

Developing Teacher Professional Learning Communities:

The Case of Education Queensland

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Jo Ailwood

School of Education, The University of Queensland

Kirran Follers

New Basics Branch, Education Queensland

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All people, Antonio Gramsci...said, are intellectuals; but only some have the *function* of intellectuals. Teachers are one such group (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000: 8 original emphasis).

Teachers regularly find themselves being considered as a nodal point for social and political change. Recent research has begun to reflect on the less optimistic aspects of change for teachers, on the negative emotions and tensions that will inevitably surround such a process (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000). Acknowledging that change will result in tension, however, cannot preclude reflection on a range of potentially positive outcomes. One of these outcomes is the growing recognition of the importance of teacher professional learning communities for developing and supporting the work of teachers (e.g. Hannaway & Talbert, 1993; Louis, Kruse & Marks, 1996; Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000; Newmann, King & Youngs, 2000; King, Ladwig & Lingard, 2001).

The focus of this paper is upon the development of teacher professional learning communities in two schools. These schools are part of the New Basics trial in Queensland that is attempting to undertake school-based reform aimed at improving the academic and social outcomes for their students [1]. The narratives presented from these schools consider the significance of the building of teacher professional learning communities as contextually specific sites for reform (Talbert, McLaughlin & Rowan, 1993; Louis, Kruse & Marks, 1996; QSRLS, 2001).

An underlying pretext for the value of teacher professional learning communities in school reform is the recognition that, as Bascia and Hargreaves point out in the opening quote, teachers need to be seen to function as intellectuals. However, as will be seen through the narratives of the two schools provided here, the intellectual aspects of teaching are also impossible to divorce from the emotional, political and social aspects of teaching. Thus, to begin this paper we contextualise aspects of the macro-political in Education Queensland's reform agenda. This includes a very brief overview of the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study [2] and the New Basics Project, both of which are elements in the reform process. Following this we elaborate on micro-political aspects of teacher professional learning communities through the narratives of two schools taking part in the New Basics Project trial.

The 'Smart State' agenda

Queensland's state government has adopted 'The Smart State' as its most recent slogan (car owners can even acquire 'The Smart State' number plates). This is reflective of a clear direction and policy towards marketing Queensland as an important site in which new 'knowledge economies' might build and invest

successfully. This more recent slogan could be seen to operate in interesting, and potentially conflicting, ways with the more established slogan - 'The Sunshine State'. The semantic shift from Queensland being marketed as a place to find your temporary (vacation) or permanent (interstate migration) place in the sun, to a place where knowledge is the new key to jobs, opportunities and economic viability is significant. Given the increasing concentration of global business in either Sydney or Melbourne, this shifting sales pitch on the part of Queensland's government is viewed as vital. But such a shift is not only significant for business and the economy; it is also significant for the many educators who operate in Queensland's government schools.

Education Queensland's central organisational document is *Queensland State Education, 2010*. This policy is introduced by Peter Beattie, the Premier of Queensland, as '...the contribution of state schools to the Smart State' (Education Queensland, 2001: 3). Exactly what comprises that contribution is made clear further on as he points out that,

Students who complete year 12 or its equivalent have better life chances. Increasing the number of our young people who achieve this gives them a 'fair go' at life's opportunities and will improve our economic performance. It is the basis of a Smart State (Education Queensland, 2001: 3).

That completing year 12 may enable young people to follow up a greater range of life chances is not in question here. There are debates around this issue, for example, feminist researchers have regularly questioned the post school environment for girls and young women (e.g. Porter, 1993; Collins, Kenway & McLeod, 2000). However, what is of interest here are the explicit links between year 12 completion and the economic performance of 'The Smart State' - and what this means for teachers as they attempt to cope with the continuous and unrelenting realities of classroom life.

