which knowledge must be applied. It is reasonable to suggest then that knowledge is acquired through engagement in practice and through experience. Learning results as individuals engage in social processes requiring negotiation and problem solving with others in the social world. Barab and Duffy (2000) highlight that situated learning represents a shift from learning as an individual process to viewing learning as a function of being a member of a community of learners. These characteristics of situated learning are clearly evident in the way communities of practice share inquiry, engage in learning through authentic practice opportunities and solve dilemmas as a joint enterprise. Communities of practice emphasise that practitioners create and make meaning from their shared and lived experiences and that learning occurs

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within the context of social relationships as practitioners mutually engage in their daily enterprise.

The second essential tenet in which communities of practice are grounded is *reflective practice*. Ongoing and purposeful reflection with others provides opportunities for members of a community of practice to examine the interrelationship between their knowledge and experience. 'Reflective practice is predicated on the assumption that knowledge is derived from professionals' own experience and observations as well from formal knowledge gained through theory and research, and that each informs the other' (Buysse, Sparkman & Wesley, 2003, p. 268). Reflection essentially involves practitioners standing back from their work and considering the philosophies and practices that underpin their daily enterprise. Schön (1987) suggested that reflective practice included both technical skills and the art of practice. This combination of solving problems in new, unique or unfamiliar situations using a set of established rules can be applied to the workings of a community of practice. Reiman (1999) noted that constructing meaning from experience most often coincided with engaging in a new or unfamiliar activity or participating in an activity with a new focus. In a community of practice new knowledge that is generated through communal reflection, cooperation, collaboration and inquiry not only extends each individual's

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understandings of and meanings associated with their work, but also adds to the knowledge base of the entire community of practice.

A community of practice, as defined by its originators, is:

> a set of relations among persons, activity and the world, over time and in relation with other and overlapping communities of practice. A community of practice is an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge, not least because it provides the interpretative support necessary for making sense of its heritage. (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98)

Communities of practice, as stated by Wenger (1998), vary in their formation. The formation of these communities may be formal or informal, include core and peripheral members and can be fixed or fluid, short-lived or long-lasting. All communities, however, are not identifiable as communities of practice. A community of practice is organised around a "practice". Three characteristics define this practice.

(i) Mutual Engagement – How Does the Community Function?

A community of practice is first characterised by the mutual engagement of its participants in a shared "domain of interest" (Wenger, 1998, p. 73). In other words, members of a community of practice form relationships based

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on their interactions, sharing of experiences, solutions and knowledge associated with their common activities of work.

> Learning traditionally gets measured on the assumption that it is a possession of individuals that can be found inside their heads …[Here] learning is in the relationships between people. Learning is in the conditions that bring people together and organise a point of contact that allows for particular pieces of information to take on a relevance; without the points of contact, without the system of relevancies, there is not learning, and there is little memory. Learning does not belong to individual persons, but to the various conversations of which they take part. (McDermott, in Murphy, 1999, p. 17)

It is essential in order to maintain a community of practice, that this mutual engagement is enabled. Mutual engagement unites members of a community of practice as a social entity. Wenger (1998) identifies the necessity for allowing the community of practice to interact in conversations and exchanges that nurture the 'dense relations of mutual engagement organised around what they are there to do' (p. 74). Membership of a community of practice requires a commitment to the "domain of interest" (Nardi & Miller, 1991). Participants within a community of practice

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recognise and value their shared competence; however, their competence may not be recognised as expertise or as valuable by people outside the community of practice.

Diversities of understandings and overlapping competencies allow members of a community of practice to contribute in complementary ways. This complementarity may be seen as a valued resource or as a limitation to the functioning of a community of practice. Drawing on what individuals know and can do, as well as learning from members of the community of practice about what we don't know and can't do, has possibilities for creating a shared practice of mutual engagement (Wenger, 1998). Communities of practice also assist in constituting members' identity and constructing mutual relationships. Learning is inseparable from membership in the community of practice and as such, as members change their learning, their membership status and identity can also change.

(ii) Joint Enterprise – What is the Community About?

