

**A CASE STUDY OF A NETWORKED
LEARNING COMMUNITY: THE “THIRD SPACE”**

by

PIUS RYAN

B. Arts. Memorial University of Newfoundland 1991
B. Eds. Memorial University of Newfoundland 1993
M. Ed. School Psychology, University of British Columbia 2001

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Educational Leadership and Policy)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Vancouver)

October, 2009

©Pius Ryan, 2009

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to develop a deeper understanding of the formation, operation, and impacts of a networked learning community within a geographically and culturally diverse school district in British Columbia, Canada. The general approach used for this research was case study methodology. As such, the work must be appreciated as a whole and as a narrative of how something came to be the way it is; in other words, to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the group under study: Who are its members? What are their stable and recurring modes of activity and interaction? How are they related to one another and how is the group related to the rest of the world? The primary data sources for the study were network participant interviews and documents related to the network. The main findings of the study include a deeper understanding of the impact Ministry and School District level policies and practice had on the network's inception and evolution; the operational details and structure that supported the network in order to create the conditions for learning; and how the perceived success was based upon focused "teacher talk". Implications for practice include an understanding of how seemingly simple system actions are influenced by a broad array of macro and micro socio-political actions, as well as the historical context of an organization. The research also suggests that networks are not an end in themselves or fit into a prescribed typology but constitute a shifting terrain with impacts beyond the life of the network.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
CHAPTER 1	1
INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 RESEARCH PURPOSE	6
1.2 RATIONALE AND RESEARCH BENEFITS	8
1.3 PERSONAL BACKGROUND	9
1.4 RESEARCHER/PRACTITIONER	13
1.5 STRUCTURE OF DISSERTATION	16
CHAPTER 2	17
LITERATURE REVIEW	17
2.1 ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE AND THE SPIRIT OF THE TIMES	17
2.2 PUBLIC SCHOOLING: A CALL FOR CHANGE	19
2.3 RECENT TRENDS: THE NETWORK BRIDGE	21
2.4 THE NETWORK SOCIETY	21
2.5 NETWORK LOGIC, DEFINITION, AND TYPOLOGIES	24
2.6 THE DARK SIDE OF NETWORKS	28
2.7 POWER AND DECISION-MAKING	29
2.8 NETWORKS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLING	31
2.8.1 Dissemination of “Good” Practice	33
2.8.2 Enhance Professional Development of Teachers	34
2.8.3 Support Capacity Building in Schools	35
2.8.4 Mediate Between Centralised and Decentralised Structures	37
2.8.5 Assist in the Process of Re-Structuring and Re-Culturing Educational Organizations	39
2.9 SUMMARY OF LITERATURE REVIEW	40
CHAPTER 3	42
CASE STUDY RESEARCH	42
3.1 INTRODUCTION	42
3.2 CASE STUDY: A HEURISTIC DEVICE	42
3.2.1 Characteristics of Case Study Research	42
3.2.2 The Fit of Case Study and the Current Project	44
3.2.3 Case Study Critique	46
3.2.4 Epistemological and Methodological Assumptions	47
3.2.5 Double Hermeneutics	49
3.2.6 Rigor and Verification Bias	51
3.2.7 Generalization	51
3.3 RESEARCH FRAMEWORK	55
3.3.1 Methodology	55
3.3.2 Mixed Methods	56
3.3.3 Design	56
3.3.4 Network Participants	57
3.3.5 Data Collection Techniques	58
3.3.6 Interview Data	58
3.3.7 Documents	59
3.3.8 Data Sampling	60
3.3.9 Data Analysis	60
3.3.10 Quality of the Research	62

3.3.11	Writing the Report.....	65
3.3.12	Purpose of Research.....	65
CHAPTER 4	66
CASE CONTEXT.....	66
4.1	FINDINGS: CHARACTERIZING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CASE	66
4.2	EDUCATIONAL AND POLITICAL TRENDS INFLUENCING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ESSN	66
4.3	PROVINCIAL POLITICAL CONTEXT	67
4.4	EDUCATIONAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT.....	71
4.5	CREATION AND EVOLUTION OF THE ESSN.....	74
4.6	SUMMARY OF CASE CONTEXT	76
CHAPTER 5	78
FINDINGS	78
5.1	FINDINGS: OPERATION OF NETWORK FROM KEY PLAYERS.....	78
5.2	SUCCESS: THE BIG IDEAS	78
5.2.1	Teacher Talk.....	78
5.2.2	Shared Language Development.....	83
5.2.3	Relaxed Environment – Voices Matter	86
5.2.4	Network Architecture.....	88
5.2.5	Experience of Membership	90
5.2.6	Balance of Leadership.....	91
5.2.7	Connections with Larger Networks.....	92
5.2.8	Participant Critique	93
5.3	NARROWING OF PRACTICE	94
5.4	SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW FINDINGS	96
CHAPTER 6	98
DISCUSSION.....	98
6.1	INTRODUCTION.....	98
6.2	THE IDEAL VS. THE REAL.....	98
6.3	NETWORKS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS	101
6.3.1	Networks Support the Dissemination of Good Practice	101
6.3.2	Enhance Professional Development of Teachers	103
6.3.3	Support Capacity Building in Schools	104
6.3.4	Mediate Between Centralised and Decentralised Structures	105
6.3.5	Assist in the Process of Re-structuring and Re-culturing Educational Organizations.....	106
6.4	POWER RELATIONS AND POWER CONFIGURATIONS	107
6.5	DARK SIDE.....	110
6.6	COMPREHENSIVE UNDERSTANDING OF THE CASE.....	113
6.7	SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION	117
CHAPTER 7	119
SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS.....	119
7.1	STUDY OVERVIEW	119
7.2	THE THIRD SPACE	120
7.3	CREATING A LEARNING ORGANIZATION	122
7.4	NETWORKS AS A DISTRICT PRACTICE	124
7.5	NETWORKS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PERSONAL PRACTICE	127
7.6	POLICY MAKERS AND RESEARCHERS	129
7.7	CRITIQUE AND AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	132
7.8	CLOSING COMMENTS	134
REFERENCES	136

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In a rapidly changing society schools are beginning to discover that new ideas, knowledge creation, and sharing are essential to solving learning problems. The challenge for educational leaders is how to cultivate and sustain learning under conditions of complex, and rapid change (Fullan, 1992, p.5).

Today's school districts face significant challenges. Within the milieu of an increasingly complex society, rapidly changing technologies, and an increasing focus on academic standards and accountability, school districts are being asked to educate a more diverse student population (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Reynolds, Creemers, Stringfield, Teddie, & Schaffer, 2002). Adding to this challenge, British Columbia's school districts face the reality of a high turnover of teachers and administrators due to retirements resulting in a loss of experienced educators (BCTF, 2004). It is within this context of change and complexity that school districts fulfill their responsibility of preparing individuals to participate in a knowledge-based global economy where continual change and continual learning are the norm (Castells, 1996; Hargreaves, 2003; Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, & Kleiner, 2000; Wood, 1995).