Queensland State Education 2010 (QSE 2010) was developed out of a lengthy consultation and data collection process and is a laudable and futures oriented piece of corporate policy. The central aims of *QSE 2010* are; to prepare students for flexible and adaptable life pathways, to participate in cohesive social communities, and to become active and contributing citizens in a globally competitive workforce. Translating these rather grand aims into schools and classrooms, however, is a difficult matter. The evolution of the *QSE 2010* agenda, therefore, has also required several other systems priorities including Literate Futures and the New Basics Project. There is an ongoing reassessment and development process as part of this, as evidenced in *Destination 2010* (Education Queensland, 2001) a 'roadmap' for the journey to *QSE 2010*. As the corporate centrepiece for Education Queensland, *QSE 2010* can be considered an overt attempt to put what is regularly considered "out there" (that is, social, political, cultural changes) into the "in here" of schools and classrooms (see Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000).

Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study

Although beginning during the term of a previous coalition government, the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (QSRLS) has had a significant impact upon the current context for change in Education Queensland. Over the three years of the study, which was funded by Education Queensland, a research team from the University of Queensland and the University of Newcastle visited 8 schools, twice per year (that is, 24 schools over three years). Classroom observations were conducted in the focus years of 6, 8 and 11 in the subject areas of English, Science, Maths and the Social Sciences. Observations of teachers in other year levels and subjects who were seen to be 'making a difference' by the school community were also sought. In total 975 classroom observations were made. All the teachers observed were then interviewed, along with the principal and deputy principals of those schools. Additional data was collected via teacher developed assessment items, standardised test results (such as the Year 6 test) and quantitative rolling surveys.

The study backward mapped from student outcomes, classroom practices, school organisation and external supports (see also Newmann & Associates, 1996). This backward mapping approach was an attempt to locate classroom practices and relationships at the core of school based reform and innovation. The QSRLS has produced an enormous amount of data related to classroom and assessment practices, leadership practices, student outcomes (both academic and social) and the effects

of restructuring. 'Productive Pedagogies', the vocabulary of teaching developed out of the classroom observation instrument, has been drawn into the current reform process in Education Queensland and is an integral component of the New Basics Project.

The focus of this paper is upon just one part of the broad discussion in Queensland motivated through the QSRLS, that is, upon the importance of creating teacher professional learning communities that aim to improve the social and academic outcomes for students. Following a brief discussion of the New Basics Project we then move on to discuss the emerging teacher professional learning communities in two school contexts.

New Basics Project

Queensland is currently trialing a new approach to curriculum, assessment and pedagogy in fifty-nine state schools. Known as the New Basics Project, this is an integrated framework for delivering Bernstein's (1971) three message systems of curriculum (New Basics), pedagogy (Productive Pedagogies) and assessment (Rich Tasks). The New Basics Project is a major educational renewal project, taking up the challenge of preparing students for 2010 and beyond. It is about dealing with new student identities, new economies and workplaces, new technologies, diverse communities and complex cultures. Thus, the aim of the New Basics Project is to work with teachers and schools as they focus on their core business of teaching and learning, but to do so in a way that directly confronts the challenges of changing times.

The New Basics Project defines essential areas of learning, appropriate and effective approaches to teaching, affiliated modes of assessment and standards and assurances about student development at key points of schooling. The conceptual pivots of the New Basics Framework are: New Basics, Rich Tasks and Productive Pedagogies. Each element has a reciprocal relationship within the triad. For example, the New Basics are not deliverable without significant shifts in pedagogy, and furthermore the New Basics and Productive Pedagogies necessitate rich and authentic assessment.

The New Basics are clusters, families or groups of practices that are essential for survival in the worlds that students have to deal with. There are four clusters that act as curriculum organisers. They are; 1) life pathways and social futures, 2) multiliteracies and communications media, 3) active citizenship and 4) environments and technologies. This project has impressive aims, attempting to empower and encourage teachers, unclutter the curriculum, raise intellectual standards, deliver fewer alienated students, prepare students for a future in an uncertain world, and position the classroom in a globalising society. The New Basics approach focuses on students developing critical thinking, problem solving and lifelong learning skills and applying them to real-life tasks and activities.