The negotiation of joint enterprise is the second characteristic of practice as a source of community coherence. Members of a community of practice engage in joint tasks and activities, share solutions, and assist each other. The formation of these relationships, centred on the pursuit of the domain of interest, enable members of a community of practice to learn from one

another. While individual members of a community of practice may have very different understandings of their enterprise, it is perceived as "joint" because it is communally negotiated. Members of a community of practice are connected because they are involved in making their enterprise "real and liveable" (Wenger, 1998, p. 79).

A community develops its practices and responds to external mandates from both personal and social interactions and negotiations with its members. As Wenger (1998) states, "it is only as negotiated by the community that conditions, resources and demands shape the practice" (p. 80). The practice of the community is not merely a response to an outside mandate but rather the practice emerges and grows as a negotiated community response. The community members, in this sense, essentially mediate their practice, that is, they negotiate their enterprise. Hildreth (2004) suggests that members of a community of practice have a common purpose that drives them to improve their practice. This drive or internal motivation provides the group with its momentum. Rather than external mandates or pressures it is the internal motivation that is a key element to the formation and maintenance of a community of practice.

(iii) Shared Repertoire – What Does the Community Produce?

Development of a shared repertoire is the third characteristic of practice as a source of community coherence. Members of a community of practice share not only their work but their histories, stories, techniques, tools, artefacts, routines, symbols, language and behaviour patterns. In other words, there is a cultural context for members' work. This shared repertoire is essentially a material trace of the community of practice.

The community of practice produces a repertoire of ways of knowing and doing that have evolved as part of the process of their common work or practice. This shared repertoire includes the discourses that shape members' understandings of their practice and their membership identity (Wenger, 1998). Shared repertoire is a set of resources that members use to engage in, make meaning of and refine their practice. The community of practice may not, however, agree on meanings associated with their practice. "Shared beliefs … are not however, what shared practice is about" (Wenger, 1998, p. 84). Misunderstandings of meaning only need to be resolved if they interfere with mutual engagement and then this negotiation provides opportunities for new meanings to emerge amongst members.

Communities of practice and professional development

Although the term community of practice is relatively new, for many decades both formal and informal groups within organisations have benefited from sharing their knowledge, insights and experiences with others with similar interests and enterprises. The term coined by Lave and Wenger (1991) now serves a multitude of professional contexts and has practical applications in technical, organizational, government, and educational systems. It is accepted that this situated approach to learning can be used to 'consider new methods of knowledge generation and dissemination in practice fields' (Buysse, Sparkman & Wesley, 2003, p. 265). A community of practice acts as a learning community: one in which members use their peers as a source of knowledge and professional development. While it is beneficial for individuals to hold personal knowledge, it is when the members of a community of practice interact and share their learning that knowledge networks flourish.

Communities of practice have also been used as a model for professional development and are prolifically documented in the teacher education research (Buysse et al., 2003; Englert & Tarrant, 1995; Marshall & Hatcher, 1996; Palincsar, et al., 1998; Rogoff, et al., 2001; Stamps, 1997; Westheimer & Kahne, 1993). By applying a community of practice framework, professional development programs may be transformed by learning communities where practitioners co-construct knowledge (Englert

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& Tarrant, 1995). The goal of a community of practice is to provide opportunities for collaboration and professional inquiry. In order to transform learning communities, professional development must move to multiple, shared, reflective discourse that involves deep knowledge and learning (Digisi, Morocco & Shure, 1998). This essentially involves shifting from knowledge transmission to knowledge co-construction within a learning environment that fosters trust, professional respect and open conversation between active and mutually engaged participants.

Professional development opportunities for experienced practitioners, such as in-service, has according to Buysse et al. (2001) been disjointed, typically providing limited exposure to a wide range of topics through workshops, staff development activities and professional conferences' (p. 191). This exposes the need for a more coordinated and collaborative approach to professional learning; one in which practitioners are invited to participate in the discourses of learning in situated contexts with other practitioners whom they respect, trust and who share an interest in improving their practice.