In order for school districts to support students in this rapidly changing landscape of learning and knowledge they need to support teacher development including the capability of continual learning and adaptation (Abbott, 2002; Hargreaves, 2003; Palmer, 1998; Smith, 2001). As Fullan notes "the success of system change is as simple and as complex as what teachers think and do" (1992, p. 6). Ostensibly, to support teachers in meeting the schooling demands of today's society (e.g., continual learning) education systems need to rethink basic organizational frameworks (Isaacson & Bamberg, 1992). This includes the development of a more horizontal decision-making structure supported through a collaborative culture (Hargreaves, 2003). Networks and a focus on the interrelationships among constituents are important to this potential framework for public schooling because much of teacher practice is tacit in nature and must be shared in a social context (Castells, 2000; Hargreaves, 2003).

A relatively new and promising organizational metaphor to support the development of this framework is the idea of a “learning organization” (Fullan, 2000; Hargreaves, 2003; O’Neil, 1995; Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, & Kleiner, 2000).

A learning organization is broadly defined by its continuous testing of experience, the transformation of that experience into knowledge that is accessible to the whole organization, and relevant to its core purpose (Senge et al., 1994). Learning organizations stress self-reinforcing learning, enabling employees working together in teams to respond to new signals and trends in the market place (Senge, 1990).

The “ideal” learning organization carries profound implications for the redesign of teaching and learning processes, the way school professionals define their roles, and the way schools are structured and regulated (Cibulka, Coursey, Nakayama, Price, & Stewart, 2000). As such, much has been made of the “learning organization” metaphor as recent literature, conferences and websites have been and continue to be devoted to its transformative potential in public schooling. Like many educational reform efforts, the development of learning organizations in many cases has not transferred beyond the conference room floor, and educators and administrators continue to struggle with the concept and its implementation. The lack of generalization and implementation may be due to the magnitude of the change implied, and the power of the status quo regarding the bureaucratic design of schooling. Alternatively, it may be that the idea of a “learning organization” and how it might apply to public schooling has not been duly considered, and/or that the history of schooling along with the merit of the egg crate school design¹ and bureaucratic decision-making model are not fully appreciated. For example, teacher education does contain areas of expertise that require study and core knowledge sets that are taught and/or mentored to new generations of teachers such as classroom management, lesson planning, as well as assessment of learning. Respectively, the egg crate design of schools is functional and allows us to educate large numbers of students efficiently. On the other hand, in a world where knowledge creation far exceeds our capacity to learn, and information sharing via tools such

¹ The designs of most schools resemble the shape of an egg crate. There is a hall down the middle and a series of pockets (i.e. classrooms) where the design limits interaction between classes (Lortie, 1975).

as the Internet, I-pods, Blackberrys (to name a few) is more responsive to learners needs, the historic role of a teacher must evolve accordingly. Therefore continual learning opportunities for teachers need to be embedded in schooling organizations given the changing context of society.

Albeit, as in any change process, the steps for change need to be clear and the practicality and benefit of the change needs to outweigh the frustration experienced by those implementing the change. In general, human beings persevere with change because we are convinced that our lives will be improved. It might be that the merit of developing a learning organization has not been adequately demonstrated in relation to public schooling. Indeed some argue that the school as a learning organization remains a distant dream (Fullan, 1995; Gunter, 1996; Isaacson & Bamberg, 1992; Knight, 1998; O'Neil, 1995).

A practical step towards the vision of a learning organization in public schooling is the creation of networks, specifically learning networks. Definitions of a network range from everyone you know and everyone who knows you, to a highly contextualized and fluid concept, to a map of lines between points, an explicitly spatial and defined representation (Lipnack & Stamps, 1986). Learning networks share similar attributes to a learning organization, such as people working together to create new practices, horizontal decision making, and continual learning, but they can work outside the political structure of an organization. They may be smaller in scale in regards to organizational ends and as such may focus on a subject area and/or theme like literacy. Further, networks can exist across organizations as the focus is not politically tied to individual organizational ends. Networks hold promise as an intermediate and practical step between the status quo of public schooling² that has been argued to be learning disabled (Knight, 1998) and the vision of a learning organization. A particular type of network, a Networked Learning Community

² NLCs are distinct from the concept of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). NLCs provide a more directed pursuit of what is to be learned as in communities of practice learning is seen to happen simply by being connected with other practitioners without the need for explicit agency. As well, a network is likely to be more precarious than the communities of practice upon which it draws. Networks create communication across communities, and practices. The driver for communities of practice is the individual who wants to participate as a full working member. Networks create routes where individuals create opportunities for themselves and their group, and use resources of their group to make their network succeed (Thorpe & Kubiak, 2005)

(hereafter referred to as NLC) has shown promise in supporting teachers (Hopkins, 2003). NLCs involve groups of teachers and schools joined together with the explicit aim of enhancing teaching and learning throughout a school or groups of schools, not just sharing practices (Hopkins, 2003). Ideally, NLCs bring together individuals or institutions in a horizontal partnership with regard to decision-making power, where the rationales for action are democratic exchange, mutual stimulation and motivation, rather than top-down reforms (Sliwka, 2003).

Research shows that appropriate inter-connectivity of well-managed networks within organizations can have a substantial impact on performance, learning, and innovation (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998). Notably, these networks are “managed” and therefore linked to organizational goals not driven solely by the interests of network participants. Yet despite the potential of networks as an organizational tool, executives rarely attempt to assess or support them (Uzzi, 1997). This may be because networks have not been understood as a potential tool in organizational development, and/or that managers may be fearful that networks will change the power dynamics within the workplace and thereby threaten positional power held by administration.

Another reason networks have yet to be fully appreciated as an organizational tool is that in their “ideal” form networks may not support organizational ends and may interfere with the management of an organization. The realities of organizations are that there are finite resources, competing budget priorities, politics, and organizational needs that management is empowered to act upon. The “ideal” network operates from a more democratic perspective in that knowledge creation and sharing is the goal although this may not align with organizational priorities. A fundamental difference between the “ideal” network and a network as an organizational tool is what actions will be taken on behalf of the organization as a result of network participation. In other words, the direction or focus of the network is not democratically determined. A fundamental difference between networks inside an organization and outside the organization is the power to act on behalf of an organization and the subsequent socio-political power differences when a network is given the power to influence budget priorities or policy. Organizational leaders need to consider what aspects of

network thinking support organizational ends and organizational management. Practicality demands that networks utilised towards organizational ends cannot hold onto the “ideal” as the realities of budget decisions, politics, and organizational priorities require organizational actions, even networks, to have an organizational function linked to positive organizational ends. In order for networks to be seen as a value-added organizational tool they have to support the administration of the organization.

The creation of learning networks in organizations like public schools may hold particular merit as teaching practice and educational knowledge are for a large part tacit in nature; estimates vary between 70-90% (Aalst, 2003). In addition, a large part of the management of public schooling is done through classroom instruction. This is where educational policy is implemented in the form of curriculum. Teacher networks may provide a critical link between the current structural and cultural practices of public schooling (e.g., egg crate design, professional isolation, and hierarchical decision-making by individuals removed from classroom practice, etc.) and the process of continual learning. They can provide a context wherein interconnecting pathways and linkages to avenues of enquiry can be opened-up, explored and expanded. Networks have the potential to support “the flows of theories, thoughts, cultures, and innovations articulated between schools and other education institutions” (Chapman, 2003, p. 42).