Rich Tasks are the assessable and reportable outcomes of a curriculum plan that spans nine years of schooling, in three year cycles (1-3, 4-6, 7-9). The first two years of this cycle should consist of lead in activities that build the prescribed skills and knowledges (or repertoires of practice). This should occur in different contexts to the actual Rich Task which would then take place in the third year of that cycle. Rich Tasks are a reconceptualisation of the notion of mastery; that is, students display their understandings, knowledges and skills through performance on transdisciplinary activities that are intellectually demanding and are connected to the world beyond the classroom. These tasks require students to solve problems, be critical and analytical thinkers, and to use the knowledge and skills they have acquired in a variety of contexts.

There are five practices that identify a New Basics Project trial school. One of these is that the school operates as a significant learning community. The achievement of teacher professional learning communities is currently one of the most challenging aspects of the New Basics agenda. Thus, the task for the New Basics team was to develop a strategic plan that outlined the support required to establish and maintain teacher professional learning communities within and between all trial schools.

In their final report to Education Queensland, the QSRLS (2001) outlined a series of recommendations. Many of these reinforced the various aspects of the New Basics Project, in particular the recommendation that there be systemic support for the establishment of teacher professional learning communities in schools. Other recommendations discussed the importance of professional

development. The QSRLS (2001: key findings and recommendations) pointed out that 'teachers should be encouraged and supported to participate in professional development, both external and internal to the school, around relevant school derived issues' and that 'professional development for teachers needs to be about building a sense of responsibility and efficacy for student learning'.

The New Basics Project has attempted to capture the essence of these recommendations through the development of two key initiatives. Firstly, protocols training was undertaken by selected teachers in all trial schools. This professional development offered opportunities for peer support and self-reflection by providing teachers with a framework for conducting critical professional conversations. This process has been well received, in part because it recognises that teachers have much to learn from each other (ANSN, 2001). The second key initiative was to embed the idea of teacher professional learning communities within all professional development provided by the New Basics Branch. Professional development programmes are, therefore, designed with the aim of providing teachers with opportunities to begin the process of becoming a member of a teacher professional learning community.

It has been argued that the vast majority of professional development leads to no significant change in classroom practices (Kinsler & Gamble, 2001). One-off or 'mini series' workshops are ineffective without adequate follow up and support for ideas and practices (Fullan, 1991). Provision must, therefore, be made for teachers to further develop and sustain, at the school and classroom level, the knowledge and skills acquired from professional development programs. The QSRLS (2001) suggests that both internal and external professional development is necessary and useful for teachers. To support this provision schools need to become learning organisations, where teacher professional learning communities play an important role (Fullan, 2000; QSRLS, 2001).

School organisation and teacher professional learning communities

Having spent some time discussing the macro-context of Education Queensland's reform agenda, we now turn to the micro-context of teacher professional learning communities. It is undoubted that the role of teachers in improving the outcomes of students in their care is significant (QSRLS, 2001; Newmann & Associates, 1996). As Lingard, Mills and Hayes (2000: 108) argue,

we know from research that, after holding student backgrounds constant, teacher effect upon student outcomes is much greater than whole school effect. The 'trick', as it were, for effective school reform is to try to spread productive pedagogies across the school culture.

Centring the role of teachers and their work in schools seems to be an appropriate way of moving towards more effective schooling for students. This is, however, a potentially poisoned chalice. For while teachers can make a difference for many students and this needs to be acknowledge and valued, as Basil Bernstein (1970) famously stated 'education cannot compensate for society'. Without very high levels of institutional, systemic and sustained support teachers will be constrained as to the collective responsibility for student achievement that they may attain. Thus, it needs to be recognised that teachers not only operate within their classrooms, but also within layers of systemic and school based constraint and that in order to develop viable teacher professional learning communities high levels of systemic and school based leadership and support are required.

Adding to this are the layers of social constraints, particularly for schools in areas with high levels of poverty. As pointed out in the *QSE 2010* document, up to 25% of children attending government schools live in families with incomes below the poverty line (EQ, 2001: 6). This obviously has implications for the lives of children in terms of health, housing, crime and homelessness. Such issues will inevitably flow over into the daily life and functioning of schools, impacting upon administrators, teachers and of course students.