Aim of the Research

The project aimed to investigate the complexities surrounding the creation and sustainability of communities of practice through the engagement of school/university partnerships.

Methods:

Research Design

In order to investigate the complexities of the formation and workings of these school-university communities of practice, the research design employed a qualitative approach. This approach utilised two data collection methods: informal interviews conducted by the CSU academic and journal entries prepared by the UWS academic. These tools were chosen as they allowed for the different perspectives of the participants to be highlighted.

Case study

A case study is a generic term that is adopted when investigating an individual, group, or phenomenon that claims to retain a high degree of faithfulness to real-life processes through the collection of extensive and rich data (Sturman, 1997). This research consisted of two case studies of a community of practice. A case study allows for an in-depth examination of a particular phenomenon and the participants are studied in context with an emphasis on gaining an holistic understanding of their experience (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Yin, 1989). In this instance, the *cases* included two schools (one primary and one secondary) in the Parramatta Diocese and two academics (one from CSU and one from UWS) acting as brokers in the communities of practice.

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Participants

Six purposively selected staff from the primary school were invited to participate in informal interviews while the UWS academic acted as a participant researcher in the project. These participants were representative of the breadth of the community of practice: newcomers and old-timers; centripetal members and legitimate peripheral participants (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Data Collection

The data was collected and examined from two different viewpoints. Firstly, data was gathered from the perspective of the teachers as participants and secondly from an academic as researcher participant.

- Six teacher participants from the primary school were interviewed to investigate whether a community of practice was formed. Each interview was approximately 30 minutes duration and was conducted by the CSU academic at the primary school venue.

- Journal data entries created by the UWS academic were used as a reflective tool to evaluate the conditions conducive to creating and sustaining a school university partnership, acting as a community of practice.

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Data Analysis

Interview data was transcribed and coded using Wenger's (1998) three characteristics of a community of practice: shared repertoire, mutual engagement and joint enterprise. Examples of participant dialogue were used as evidence to support or deny the formation of a community of practice.

Journal data entries and processes undertaken at one of the secondary schools were analysed and described in terms of Wenger, McDermott and Synder's (2002) conditions and principles used to cultivate communities of practice.

Discussion and findings

Case Study 1: Reflections by an ''outsider''- the academic partner involved in one of the secondary school projects.

This case study was undertaken in a secondary school in the north western suburbs of Sydney. The purpose of the project was to support teachers in the development of Professional Learning Plans. Three academics from UWS met with staff members from the secondary school, sharing understanding of professional learning and its meanings, examining common areas of interest with staff and discussing how the learning plans fit within a framework of the school's goals. The project involved the teachers

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nominating themselves to be part of a group who would support each other while they formed a Professional Learning Plan.

The case study took the form of a reflection (derived from journal entries) by one of the academics involved in the project. The narrative reflected on the professional learning processes used at the school to encourage a community of practice. The 'case' was evaluated in relation to the seven conditions or principles that are promoted by Wenger et al. (2002) as cultivating a community of practice.

The project began with a workshop organized by the three academic partners and involved a discussion of professional learning. The purpose of these meetings was to establish 'shared meanings' of the nature of the project and the supporting role of the academic partners. This part of the teacher learning process was based on Wenger's view that practitioners make meaning from their shared and lived experiences. Roseberry and Warren (1998) (cited in Power & Clarke, (2007) also found that research work in schools, documenting and analysing what teachers learn, involves establishing shared meanings. They argue:

> The construction of a shared meaning does not happen in an orderly, linear progression, from implicit to explicit meaning. Rather it has a

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more mobile, mutable, improvisational character as meanings are

taken up and elaborated by different participants, each of whom draws

on past as well as almost accepted perspectives in the conversation.