Networks may play an important role for public education³ as the interconnectedness of the societies we live in increases. Due to new communication technologies and economic globalization, we paradoxically seem to have less time for human to human intimacy. For example, my colleagues and I receive more and more e-mails each week but our responses become shorter and less and less intimate. Given this context, the development of explicit face-to-face network structures may be of even greater importance as they provide the time and space for people to get to know one another and share their realities. I see this as fundamental to the promotion of education within the public schooling enterprise.

³ I define education as the process of developing ‘kinds of understandings’ through relationships and the use of mediating tools for the purpose of helping us live and contribute positively to life in the private and public space.

The promotion of education is not as straightforward as one may think as public schooling is a “system that reinforces hierarchy, power differentials and regulatory arrangements that predetermine people’s places, create barriers that emphasize differences and establish distance between people” (Wiens & Coulter, 2005, p. 22). Without meaningful human interaction, it may become easier for us to see people as objects and not as others we wish to live with and understand. This may have significant impact on the culture of a schooling organization where teachers do not know one another, and are not aware of their colleagues’ experiences at other school sites, or the political pressures administrators’ experience. Ongoing networks may facilitate people getting to know one another and being connected to their colleagues and as such enable organizational action. As an organizational tool, networks would have to go beyond being a social club for practitioners and positively link to student learning.

Given the potential of networks as vehicles of change, it is remarkable that few studies have investigated networks within public schooling. More surprising are the few attempts to understand how district level practices can improve learning systemically (e.g., district, school, teacher, and student learning) (Maguire, 2003; Pajak, & Glickman, 1989; Fullan, Bertani, & Quinn, 2004). To this end, a close analysis of one school district’s attempt to create a teacher network may provide insight into future individual and organizational efforts to support teacher learning.

1.1 RESEARCH PURPOSE

The purpose of this research was to develop a deeper understanding of the formation, operation, and impacts of the Early School Success Network (hereafter referred to as ESSN) in a particular British Columbian school district. Ostensibly, the ESSN fits within the typology of a NLC. One definition of a NLC is a group of teachers and schools joined together for the purposes of school improvement with the explicit aim of enhancing teaching and learning throughout a school or group of schools, not just sharing practices (Hopkins, 2003). The degree to which this group of teachers represent an “ideal” type of a network is to be explored. The “ideal” NLCs would include horizontal partnerships, where the rationales are democratic exchange, and mutual stimulation and motivation, rather than top-

down reforms. It is of particular interest to see what aspects of the “ideal” network are evident in the ESSN and what influence organizational realities have on its operation and evolution.

The ESSN was a network of teachers formed in 2002 to find ways to prevent reading problems in kindergarten and grade one children. Initially, it was a voluntary group where interested teachers were originally provided release time to share practices, and come to agreement on a common assessment framework for early reading. Within three months, the teachers involved noted improvement in their student reading results, and they demonstrated gains in practitioner and research knowledge. This study is designed to gain greater understanding of the ESSN.

A NLC is a purposeful social entity identified to improve both teacher and student learning. As a purposeful social entity deployed within and by an organization, I did not expect it to function without some degree of administrator influence. In other words, I did not expect to find the “ideal” network. Of interest was to what degree the group under study was an “ideal” network versus an instrument of organizational policy. Ultimately, various power structures exist within and outside of an organization that impact organizational actions (e.g. government policy and funding to referential teacher power). To what degree was the evolution and operation of the ESSN outside this policy context? To what degree did it influence historic power structures within the organization from decentralised to more centralised decision-making?

Case study was the heuristic⁴ device chosen to study the ESSN. Case study is the appropriate choice for inquiry when the researcher seeks an in-depth, holistic understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved (Merriam, 1998). The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation (Merriam, 1998). Orum, Feagin, and Sjoberb (1991) posit the principal argument for case study research is that it “provides a way of studying human events and actions in their natural settings” (p. 7). As such, it enables researchers to understand the

⁴ Heuristic means that case studies illuminate the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1998).

larger social configurations of participants, actions, and motives. The researcher can also discern the impact of these events or actions on beliefs and decisions or the web of social interaction.

In discussing the purpose of case study, Becker (1970) succinctly summarizes its aims:

To arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the group under study: Who are its members? What are their stable and recurring modes of activity and interaction? How are they related to one another and how is the group related to the rest of the world? (p. 26)

The aims of this case study were threefold: (1) to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the ESSN; and (2) to develop general theoretical statements about regularities in its social structure and process; and (3) to explore key propositions identified in the literature on networks, specifically NLCs. The goal of the case study was to illuminate the “case” by providing readers with a rich description of the socio-political, contextual evolution of the ESSN in the school district as well as develop NLC propositions for analytical generalization to their sites of practice.

1.2 RATIONALE AND RESEARCH BENEFITS

The school district studied presented a unique opportunity for the practitioner/researcher to look at one school district’s attempt to influence systemic learning through a teacher network. The school district’s creation of an educational network is a micro representation of the changes in practice that researchers like Fullan (1995) and Hargreaves (2003) have argued are necessary, and may provide insight for practitioners that have been seeking to create a learning organization.

As a practitioner/researcher, the use of case study is a means to develop socio-political expertise. Flyvberg (2001) asserts that there “is a need to restore social science to its classical position as a practical, intellectual activity at clarifying the problems, risks, and possibilities we face as humans and societies, and at contributing to social and political praxis” (p. 4). Following this argument, social inquiry’s purpose becomes to aid the decision making of social and political participants within a “real” life context. The goal of social

research is the development of practical wisdom, and therefore research must consider context, power relations, and the realities of social life, that is knowledge of the particular not the universal. This is the goal embodied in the development of an expert or virtuoso social-political participant (Flyvberg, 2001).

In addition, this research was intended to fill a number of gaps identified in the literature on organizations, public schooling, and social science inquiry. First, there is a general paucity of research on learning organizations and networks in public schooling (Tsang, 1997; Ortenblad, 2000; Istance & Kobayashi, 2003). Second, networks, as a structure in creating learning organizations, have been overlooked in key writings on learning organizations. This is a serious flaw in the literature on learning organizations that needs to be rectified. In particular, as the trend is to an understanding of learning as a social process (Easterby-Smith & Aurjo, 1999), and that relationships are key to building organizational capacity (Coleman, 1993), networks provide the space and/or container for these developments. Third, this study focuses on a district level initiative and leadership which has been called for by researchers on educational improvement (MaGuire, 2003). Much of the research on educational improvement efforts have focused on school and/or teacher level initiatives (Coleman & Laroque, 1989) and has not until recently recognized the value and influence of district level support and practice (MaGuire, 2003; Fullan, 2005). Finally, this research adds to the educational discourse on developing learning organizations by illuminating theory grounded in practice that can aid other school districts in a pragmatic and concrete manner on this journey.