School organisational capacity

To begin recognising these constraints, the model of teacher professional learning community discussed here is based upon the QSRLS (2001) development of the work of Louis, Kruse and Marks (1996). In this model, teacher professional learning communities form part of a school's organisational

capacity. A school's organisational capacity has at least five elements: the professional capacities of teachers (teacher capital), professional learning communities within schools, program coherence, leadership, and technical resources (QSRLS, 2001; King, Ladwig & Lingard, 2001; Ailwood & Capeness, 2001). As pointed out in the final report of the QSRLS (2001: 29) each of these aspects of school organisational capacity operates in a synergistic fashion. That is, they are all necessary, but in and of themselves insufficient, for improving pedagogy and student outcomes.

A very brief clarification of these five aspects of school organisational capacity is in order. The professional capacities of teachers refers to the knowledges, skills and capabilities of individual staff. Program coherence refers to sustained, focused school-based goals (along with the alignment of curriculum, pedagogy, assessment). While recognising the importance of the principal, leadership in this context also refers to various leadership roles across the school and an effective spread of responsibility for these leadership positions (for further development of these leadership ideas see Lingard, Hayes, Mills & Christie, forthcoming in 2003). Technical resources refer to quality of curricula and other instructional materials and facilities. Teacher professional learning communities refer to the extent to which teachers and administrators within a school develop a community centred around learning and pedagogy.

Teacher professional learning communities

Following the earlier work by Talbert, McLaughlin and colleagues (Talbert, McLaughlin & Rowan, 1993; Hannaway & Talbert, 1993; Talbert & McLaughlin, 1994), the need for ongoing teacher professional learning communities within schools that support teachers in their work has been further discussed by various researchers (e.g. Seashore Louis, Kruse & Marks, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000; QSRLS, 2001). This research suggests that schools, quite broadly, need to be viewed as learning communities where learning is their core business. This idea of schools as learning communities extends to encompass all members of the school community including parents and others in the local community. Within this, teacher professional learning communities focus particularly upon the ongoing professional collaboration and learning of the teachers in the school.

It is suggested here that there are at least six aspects that characterise teacher professional learning communities. They are 1) shared norms and values, 2) deprivatisation of practice, 3) reflective dialogue, 4) collaboration, 5) a focus on student learning and 6) teachers' collective responsibility for student learning (Louis, Kruse & Marks, 1996; QSRLS, 2001). Each of these aspects operates in an ongoing, messy and complex manner, or as the QSRLS (2001) suggests, synergistically.

Shared norms and values refers to the 'thisness' of a school (Thomson, 2000), that there is a particular 'school way' of operating, which necessarily both enables and constrains what goes on in that school. The next three; deprivatisation of practice, reflective dialogue and collaboration, require teachers to talk to each other in a sustained way about the work of teaching and learning. These aspects also take into account such activities as visiting other schools and membership of educational groups or associations such as the Primary English Teachers Association. The final two aspects reflect, and flow from, the other aspects. That is, when teachers have the time and space to conduct professional and reflective dialogue, to collaborate, to share their practice and ideas there is (hopefully) a focus on student learning and the production of a sense of collective responsibility for the outcomes of students in their school.

High quality pedagogy depends on the professional capacities of teachers, however, this capacity intersects with a variety of other issues in teachers' lives (Newmann, King & Youngs, 2000). It is, therefore, important to point out that we are discussing a model of professional learning and practice, which is not necessarily one of friendship. The everyday realities of school reform are regularly constrained through the less salubrious aspects of professional disagreements, jealousies and the 'protection of turf'. In their aptly titled book, *The Sharp Edge of Educational Change: Teachers, leading and the realities of reform*, Bascia and Hargreaves (2000) argue there are at least four aspects to school reform for teachers: the technical, intellectual, socioemotional and sociopolitical. All of these aspects impact upon the development of teacher professional learning communities, often in unpredictable and sometimes destructive ways.