(pp. 10-11 cited in Power & Clarke, 2007, p. 5)

Following the initial meetings, a whole school workshop was undertaken

where principles and models of effective school-based professional learning

were discussed. The purpose of this meeting was to develop understandings

of the term 'Learning Plans' and provide motivation for staff to become

involved in the project. Learning plans were explained in terms of self-

identifying an area of professional learning for each teacher and then

developing a plan to implement the ideas. These plans were discussed as

identifying the teacher's professional growth outcomes, with a proposed

action plan and time lines for achieving those plans. As an outcome of this

meeting eight teachers volunteered to be part of the project. The teachers

were highly motivated and keen to develop their learning plans based on a

perceived need in a particular area of learning. Two further meetings were

held with the self-identified staff and academic partners to clarify direction

for the plans.

Participation of the project team members in learning opportunities

supported by the academic partner/s including providing release from daily

duties to participate in group and individual tasks, meetings, mentoring, conferences and courses formed part of the initial implementation of the project (Power & Clarke, 2007, p. 6). The opportunity to learn for these teachers became evident by using professional learning strategies that focused on the identification of what they wanted to learn, scaffolded by collaborative learning with their colleagues. Not only was it important to identify the learning needs of the teachers it was evident that the process needed to be on-going, supported by time for the teachers to develop and apply new learning. It was also apparent that there was a need to drive professional learning and sometimes this is best achieved through outside expertise such as through an academic partner (Power & Clarke, 2007). The 'outsider's' needed to be recognized as legitimate members of an overlapping community of practice and hold enough credibility to influence practice. Wenger (1998) discusses the notion of 'insider's' and 'outsider's'. 'Insider's' have an innate knowledge of the finer workings of the community, the social relationships that are being played out in the community and the issues and challenges that the community face. 'Insider's' though may not necessarily recognize the potential or possibilities of their community of practice.

The 'outsider' participates in what Wenger identified as brokering. The act of brokering is complex. The broker undertakes the tasks of translating

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meaning between the connecting communities of practice, and assisting members to acknowledge the possibilities for alignment between perspectives. Brokering involves multi-membership in communities of practice. The broker uses their membership in more than one community of practice to advantage and essentially transfers some element of one community of practice to another.

It may only be when an outside perspective is applied to the practice that members acknowledge and plan for their imaginings of what is possible. In this way, the 'outsider' essentially acts as a change agent. The school acknowledged that the Academic partners provide knowledge in the form of theoretical underpinnings for the activities that the teachers wanted to carry out with their classes. The Principal was keen to support all teaching and learning processes through a framework of research and theory. The 'outsider's' (the academic partners) however, need to hold a sense of legitimacy in the eyes of the central members of the community of practice for meaningful dialogue to be exchanged.

Part way through the project an invitation was given to the staff involved to participate in a symposium at a teacher education conference. They were also invited to be part of the writing team in the development and presentation of a paper at the symposium. Unfortunately no one volunteered

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to be involved in this aspect of the project. The Deputy Principal did however agree to participate in the symposium and present part of the session with the academic partner. It should be noted that the development of a community of practice at the beginning of the project was very slow to cultivate. Some thoughts on this are evident from the academic's journal entry.

> There does not seem to be any clear direction to the whole school's commitment to the project. I have come away today from our meeting feeling less than motivated as there seemed to be a sense that this project had not been negotiated with the staff. They did not seem really interested however, there were a few staff members who did show some interest in participating in the project.

A new Principal was appointed to the school at the beginning of the following year. It became obvious to the academic partners working with the school staff that the Principal needed time to establish new priorities and goals for the school therefore, the project did not re-commence until half way through the year.

> There was such a feeling of joy in me today after meeting with the new Principal. There seemed to be new vigour and energy at the

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school. The principal is keen to establish learning and teaching
teams that will work to influence others in the schools in new
practices that engage staff in their professional learning and achieve
improved outcomes for students. (Academic's journal entry)

A new member of staff was also appointed to drive the school change
process. Before the initial meeting with one of the academic partners this
staff member had held two meetings to set the scene with the staff in
relation to individual plans and school goals as well as to organize
themselves into cross-curricular learning teams.