1.3 PERSONAL BACKGROUND

My interest in learning organization theory and practice stems from an appreciation of the “Utopian Ideals”⁵ that some of the learning organization theorists espouse. That is, the realization of human potential and the bringing of one’s entire self to the work setting. It has

⁵ Michaela Driver (2002) critically reviews two identified research communities which argue about whether the learning organization is a dream or a nightmare, particularly with regard to three critical dimensions: control, ideology, and potential pain for employee experience. One community presents the learning organization concept as a positive ideal – a new workplace paradise for employees. I allude to the utopian ideal of societies living in perfect harmony with work life providing significant fulfillment.

been a personal and professional journey that has drawn me to these “ideals”. In my evolving role as an educator from a childcare worker, learning assistance teacher, school psychologist, to a District Administrator, my interest in the “ideal” of a learning organization has evolved naturally. From a personal insight early in my career that a large part of my life would be spent at work and therefore as part of my life’s fulfillment, I would need to bring as much of myself to my work as possible, albeit this commitment to work would need to be balanced with a similar commitment to other aspects of my life such as family. With this realization came a related resolution that I should make the most of my work by continued learning about the field I chose and aim to develop professionally throughout my life.

My view of work and life has been in part informed by many writers; however two in particular stand out regarding my view on the interaction of work and leisure. Both writers, Viktor Frankl and Bertrand Russell, comment on a person’s search for meaning, and how to lead a happy life. In their respective observations, Frankl (1946) noted that those individuals who survived the atrocities of the Nazi death camps were not necessarily the strongest physically, but those who had a clear purpose in their lives. Frankl comments that for him this meaning was a book that had been destroyed by Nazi invaders. Russell, in his commentary on *The Conquest of Happiness* (1930), notes that from his observations people who seem generally content are those with clear pursuits that engage them. He gives the examples of his gardener who is determined to eradicate the gofers that intrude in his gardening, and the scientist who is attempting to eradicate much simpler creatures such as bacteria, and how both individuals appear more content with their lives than those without such clear pursuits. What I have drawn from such readings has been the importance to seek out meaning in all aspects of my life, and seeing that work occupies a large majority of this time it is only fitting that it have full purpose and meaning. One of the philosophical underpinnings of learning organizations is that workers will be happier and more fulfilled if they can bring their whole self to work and find fulfillment in their work (Kofman & Senge, 1995).

Professionally, my roles as a childcare worker, teacher, psychologist, and administrator have fundamentally had the same core belief: that is, to support the creation of the best possible

outcomes for whomever I was working with whether a school-aged child, fellow teacher, or administrator. Much of this work has consciously or unconsciously relied on creating an environment that supports others and hopefully their search for meaning. Personal observations have led me to believe that for individuals to create and capitalise on their own personal vision, the system of which they are a part must give consent that this is acceptable. For example, a student who is in a tightly controlled classroom, and has no input into how activities are designed, can only emulate the person in charge and will have more difficulty finding their own voice and consequently their own passion. In a similar way a teacher or administrator who is confined by a particularly rigid system will likely find that they are caught up in fulfilling the system's needs rather than exploring their own needs. This is not to say that a system does not need a structure, but that the design of that structure needs to allow for the evolution and exploration of its members while still getting the job done. Proponents of the learning organization have argued that the architecture of an organization is of paramount importance in enabling employees (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, Roth, & Smith, 1994).

Realistically, creating an enabling environment is far from sufficient in meeting the needs of the diverse groups represented in public school. Indeed, there is a core curriculum that is expected by the public to be taught, as well as expected outcomes for students. Working within the noted boundaries of an educational system, how does one facilitate the development of personal vision, and ensure publicly determined outcomes for all students?

In the late 1990s, with a shifting focus to learning from teaching, three themes - evidence-based decision-making, data-driven dialogue, and assessment to instruction - became popular administrative terms in my school district. The focus was on student achievement and methods to ensure that teachers and administrators were doing the best they could, and could prove it. Although these methods for determining quality decision making, and improved student outcomes were an ostensibly needed framing for educational decisions, and could provide a common vocabulary for discussing practice, they inevitably appeared to lack a human connectedness as to what was important (e.g., human interaction and democratic processes).

It was the innovation of a district educational network structure for an early school success initiative that provided a structural framework wherein teachers were able to come together to discuss practice, albeit under the aforementioned guiding principles, as well as the objective of bringing research to practice. The district educational network had a teacher from each school in the district volunteer to come together and investigate how research on early reading development could be translated into practice. The group met four times in the first year, and the evolution of the individuals, and the group was noted by both those in and out of the group. In particular, it was observed that the knowledge base of each teacher involved regarding early literacy had grown significantly, and that as an educational system we were much better informed as to what the research was presenting as best practice. Further, a systemic assessment framework had been established and embedded across all schools, and teachers had a core vocabulary to share practice. In addition, a number of teachers who participated in the network took on leadership roles in their schools, and appeared to be more confident regarding their teaching practice.

Observing the apparent power derived within this educational network, under the guiding themes, I became interested in the “ideals” set forth by proponents of the learning organization. It was the less tangible change in teacher motivation and empowerment that underscored the apparent success of the ESSN, and I became intrigued as to what triggered this development.

In particular, I became intrigued with the notion that wouldn't it be great if we could recreate this network on a greater scale where teacher development and student outcomes were both positively influenced. This thinking led me to the construct of a “learning organization” as espoused by Kofman and Senge (1995). Since that time my investigations have broadened and deepened my appreciation of the various thinkers on the learning organization and organizational learning.

In the summer of 2003, I became involved in the University of British Columbia's doctoral program in Educational Leadership and Policy. A significant feature of this program is to conduct research on your own practice. The ESSN was a key aspect of my work in my school district, and I had a vested interest in developing a broader understanding of it as an

organizational vehicle to support teachers, and the school district towards a better schooling organization.

1.4 RESEARCHER/PRACTITIONER

To situate myself within this research, I was one of the District Administrators who facilitated the grass-roots movement, and subsequently facilitated the ESSN during its first two years of operation. It was a personal observation that the outcome of the network involvement for teachers appeared to result in significant gains in knowledge of early reading, evidence of teacher leadership, and the building of positive relationships between district staff and classroom teachers. As a District Administrator I believed the ESSN was a good method to support teachers towards improving student learning. The network became a focus in my doctoral studies. I moved to the Surrey School District in 2006 and as such have gained some distance from the ESSN work. I believe this has provided me with a less biased perspective, but in the end readers need to keep in mind that I studied work I personally helped to shape.

Within the EdD program I was challenged to reflect deeply upon what my practice was as an educational leader, what education meant to me, and the challenges of public schooling in promoting education. A brief review of my current practice in relation to these inquiries may help the reader understand my viewpoint and potential biases.

At present, I work as a Director of Instruction for the Surrey School District. Until 2006, I was a Director of Instruction for the school district under study where my direct responsibilities included the creation and implementation of policy and procedures for the delivery of special education programs, supervision of itinerant staff, and the implementation of early literacy and social problem solving curriculum. In addition, I worked closely with one other Director of Instruction on the district's education plan, and accountability framework. In my role, I am often challenged to decide upon the "right" systemic direction to support students within the constraints of organizational realities (e.g., collective agreements, ministry and organizational policies, etc.), and competing individual and public views (e.g., parents, teachers, students, media). My work was situated within a context of

public schooling that was decentralised seven years ago, where all decisions were made at the school level. Since that time, there has been a gradual recentralization of a number of systemic decisions in key areas. My practice in the school district was situated within these noted organizational constraints and resultant socio-cultural power dynamics.