For example, on the micropolitical front, Datnow (2000) makes the gendered implications of reform attempts very clear. The deeply gendered aspects of the functioning of power relations, knowledges and discourses in schools cannot be underestimated. Who is leading the reform, the micropolitics of their position in the school and especially the way in which gender cuts through this process is well illustrated in Datnow's work. As she points out, '...the opportunity for teachers to gain or lose power is an underestimated yet threatening byproduct of whole school reform efforts, particularly those that address existing organizational arrangements' (Datnow, 2000: 150). Blackmore (1999) and Ozga (2000) also consider the gendered aspects of reform, particularly from the position of women in leadership roles.

The two professional communities to be discussed here are very much emergent and 'works in progress'. They have been selected for the way in which they illustrate aspects of the teacher professional learning community model. In this context the implications of gender, and indeed, disability, class, race, or first language of the teachers, while acknowledged as issues, are not explicitly considered here. Another space for further thought that is not considered in depth here is the socioemotional aspect of school reform. The emotional labour of teaching and individual teacher investments in classrooms and students is an often overlooked factor in school reform policy. These are points that we cannot address here, since they are deeply personal and require more in depth study than our narratives may provide.

Rather we are considering some observable aspects of effective teacher professional learning communities that may function together in various ways to improve the overall learning communities within and between schools. What follows is a discussion of two school contexts, drawn from schools participating in the New Basics Project. We outline their progress to date and consider the implications of this process. These two contexts are emergent and face their own specific difficulties, resistances and barriers. However, it needs to be acknowledged that the teachers and administrators within these schools have taken significant risks in order to engage with the notion of teacher professional learning communities. In what follows the case study narratives are italicised while our comments and analysis is in standard text.

Context A: Teacher Professional Learning Communities across faculties in a secondary school.

School A is a secondary school with a student population of approximately 750. Prior to joining the New Basics trial, the school had developed a curriculum that was based around four frameworks. This curriculum was interdisciplinary, thus often requiring teachers to teach away from their area of expertise. Confusion reigned and the staff members were generally unhappy with this framework.

The District Director convened a meeting of all administration members, two union representatives and two staff members. Issues were discussed and a clear set of assumptions developed. One of these assumptions required a working party to be established. The members of this working party consisted of one member of the administration team, three heads of department and three teachers. The individuals who comprised this group were drawn from parties who had been both supportive and critical of the previous school curriculum framework.

As previous communication between staff, committee members and administration had been poor two strategies were proposed. First, the District Director delivered a workshop on professional dialogue to all staff in the school. Second, the working party developed a feedback loop that would attempt to engage and empower all school stakeholders. This entailed each working party member being assigned to a staffroom. Their role here was to raise and discuss any issues or problems with staff. They would then feed these staff interactions back to the working party. Ideas and

suggestions were examined and recommendations developed. Recommendations were then submitted to staff meetings for endorsement. As the staff was large, concerns regarding the level of input from all stakeholders emerged. It was decided to divide the staff into smaller groups within the staff meeting context so all voices could be heard. In this way recommendations were modified and ratified.

One of the recommendations endorsed was to design a structure that would support the principles of the New Basics curriculum. This was also aimed at alleviating the concerns flowing from the collapse of the previous school curriculum framework. As a consequence, three transdisciplinary teams were established. This concept was so popular that a selection process was necessary, with the administration team forced to ask for expressions of interest from the staff.

Each of the teams is identical in its structure but unique in its function. The teams consist of seven teachers, with each teacher having expertise in one of the following operational fields of knowledge; Maths, Science, Health and Physical Education, English, Study of Society and the Environment, Business and Information Technology, and Technology and Design. Due to human resource constraints, the following teachers act as "floaters" between the three teams; Art, LOTE, Performing Arts and Home Economics. All year 8 and 9 students are divided equally among the three teams. Students remain with that team of seven teachers for two years. The timetable is flexible with teams (not subjects) being allocated fourteen lessons per week. This theoretically equates to two lessons per week for each subject area. However, if a particular unit of work requires an intensive session with a particular subject area, that subject area can negotiate the borrowing and repaying of time from other subject areas.