Today I was introduced to a teacher who had recently been
appointed to drive change within the school. He is dynamic in his
approach and seems to have established very positive relationships
with the staff within a very short time. I'm looking forward to seeing
how the momentum for change in this school will now be driven.
(Academic's journal entry)

Wenger, et al. (2002) suggests that as communities of practice are not
contrived entities but rather self perpetuating, self–organising and fluid 'it is
more a matter of shepherding their evolution' (p.51). The key to designing
for the evolution of a community of practice is to provide catalysts for the

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evolution, that is, to recognize what is needed and how it can be provided to best accommodate the nature of the community of practice. Hence, the school had two new members of staff appointed who were driving and shepherding the evolution of a community of practice.

Only two members of staff continued with the project from its beginnings. However, the numbers of teachers participating in the project grew significantly with eight teachers participating in the first six months and grew to sixteen teachers in the following year. One of the original participants indicated that she thought that there were problems with the project's implementation because there was no-one driving the initiative from within the school and because of this there was a lack of commitment to the scheduling of meetings and follow through. This was not the case in the following year. In fact, the teachers requested more meetings closer together with specified tasks to complete in between the times when they met with the academics.

The Academics have provided the framework and scaffolding for the professional learning workshops that took place and worked with the staff and teams to develop a process for the development and implementation of their learning plans. Strategies such as individual and team research, reporting on research investigations, action planning, team collaboration,

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and in-class visits by teachers were introduced to cultivate a community of practice.

The processes utilized for the cultivation of the community were analysed in terms of Wenger, McDermott and Snyder's (2002) seven conditions or principles. Table 1 identifies each of the processes used at the secondary school and identifies its relationship to the cultivation of a community of practice.

Table 1

Conditions or principles for cultivating communities of practice and strategies identified.

Conditions or Principles	Strategies used in the process
1. Design for Evolution	Catalysts were provided for the evolution of a community of practice in the form of a new school principal and new member of staff appointed to drive school change
2. Open a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives	Academic partners (acting as brokers) working with cross-curricular teams provided a research framework to assist with developing practice
3. Invite different levels of participation	A core group of participants formed part of the community of practice. These participants were the school staff member appointed to drive and lead the process within the school and the academic partners. The active group consisted of the team members who met regularly and engaged in discussion of the communities key practices.

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		Peripheral members consisted of other staff of the Key Learning areas who viewed the activities of the core and active members
4.	Develop both public and private community spaces	Time and space was created to provide on-going opportunities for the active group to gather both face to face and electronically. Formal and informal workshops were created. Presentations at workshops were conducted by individuals and teams of the active group. Informal discussions on the day to day practices were evident among team members of the active group.
5.	Focus on value	The community of practice has been encouraged to imagine the possibilities of the community. They have discussed why it has been worthwhile being part of the learning community and have drawn on the expertise of different people within the community to provide different solutions.
6.	Combine familiarity and excitement	A network of relationships was nurtured through the establishment and maintenance of cross-curricular teams. The professional familiarity that occurred in the teams enabled team members to explore new possibilities and ask for advice without fear.
7.	Create a rhythm for the community	The active group negotiated timelines and meeting dates to develop and sustain a rhythm to the community of practice.

Case Study 2: Teachers' Perspectives of the Formation and Sustainability of a Community of Practice

The second case study was undertaken in a primary school on the semi-rural outskirts of Western Sydney. The purpose of this project was to raise the quality of assessment tasks using the Quality Teaching Framework. This framework has been "shown to improve the academic outcomes of all students. It respects the work of teachers and provides them with a practical

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and useful framework for professional dialogue, for planning and redesigning lessons and for reflecting on the quality of what they do in the classroom" (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2007).

An academic from CSU was employed as a critical friend to facilitate a range of continuing professional learning opportunities for staff.

This case study used interview data from six purposively-selected staff to reflect on the formation of a community of practice. The three characteristics of a community of practice: shared repertoire, mutual engagement and joint enterprise (Wenger, 1998) were used as signposts to evaluate the formation of a community.