My practice⁶ as an educational leader within this context is defined by the action I take to promote education⁷ within the constraints of public schooling. Action is not only about doing but about understanding. The break down of practice into labour, work, and action helps me to reflect on what my day to day activities look like, and as such enables me to maintain a level of clarity regarding my primary function as an educational leader, “action”. Given the challenge of promoting education within the constraints of public schooling, I see my actions as twofold: first, to help create the opportunities wherein relationships and perspective sharing can happen, and second, to make “good”⁸ decisions to support education within the noted organizational constraints. It has become apparent that the decisions I make as an educational leader to realise these goals are influenced by certain theories of education⁹, to which I subscribe, and my mediation (conscious and unconscious) of ethical reasoning, research, and school district policy.

In many ways my continued journey within the EdD program has reinforced, challenged, and enriched my views on education, and how the idea of a learning organization can be better

⁶ For the purposes of this paper, practice is defined in an Arendtian sense as labor, work and action (Coulter, 2002, pp. 194-195). Labor involves routine behaviour to meet basic human needs; work includes activity to make objects that comprise the artificial world; and action, the primary focus of my educational leadership, involves collective public dialogue to determine identity and purpose, and exercise human freedom and responsibility. Action is not only about doing but about understanding.

⁷ Formal theories of education include noted historical philosophies about socializing the young into the dominant culture, to teach particular forms of knowledge that will bring about a realistic and rational view of the world, and to help realise the unique potential of each child (Egan, 1997). Other theories include ideas such as to continually question what one’s education has been (Burbules, 2004), to develop intellectual mediating tools like language towards different kinds of understandings (Vygotsky, in Egan, 1997) and metamorphoses (Martin, 2002). This list is given as exemplars and is not exhaustive.

I define education as the process of developing ‘kinds of understandings’ through relationships and the use of mediating tools for the purpose of helping us live and contribute positively to life in the private and public space.

⁸ My actions as an educational leader are undertaken in regard to other human beings (Fenstermacher, 1990) and as such have an ethical quality and must consider what is good and right (Greene, 1978).

⁹ Theories of education influence our day to day interactions and the various understandings that teachers, administrators and parents have of issues. This has led some philosophers to argue that today’s problem in education is not with schooling but in what we conceive the role of schooling to be (Egan, 1997).

utilised for me and in the organization of public schooling. In particular, the notion of creating public space for meaningful dialogue, the idea of competing goods, the idea of ideological waves (e.g., neo-liberalism), the tension between organization and education, and the problems with means-ends thinking. In essence, it has been through my course work and the ongoing dialogue within the EdD program that my own search for a definition of a learning organization has evolved.

In relation to public education¹⁰, I am beginning to re-envision this “ideal” of a learning organization as a community of individuals engaged in getting to know one another’s horizons, not for the purpose of the “promethean notion of progress”¹¹ but simply to live better together. For public schooling this must include the advancement of mediating tools¹² such as reading and writing to enable all citizens to participate in the public world. These mediating tools could be considered as operative goals¹³ of public schooling.

Personally, this study was undertaken to further my understanding of individual and systemic learning and the leadership practices required towards the aforementioned vision of public schooling. In addition, this research was undertaken to develop insight to replicate similar changes in other public school organizations. I am not so naïve as to think that a “one size” fits all approach could ever work in the complexity of differing organizations. Indeed, I am appreciative of the differing cultural and historical development, power relations, and competing needs which exist across different organizations and their influence on practice. Given the complexity of managing change and promoting the idea of a learning organization, I would like to develop a grounded framework that can help me as I continue in my career; a framework that I can use as a conceptual reminder and/or map to reflect on practice and to

¹⁰ I wish to draw a distinction between public education and public schooling. Public education is used in a very broad way inclusive of all areas of education that promote democracy (e.g., health education, social and political issues, as well as the role of public schooling).

¹¹ Prometheus in Greek Mythology is noted for stealing fire from Olympus and taught humans the use of it and various arts, and is used in this paper to reflect the idea of continual progress.

¹² Mediating tools is a concept forwarded by Vygotsky (in Egan, 1997). He argues that the goals of public schooling should be conceptualized as helping citizens to develop various mediating tools such as language to enable greater participation in the public sphere.

¹³ Operative goals are the descriptions of the ends sought through the actual operating procedures of the organization (e.g., teaching); these explain concretely what the organization is trying to accomplish (Daft, 2005).

help identify areas of development in my work setting that may lead to progress toward the “ideals” of a learning organization.

1.5 STRUCTURE OF DISSERTATION

The outline of the dissertation is as follows. Chapter One provides an overview of challenges facing public education, the call for a new organizational framework to meet these challenges, the purpose of the proposed research, the noted gaps in current research, and rationale for the chosen research context. Chapter Two provides a review of the relevant academic literature and explains how it informs the project. Chapter Three provides a critique of case study and an overview of the methodology of the study. Chapter Four provides the contextual overview of the case including the political and historical influences surrounding the case evolution. Chapter Five provides a thematic review of interview data from network participants. Chapter Six provides a discussion of the case including the comprehensiveness of the case, the acquired socio-political knowledge, and the role of the “ideal” versus the “real” in understanding networks. Chapter Seven provides a summary of the dissertation, and discusses implications for practice, as well as future research considerations in creating or assessing networks.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this review is to position this study within the broader academic literature on organizational theory as well as illuminate current debates and themes relevant to “learning organizations” and public schooling. This review is representative of the literature through 2008. The review should be viewed as illustrative rather than a comprehensive review of all the work in this area.

The first section of this review positions the study within the broader literature on organizational theory and the context of organizational change inclusive of public schooling. The second section discusses recent trends in organization theory and the role of networks in creating learning organizations. The third and fourth sections focus on the role of networks in public schooling. Finally, this review ends by articulating the core theoretical propositions informing this study.

2.1 ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE AND THE SPIRIT OF THE TIMES

The concept of “a learning organization” gained significant popularity after the publication of Senge’s (1990) book *The Fifth Discipline* and sparked an avalanche of inquiry and investigation dedicated to this somewhat elusive concept. The learning organization “ideal” has captured the imagination of business leaders as well as many educators. Indeed, references to the concept in both academic and popular literature have grown exponentially, as a recent search suggests. For example, a recent Internet search conducted through the Google search engine produced in excess of 32,000,000 references to “learning organization.” Similarly, in educational discourse, although seldom mentioned prior to 1990, the learning organization concept now attracts a great deal of interest with a recent ERIC search surfacing 300 references to the topic. Easterby-Smith and Araujo (1999) contend that two major influences have contributed to this development: 1), significant growth in the field since Senge’s book; and 2), the commercial significance of the theory.

The instant popularity and commercial appeal of Senge's (1990) book arguably captured a particular zeitgeist. Coinage of the term "learning organization" appeared to provide a much needed linguistic umbrella for an evolving organizational framework. The result was what must have seemed, given the plethora of writings post 1990, a cathartic release for organizational practitioners and researchers struggling with defining the significant changing landscape of organizational practice. Similarly, like many apparent overnight phenomena, Senge's work provided a framing to the organizational changes evolving since the 1970's.