Discussion of Context A

There are many positive results from this school based reform process and the emergent focus on developing teacher professional learning communities. Initially, some staff found the "freedom" of the New Basics curriculum difficult. However, they now feel empowered as their subject area expertise is being valued. Many teachers are now beginning to question and challenge their personal and shared ideas and goals. For example, during one particular unit planning session a maths teacher suggested that students should have acquired measurement skills prior to their first maths lesson. One of the other teachers responded by pointing out that, actually, he was the best person to deliver that knowledge. High levels of leadership are required to encourage the space for such debate, disagreement and cooperation to develop and continue.

The teacher professional learning communities in this school context seem to be emerging in a complex and multi-layered fashion. These layers consist of the working party, the three year 8/9 teaching teams and overall whole school. What is developing is a situation where the drivers of the reform, the working party, are ensuring that there is an efficient feedback loop of communication. Although this feedback loop functions in a significant way for the year 8/9 teachers involved in the New Basics trial, there is also a whole school layer. It is hoped that such discussions will ultimately lead to a sense of both shared norms and values and a climate of collaboration.

The professional dialogue within each of the three teams has gradually moved from organisational debates regarding timetables to reflective dialogue surrounding curriculum implementation. Following this reflective dialogue an audit has occurred. Some teachers, for example, were surprised at the extent of curriculum repetition and/or omission that had previously occurred across the faculties. Discussions around this topic have required teachers to focus on pedagogy and curriculum with a view to what it is that students are experiencing and learning in their school.

There are, however, negative aspects to this process reflecting the particular micropolitics of the school and the teachers' levels of resistance and/or motivation for change. One example of this is that each of the three year 8/9 teaching teams now functions in isolation from the others. This is despite the need to consult between the three teams in order to find the most effective place for the group of 'floating' teachers. It is also necessary to consider in this context the effect of this upon the group of 'floating' teachers, the perceived valuing (or otherwise) of their work and their position within the three or more emerging teacher professional learning communities. This fresh 'balkanisation' also results in the effectiveness of the project as a whole being seriously compromised when all three teams are required to meet together.

Context B: A Teacher professional learning community attempting to bridge the primary/secondary divide

School B is a secondary school with a population of approximately 870 students. These students are drawn from a range of feeder primary schools in the district. Within the New Basics Project, secondary teachers are required to take part in the development of a three-year curriculum plan that spans years 7-9. This juncture was deliberately set across the primary/secondary divide to encourage teachers from both sectors to discuss and create a seamless curriculum that is intellectually challenging, particularly for year 8 students. Initially, the year 8 teachers felt they could adequately cover the skills and knowledges required to successfully complete the Rich Tasks in year 9. However, once they became immersed in the requirements of each task and began to backward map from these tasks, some teachers realised they would need considerable input and collaboration with their primary colleagues.

Initially, subject faculty meetings were convened and one year 7 teacher from one of the feeder schools was invited to join these meetings. This particular feeder school is the only primary feeder school that is also a New Basics trial school. The secondary teachers presented their proposed curriculum for year 8 students. The year 7 teacher interjected many times that they had already covered the same skills and knowledges in years 6 and 7. For example, a year 8 introductory unit was discussed. During this discussion the year 7 teacher responded by indicating that the concepts in this unit were already covered in year 6. Also discussed in these meetings was the repetitive nature of year 8 work when considered in relation to the primary curriculum.

To achieve a more coherent curriculum across year 7-9, teachers from both sectors ascertained the need to establish a collective responsibility for student outcomes. It was then decided to convene a meeting for all year 7 teachers in all primary feeder schools. The Principal, Critical Friend and some staff from the high school also attended this meeting. Most of these schools were non New Basic trial schools.

Consequently, some primary teachers were initially reluctant to take part as they envisaged it would require extra work. However, teachers found this initial meeting so professionally enriching that regular meetings have now been requested.