The professional learning opportunities commenced with a whole-school session that provided a common framework (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2007) from which staff could negotiate their understandings of authentic assessment and quality teaching. The academic facilitator undertook a "brokering" role (Wenger, 1998) to establish credible and respected links between the university and school. In this case, the broker used the NSW Quality Teaching Framework to act as a "boundary object" (Starr, 1989) and initiated shared understandings of teachers' practice in designing authentic quality assessment tasks. The boundary object assisted in binding or bringing together members of the school and university and

supported the creation of common language associated with the shared practice of designing quality assessment. Wenger (1998, p. 161) states that it is through engagement with others in overlapping or connecting communities of practice, that individuals create bridges "across the landscape of practice". Interview data supported the need for and evidence of a shared repertoire of practice:

> We came away from the day REALLY understanding the language of the quality teaching document. For the first time we were all saying the same thing using the same language and we knew what each other meant. (Interview with BC)

> I know what I'm talking about now about QT and I can understand what everyone else is talking about too. It seems like we're all on the same page. (Interview with MB)

> Unpacking the document helped us all to focus on what we needed to know and by doing all the group activities we had the chance to flesh out what the dimensions meant and how we needed to apply them in designing our assessments. Sharing our ideas in this way really helped get us all up to speed. We now know what quality teaching means and we can try and put it into practice. (Interview with JW)

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It was like learning the rules of a game. Once we all understood the same rules we were fine. We could talk about ways to improve our assessments and we knew what someone else was talking about. (Interview with RT)

Participation in a community of practice provides members with opportunities to learn the *culture* of the practice of their community. As members participate in the community they become more knowledgeable of its practice: they learn the rules, the language and the conventions through degrees of access to established or core members.

Following the initial whole-school introduction to the Quality Teaching Framework and its relationship with authentic assessment, two team leaders or "centripetal members" of the community of practice co-facilitated half-day workshops with their colleagues in Stage teams. These co-facilitators were highly respected by their peers and had previously led other professional learning opportunities. Both these staff members had also previously attended professional learning experiences offered by external providers on the NSW Quality Teaching Framework. This experience in overlapping communities assisted them in translating their knowledge to the legitimate peripheral participants (LPPs) in the emerging community of

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practice. In a sense, these two staff members were also acting as brokers by "fringe dwelling" on the boundaries of an overlapping community of practice.

BC and *MB* have forged new identities as a result of their opportunities to participate in overlapping communities of practice. Their new identities had been, in part, created by participating in "brokering". Brokering involves the process of connecting with others "who can introduce elements of one practice into another" (Wenger, 1998, p. 105). As a product of their multi-membership in overlapping communities of practice, *BC* and *MB* were acting as translators of practice. They were transferring their understanding of quality teaching to other members of the community of practice in their school. Both *BC* and *MB* were viewed by members of the community of practice as legitimate, respected and trusted centripetal members. In order for their brokering to be successful, *BC* and *MB* required the skills to "influence the development of practice, mobilize attention, and address conflicting interests" (Wenger, 1998, p. 109). Their multi-membership allowed them to both gain a different view of the world, and bring this view to their practice, and the practice of colleagues. Using what Wenger (1998, p. 105) terms "boundary objects", *BC* and *MB* assisted their colleagues to connect with the NSW Quality Teaching Framework. These boundary objects acted as common ground, connecting different perspectives of

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members and providing a focus for shared dialogue around their meanings and implementation possibilities.

Wenger (1998) suggests that participation in overlapping communities of practice, assists elements of discourse to "travel across boundaries and combine to form broader discourses as people coordinate their enterprises, convince each other, reconcile their perspectives, and form alliances" (p. 129). In this case, *BC* and *MB* had drawn upon the resources, both human (academic partner) and material, from other communities of practice to import the discourses around quality teaching and to their practice, and share them with other community members.

"Peripherality" is a way of being positioned or located in the field of a community of practice. Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest that initially newcomers learn at the periphery of the community. The periphery in this sense, however, is not located physically at the edge of the community nor does it imply either a negative or essentially disempowered position. It simply relates to a position which "suggests an opening, a way of gaining access to sources for understanding through growing involvement" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 37). As these newcomers gain greater mastery of their practice they move to a more central position in the community of practice.