Since the 1970s, organizations have been required to adapt to the conditions of unpredictability ushered in by rapid economic and technological change. In analyzing the complexity of the new economy, society, and culture in the making, Castells (2000) reviews the interplay and dynamic systems evolution of technology, society and historical change. Castells (2000) argues that the material basis of society has been changing through a technological revolution, centered within information technologies. Economies throughout the world have become globally interdependent, introducing a new form of relationship between economy, state, and society. Capitalism has gone through a process of profound restructuring, characterized by greater flexibility in management, decentralization and networking of firms both internally and in their relationships with other firms. Finally, we have seen a global integration of financial markets, and the interdependence of the world in real time via the internet. The culmination of these changes resulted in an evolution in organizational design.

Castells (2000) contends that the new society emerging from this process of change is both capitalist and informational, which he refers to as the "informational society". What is specific to the informational society is the action of knowledge upon knowledge itself as the main source of productivity. This production lies in the technology of knowledge generation, information processing, and symbolic communication. For the first time in history the human mind is the basis for production and is therefore fundamental to the productive energies of an organization. As such, organizations in general have to pay much more attention to the interrelationships between employees, management, and consumers. The

main organizational shift in this context is a movement from a hierarchical to a horizontal model of decision-making exemplified through social networks.

2.2 PUBLIC SCHOOLING: A CALL FOR CHANGE

World trends have no less affected public schooling than other areas of society. The effect may appear to be different but the source is essentially the same; that is, the enhanced role of the human mind as the basis for production. This forces change, change in knowledge, and change in organizational structure. For better or worse, each country's economic and educational systems are more tightly linked to each other today than at any other time in history (Reynolds, et al., 2002). Hargreaves (2003) extends the view that we are now a knowledge society that in turn is a learning society. An influential Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (from hereon referred to as the OECD) report on Knowledge Management in the Learning Society links knowledge management with the challenges created by the acceleration of change and recommends that as a society we need to reconsider the kinds of knowledge students are being equipped with, and ought to be equipped through the process of public schooling (Hargreaves, 2003). It is recognized by social theorists and public policy advisors that high-quality public schooling is key to developing knowledge workers (Reynolds, et al., 2002).

Juxtaposed with the need for schools to be responsive to appropriate skill sets for knowledge workers, is the increased need for schools to provide clarity to students as to their roles as citizens. Both Castells (2000) and Hargreaves (2003) comment on how the global economy and knowledge society that is shared in real time across the internet can leave individuals with a lack of individual identity and purpose. Hargreaves (2003) contends that one of the costs of the knowledge economy includes the creation of a fragmented and frenetic world that weakens communities, undermines relationships, spreads insecurity, and damages public life. Castells (2000) highlights due to the amorphous nature of the networked global society there is an increased appetite for individuals to ascribe to more fundamental religions as these religions provide clarity of purpose and vision. Hargreaves (2003) reminds us that with increasing focus on public schooling as a vehicle for economic prosperity we must not strive to accomplish this at the expense or exclusion of the social goals of education. We are at risk

of limiting people's relations to "instrumental and economic ones with the result being peoples' passions being channelled towards the retail therapy of shopping and entertainment and away from one another" (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 72). The development of citizenry in a liberal democratic and constitutional society must remain fundamental to the role of public schooling. The tension between the economic and the social development of students requires constant attention, both important for societies in today's changing world. Key to this is teacher learning and awareness building of evolving academic and societal issues.

To this end, schools must become sophisticated learning systems that are organized and structured to encourage professional learning for teachers (Hoban, in press). Hargreaves (2003) concurs that today's teachers need to be committed to and continually engage in pursuing, upgrading, self-monitoring, and reviewing their own professional learning. This includes but is not restricted to participating in face-to-face and virtual learning networks. Further, it is vital that teachers engage in action, inquiry, and problem solving together in collegial teams. These activities are incorporated in re-culturing the teaching profession so that working effectively with adults outside the classroom is as essential as working effectively with children within it (Fullan, 1995).

Pertinent to the challenge of re-culturing schools is the role of organizational design and its influence on behaviour. Coleman (1993) contends that poor achievement in schools is the result of incorrect organizational design. He points out "schools are examples of constructed, not primordial, social organization, and thus subject to explicit design" (p. 527). In other words, he posits that our current design of schooling has a direct relationship to poor achievement by students, and that it is within our power to change the design of schooling.

Teachers, in a knowledge society, must therefore try to make their schools into learning organizations where capacities to learn and structures that support learning and respond constructively to change are widespread among adults as well as children (Senge, Cambron-McCabe, et al. 2000). Schools that are good learning institutions for children must be effective learning organizations for teachers and leaders too.

2.3 RECENT TRENDS: THE NETWORK BRIDGE

Recent understandings of organizations suggest that a learning organization is synonymous with an organization proficient at knowledge management - that is, the ability to create, organize, and transfer knowledge (Alavi & Leidner, 2001). Nonaka (1994) has proposed a simple, elegant model to account for the generation of knowledge in the firm. What he labels the knowledge-creating company is based on the organizational interaction between explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge at the source of innovation. Explicit knowledge is for the most part codified and more easily transferable to new employees as information but the implementation of this knowledge to practice may require hands-on experience. This requires the sharing of tacit knowledge by a fellow employee. Tacit knowledge is much of the knowledge accumulated in organizations that comes from experience, and workers cannot communicate it under excessively formalized management procedures as it is more case dependant. Sources of innovation multiply when organizations are able to establish bridges to transfer tacit into explicit knowledge, explicit into tacit knowledge. By doing so, not only is the worker's experience communicated and amplified to increase the formal body of knowledge in the company, but also knowledge generated in the outside world can be incorporated into the tacit habits of workers, enabling them to work out their own uses and improve on the standard practices and procedures. Although Nonaka's model was not applied to public schooling per se, it is reasonable to view knowledge transfer and the tacit nature of teacher practice through this lens. One of the structures to support these ends in complex organizations is a networked learning community.

2.4 THE NETWORK SOCIETY

In his seminal work, *The Rise of the Network Society*, Manuel Castells (2000) articulates that networks are the defining social structure of the new millennium. He contends that as a historical trend, "dominant functions and processes in the information age are increasingly organized around networks. Networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcome processes of production, experience, power and culture, increasingly, we live in a networked world" (p. 500).

Network theory aligns with complexity theory and provides a base to understand organizations. Complexity theory holds that complex behaviour lies somewhere between relatively unchanging stability and constantly changing chaos (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001). Making the connection, one can posit that networks allow for a core structure or framing wherein individual paths or network ties are constantly changing. An example of this is seen in the human brain where core structures exist but have neural pathways and neural networks constantly restructuring based on experience. The use of complexity theory as a perspective in the natural and social sciences supports Castells observations of networks (Anderson & Crabtree, 2001; Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001; Wheatley, 1999).

The learning organization of a school or a school district is a mass of different networks flowing with and around one another creating the system as a whole. The quality and focus of these networks determine organizational health or success. The concept of “network” provides a new basis for thinking about schools as organizations. For public schooling and learning, the focus may be communities as sites of learning, and co-operative policy development serving the interests of society (Chapman, 2003).