A framework in which to collect crucial data was developed. Year 7 teachers were asked to identify the repertoires of practice from the year 7-9 juncture that they currently covered. Their task was to then collectively determine which of these repertoires of practice or parts of skills they were prepared to take responsibility for. They were then to outline the context in which this would occur and the depth in which these skills and knowledges would be covered. To determine the understanding of depth, teachers designed a statement that clearly articulated each level. This collective task promoted much critical and reflective professional dialogue. All information was collated and shared among all stakeholders. This process has been widely accepted and appreciated, with teachers now having a clear understanding of curriculum requirements and a foundation for planning in the context of New Basics.

Discussion of Context B

The outcomes from these initial meetings have been inspiring. The reflective dialogue between teachers has meant that a curriculum review has occurred both within and between the sectors. It is hoped that this will curb the endless repetition and potential for reduction in intellectual demand that is currently in operation, particularly for year 8s (QSRLS, 2001, reported a decrease in all dimensions of productive pedagogies in year 8). The process has been an awakening for many of the secondary teachers, with the intellectual demand of year 8 and 9 work currently on offer being challenged.

Teachers from both sectors have been forced to re-evaluate their expectations of students. Part of this re-evaluation has seen the primary teachers invite their secondary colleagues into their classrooms. This potential deprivatisation of practice will further challenge the current thinking from both sectors and hopefully promote continued dialogue focused on improving pedagogy. This process may also begin building teachers' collective responsibility for the social and academic outcomes of students. These meetings have been particularly highly valued by the primary teachers and they are committed to the meetings as an ongoing practice.

It is, however, an extremely difficult task to break down the traditional barriers to reform in the secondary school context. First, teachers must have the capacity and the will to embrace the change. Some of the teachers, who are close to retirement, but also in positions of curriculum leadership, operate to obstruct the change process through a resistance that maintains the status quo. In the context of School B, there are gendered aspects to the resistance, reflecting the study by Datnow (2000), where the men in a school resisted the push for reform by a group of women. In Datnow's study gender was more significant than age and in the long run it was gendered resistance that impeded and finally closed down the reform process.

Another obstacle to the promotion of teacher professional learning communities is the unwillingness of the secondary teachers to share staffrooms with teachers from different disciplinary areas. Such a resistance has a major impact upon the achievement of the high levels of collaboration and reflective dialogue required to successfully plan the transdisciplinary work of years 8 and 9. Also, the inconsistent

attendance of secondary teachers at meetings with the primary teachers undermines the value of this professional dialogue. This inconsistency on the part of some secondary teachers also reinforces a perception that the secondary teachers are providing the primary teachers with the 'favour' of their presence, rather than viewing the meetings as a professional necessity. For this particular teacher professional learning community to develop in a sustained fashion, it is imperative that the secondary teachers make a commitment to the meetings. It is also imperative that there are leadership practices within the secondary school that support this commitment through the provision of the space and time to attend meetings and follow up on the invitation to visit the primary classrooms.

Conclusion

Through studying the two examples provided here, it becomes obvious that there are many more questions to be asked and a lot more negotiation, cooperation and debate required to not only continue developing but also sustaining these two teacher professional learning communities. The risks already taken by many teachers and administrators in these two contexts must also be not only recognised but supported and maintained.

An underlying objective of teacher professional learning communities is to acknowledge the significance of the impact that teachers may have on their students' schooling outcomes. This is a notion that requires great care, for while placing teachers at the centre of reform is necessary, it is also vital that the need for very high levels of institutional, systemic and school-based support for their work is acknowledged and built into the school's organisational capacity.

We would also argue that while there are identifiable aspects by which a teacher professional learning community may be recognised, there is no single template for teacher professional learning communities. Further, we would also suggest that the aspects of teacher professional learning communities presented here need to be expanded to begin taking into account the various personal, political and emotional investments of teachers in their work. Despite the complexities and potential disasters lurking in the notion of teacher professional learning communities, it is one way in which the significant intellectual, emotional, social and political work that many teachers do on a daily basis may be made visible, valued and supported. If Education Queensland is to be a central component of 'The Smart State' agenda, increasing support for the development and sustenance of teacher professional learning communities is surely a vital move.

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