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The boundaries of a community of practice are to be seen as permeable with two-way exchanges of knowledge between newcomers and old-timers. The interview data supported the positioning of different members in the community of practice. As a legitimate peripheral participant SH states:

> At the start of this project I felt like I didn't know very much and BC and MB were the ones who were leading this process. But as we've done more on the quality teaching stuff I feel like I can be a part of it and add my ideas. I can see where it fits in my teaching and I can see how I can help my Stage partner when we apply the model. (SH)

Representing a centripetal member in the community of practice MB states:
> BC and I feel that we know how to model some of this now. We can explain it clearly to the other staff and we are working with our own Stage partners and coming out with some pretty good results. Other staff ask us questions and ask for advice and to look at their assessments to see if they're OK. I think that we are driving this process with you. (MB)

Previous to the CSU academic being employed by the school, the staff had been engaged in whole-school professional learning experiences that were less than successful. 'Outsider's' had "delivered" professional learning

packages in a one-off whole-school presentation. The staff voiced their dissatisfaction with this approach of professional learning as evidenced by RC:

> We had a bad experience with the Quality Teaching stuff. ZZ came to the school and just did a "death by power-point" presentation. I think this didn't help people learn about the approach at all. We came away very negative from this day thinking that QT was just another thing we had to do. (Interview with RC)

Participants in the research suggested that it was the ongoing commitment by the academic partner and staff relationships that had assisted in making the project a success. BC states:

> When you come it feels like we're all working together – you and us. We knew what we want to achieve and where we want to go and you help us by doing stuff with us in teams and pairs and we all learn from each other.

Joint enterprise involves the community participating in joint tasks and activities, and assisting each other. In this case study, members of the community of practice shared a joint enterprise of improving the quality of

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their assessment tasks. While this focus had been mandated by the school principal, the way in which the staff had undertaken their learning associated with this focus had been negotiated. It is clearly evident from the interview data that the motivation to improve their practice around assessment was internally driven. As MB states:

> I think that we really see the need to raise the standard of our [assessment] tasks. After one of these days with you we all get enthusiastic and try and put it into practice. We try to keep the motivation going by working with each other during RFF. In a way this helps us to check on each other's progress and make sure we did what we said we were going to do. It helps that you keep coming back as well so we can keep the ball rolling.

Joint enterprise is not merely a response to an outside mandate such as the inclusion of the NSW Quality Teaching Framework into teaching and learning practices, but rather the practice emerges and grows as a negotiated community response. The community members, in this sense, essentially mediate their practice, that is, they negotiate their enterprise.

Conclusion

The data suggests that a community of practice was emerging in both the schools studied. Within the secondary school the seven conditions or principles promoted by Wenger et al. (2002) were apparent providing evidence that a community of practice was being cultivated and emerging. Strategies that underpinned the process used in cultivating a community of practice also aligned to the seven conditions noted by Wenger et al. (2002). Using the secondary school as a case study highlighted the importance and value of both an 'outsider' and an 'insider' driving change within schools and facilitating processes and strategies for a community of practice to be cultivated.

It was clear that the academic partners were able to assist with the cultivation of the community of practice by providing the expertise in 'knowledge building' for the teachers. The academics were able to provide the scaffolding for the development of the projects identified by the teachers.

One of the most poignant points discussed by the teachers was that the success of the projects and the cultivation of the communities of practice were due to time and space being created to provide on-going opportunities for the community to gather. From a systemic viewpoint this aspect of time

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and space is central if communities of practice are to continue to operate and function effectively within schools.

In the primary school the three characteristics of shared repertoire, joint enterprise and mutual engagement were evidenced during the implementation of the project. The members of the emerging community of practice could identify the significance of i) employing a common language associated with their practice; ii) sharing and negotiating their understandings of new knowledge in a team/group context; and iii) creating enthusiasm and motivation to assist in continuing to their practice. Both the centripetal and peripheral members of the community of practice supported the "model" of professional learning implemented by the CSU academic as it was built around supportive relationships and ongoing commitment to the project. These conditions are essential in sustaining a community of practice.

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