With this in mind, some organizational theorists are beginning to consider organizational success as increasingly dependent on the quality of networks established both internally and externally: that is, between departments within an organization or across organizations (Daft, 2005). School districts and schools are no exception to this in an increasingly global context. A significant initiative by the National College of School Leadership in England in building networked learning communities is a key example (Earl & Katz, 2005). Although a national strategy in England to improve school effectiveness is not district specific, a review of findings highlight key features that impact the quality of a networked learning community such as purpose and focus, relationships, collaboration, enquiry, leadership, accountability, and capacity building (Earl & Katz, 2005). The application and study of learning networks within a particular school district with its unique context and history may offer some grounded support to this more systemic initiatives findings.

Hopkins (2003) argues that networks in education have a key role to play in supporting innovation and development, and are accordingly regarded as support structures for

innovative schools. Others such as Kaser and Halbert (2004) have referred to networks as the “third space,” suggestive of a place between private practice and bureaucratic management. For the purpose of this research, the metaphor of the “third space” is used to connote the network structure that enabled teachers to work outside of their classroom practice, and outside of their schools culture/community of practice. The “third space” is used to identify the network meetings as a special place where practitioners could reflect on their practice in a different way. I recognize that the “third space” has different meaning in other bodies of research but it seemed an appropriate metaphor for this network.

From my perspective, the metaphor of the “third space” holds particular relevance for networks in public schooling. Consistent with Vygotsky (In Egan, 1997), I believe education is a result of creating the space for people to get to know each others understandings of the world inclusive of understandings within academic disciplines. Therefore, the act of teaching is the thoughtful creation of a safe place, psychologically and physically, where students come together with their teacher to share understandings and seek better understandings. As such, key learning in an organization by its employees is how space is created that is safe and relatively free from bureaucratic influences as well as free from dominant individual views, either of which may limit sharing by participants, democratic processes, and innovative thinking. Senge (1990) highlights the importance of organizational architecture and processes that enable a psychologically safe place for shared work.

Another consideration of a ‘third space’ in public schooling, as represented by the ESSN, is its potential as a vehicle to facilitate a more public (e.g., teacher to teacher) discussion of educational ends, and subsequently the development of an individual teacher’s practical wisdom (e.g., phronesis). In creating a space that is outside of a teacher’s school--and particular classroom--with the expectation that teachers will share their private practice with other teachers brings a teacher’s private practice into a more public forum and opens their practice up to contestation and arguably enables personal/professional reflection. The quality of critique is limited to the focus of the group, its members, and the organizational constraints (e.g., power relationships). A NLC represents a vehicle that in effect can engender a more public deliberation of what quality teaching looks like. As such, a NLC

may be considered one step towards a more public and open practice of education. Other steps might include the sharing or presenting of information at a forum involving other teachers, as well as publications and reports that are submitted to public spaces without organizational approval (Naylor, 2007). A fully public democratic space can only be approached outside organizational constraints in civil society. Burbules (2004) suggests that one aim of education should be to develop an ongoing capacity to reflect upon and question the sort of education one is receiving, or that one is providing to others. This type of overarching educational aim requires subjecting our personal/professional educational aims to relentless scepticism and public critique. The ‘third space’ facilitated by the ESSN is an organizational vehicle or structure in public schooling that facilitates a more communal space for teachers to contest and reflect upon the type of education being provided to students in their classes.

The relative freedom from bureaucratic influences in reality is balanced with the priorities of the school and school district. In order for networks to have value and, therefore, be supported by administration, they must contribute to a positive organizational end. For example, this may be in the form of better student outcomes, positive teacher and administrator relations, or parent satisfaction.

Networks could potentially mediate between the private practice of teachers, and the mandate of the public via the Ministry of Education policy. Wheatley (1999) suggests the apt metaphor for an organization is a living organism. The analysis of living systems reveals a paradox also noted by Castells (2000): that is, each organism maintains a clear sense of its individual identity only within a larger network of relationships that helps shape its identity. Each being is noticeable as a separate entity, yet is simultaneously part of the whole system, creating self through the interactions with others.

2.5 NETWORK LOGIC, DEFINITION, AND TYPOLOGIES

The world-view of the late 19th and 20th centuries stressed the idea that learning is linear, sequential, generalizable and mechanistic (Chapman, 2003). Schools developed as hierarchical organizations; knowledge was compartmentalized into discrete and manageable

sequences; assessment was based on the measurable and quantifiable. Such assumptions are no longer adequate. New thinking about the nature and styles of effective learning, suited to students' own modes of cognitive progress and achievement, must lay in the basis for work in schools of tomorrow. They should reflect the findings and implications of the current understanding of learning, knowledge acquisition, and of cognitive and meta-cognitive science (Chapman, 2003). In particular, individuals learn and create knowledge through a socially mediated context. Knowledge is contextually constructed and the process of learning is non-linear (Jarvis, 1999).

Within this milieu of contextually constructed learning, the network logic for this study is that if a networked learning community provides an organizational vehicle or bridge between teachers then public schooling ends will be better achieved through the transfer of teacher knowledge (i.e. tacit into explicit knowledge, and explicit into tacit).

Definitions of a network range from everyone you know and everyone who knows you, to a highly contextualized and fluid concept, to a map of lines between points, an explicitly spatial and defined representation (Lipnack & Stamps, 1986).

A more functional definition is presented by Gross-Stein, Stren, Fitzgibbon, and MaClean (2001), who define a network as a "spatially diffused structure, with no rigidly defined boundaries, consisting of several autonomous nodes, or members, sharing common values or interests, linked together in interdependent exchange relationships" (p. 5). As such, networks form by shared interest and repetitive interactions among its members. Networks are inherently social structures designed to bring members of a community together as autonomous agents.

Hopkins (2003, p.161) proposes a typology of educational networks as a tool for categorizing as well as emphasizing the potential role of networks.

1. At the most basic level, a network is simply groups of teachers joined together for a common purpose and for sharing good practice.

2. At a more ambitious level, networks involve groups of teachers and schools joined together for the purposes of school improvement with the explicit aim of enhancing teaching and learning throughout a school or groups of schools, not just sharing practices.
3. Networks can serve not just the purpose of knowledge transfer and school improvement, but also join groups of stakeholders to implement specific policies locally and possibly nationally.
4. An extension of this way of working is found when groups of networks, within and outside education, link together for system improvement in terms of social justice and inclusion.
5. There is the possibility of groups of networks working together not just on a social justice agenda, but also as an explicit agency for system renewal and transformation.

One could view Hopkins (2003) typology as a linear, cumulative and developmental based description of networks in that each type of network is more progressive and sophisticated than the next. This is problematic. Each different type of network implies an increased focus on particular ends, with the level five seemingly not that different from a traditional bureaucratic organization. The only difference for level five being a network or a traditional system is potentially in how membership is determined (e.g., voluntary).

I would argue that any purposeful social entity, networks included, will have to become reflective of traditional systems the more focused their ends become. In other words, the closer the goals of a group are with particular organizational ends versus individually determined ends, the more the group will resemble typical bureaucratic organizations. In regards to the utility of networks to an organization, one has to juxtapose the individual needs to the practicalities of organizational life. In effect, the idea of a network in an organization may, in fact, be better considered as a tool or form of decentralised centralism (Karlsen,

2000). In other words, the central direction of the organization is reinforced by the practical action determined via employee networks.

With this in mind, and for the purposes of schooling, the role of networks across schools creates a more flexible and democratic space to increase shared practical decision-making closer to the day to day practice of teachers, however this is done under a centralised organizational vision, direction and related policy. As such, teacher practice may be shared, developed, and reinforced but within the parameters defined by Ministry and/or district level policy.

The concept of decentralised centralism informs this study by enabling a more balanced organization by providing a level of conceptual freedom regarding organizational governance and the practical action of teachers. As a way to organize, decentralised centralism may enable formal organizational leaders to see a legitimate and less threatening place for a networked learning community of teachers. One of the tensions in the research is the definition of a network as being completely horizontal in nature and thereby having no influence from bureaucratic hierarchical organizational positions. The reality is that networks in organizations must be supported by the leadership and this won't happen unless there is a direct benefit to the leader or the organization, or both. The concept of decentralised centralism allows for the possibility that a compromise can be made so that both employee's needs and the organizational ends are supported.

Even so NLCs are potential vehicles to support teacher learning, knowledge creation and sharing. They may provide a context wherein interconnecting pathways and linkages to avenues of enquiry can be opened-up, explored and expanded. Networks can be constructed to support the "flows" of theories, thoughts, cultures, and innovations between schools and other education institutions (Chapman, 2003). This potential for networks as a vehicle to promote the spread of new ideas is exemplified in Malcolm Gladwell's (2004) book *The Tipping Point*. Gladwell provides popular examples of how the spread of ideas and trends in society are dependant on networks (e.g. how children's television programming was dramatically changed via a network of individuals). Although, networks can spread new ideas, networks can also be used to limit opportunities or control information.

2.6 THE DARK SIDE OF NETWORKS

On the surface, or from a theoretical “ideal”, NLCs promote shared leadership, flattened bureaucratic power relations, and practitioner-motivated reform. At a deeper level, we need to be highly sceptical of “ideals”, and aware that there is a “dark side” to networks.

Networks can become exclusive and a means to control the practice of others. A good example is the “old boys club” of 19th century England that excluded the advancement of those who were not a member of their “network”. An example of networks limiting the advancement and quality of public schooling, according to a report by the World Bank (2004) are networks among elites that may impair public education should those wealthy families opt out of public education and choose private schools, stripping public schooling communities of financial resources, local leadership, and students who are well-prepared to learn. This devolution of parent and student support can result in a school system with little political influence to demand public resources and fewer parents who have the time and money to join voluntary school associations.

In schooling, the exclusivity of a network is also a concern as innovative groups can become part of the establishment and used to limit and determine the acceptable behaviour of others (Driver, 2002; Marsick & Watkins, 1999; Owenby, 1997). Critics of learning organization theory and the educational equivalent of the Professional Learning Community comment on the potential for prescriptive and scripted agendas that only have the guise of being democratic but are really a top-down educational reform (BCTF, 2004). Another aspect of controlling practice is that networks like organizations are subject to the nature of the discipline they are formed around and the inherent organization of these disciplines (Spillane, 2006).

Networks build organizational capacity through inter-organizational knowledge sharing and the building of trusting reciprocal relationships. Paradoxically, network groups are susceptible to establishing their own norms potentially dominated by the most aggressive and vocal participants. These norms may or may not enable democratic processes. It is quite possible that a network group could have a narrow ideology that is imposed on weaker members of the group. A question to consider is what happens to network participants who

express divergent views from the norm? How are divergent views encouraged and or supported by the group?

Finally, network attributes suppose that the ends being strived for are for the greater good. Much can be said regarding the Third Reich's ability to achieve excellent networks but this clearly did not produce positive outcomes.

2.7 POWER AND DECISION-MAKING

Inherent in any discussion regarding democratic education, a learning organization, a collaborative culture, and/or the structures and logic to achieve these goals is power. Who gets to decide and who controls the agenda. This is of particular interest in this study as the creation of a district network can have significant influence on the organization's power dynamics. If organizations exist as a group of people who come together to achieve some common ends, power within an organization is who gets to make decisions about the direction of the organization: that is, what individuals within the organization must do and, subsequently, how to empower people to act (Daft, 2005).

Network structure is intended to create a "flatter" concept of organizational decision making than the bureaucratic heritage of most school districts (if not all) (Hopkins, 2003). Within the emerging network thinking, practitioners have the potential towards a greater role in the "decision making process in regards to areas of professional development" (Sliwka, 2003, p. 53). This increased decision-making power, in turn, can influence how budgets are organized to support the practice of teaching by highlighting areas of priority and/or systemic direction regarding educational initiatives such as the literacy agenda (Ministry of Education, 2004a). To understand networks as an organizational tool and promote a learning organization, we need to explore how networks influence the power dynamics in an organization (Driver, 2002).

Power in organizations can be defined by the capacity to act. According to Castells (2000, p. 15) "institutions of society are built to enforce power relationships existing in each historical period, including the controls, limits, and social contracts achieved in the power struggles."

Foucault (In Flyvberg, 2001) argues that within institutions, the microphysics of power diffuse throughout the entire society enclosing subjects in a tight framework of formal duties and informal aggressions. These power relations thus play a significant role in generating culture (e.g., the way we do things around here) and collective identities (Castells, 2000). In other words, if a school district is trying to promote a culture of collaboration, according to Fullan (2003), how power manifests itself in the roles and responsibilities of individuals is important to understand.

Flyvberg (2001) argues that if social science's goal is to improve social conditions, it must include an analysis of power. He proposes a series of questions that help understand power relations as articulated by Foucault. They are as follows: What are the most immediate and the most local power relations operating, and how do they operate? How has the active exercise of power in the relations being investigated affected the possibilities for the further exercise of power, with the resulting reinforcement of certain power relations and the attenuation of others? How are power relations linked together, according to what logic and strategy? How have these relations made certain rationalities possible and others impossible, and how do rationalities support or oppose the power relations? How can the games of power be played differently?

Although this is not a study in power per se, how "the power to act" evolves in and around the network group warrants some investigation. For the purposes of this study, the evolution of the 'power to act' may be illuminated via questions such as, how does the teacher network influence budget allocations? How does a school district network influence the decision making power of District Administrators versus school based administrators? In particular, how does the network influence the decision making of a District Administrator who is also involved with research on networks? In what ways can a district-supported network influence the work of other teachers not directly involved with the network? What are the limits to the democratic nature of decisions made within the network and how do these decisions impact a larger schooling community who were not included in the network decision making?

2.8 NETWORKS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLING

This study is interested in a particular type of network in a particular context, a network learning community within a school district. In regards to Hopkins (2003) typology, the NLC involves groups of teachers and schools joined together for the purposes of school improvement with the explicit aim of enhancing teaching and learning throughout a school or groups of schools, not just sharing practices. It is conceded that organizational ends are important and it is not simply about practitioners.

The social and contextual understanding of teacher learning and knowledge sheds light on what Sarason (1990) described as the predictable failure of educational reform. Aalst (2003) clarifies that the optimism of the 1970s which proposed that research would provide the knowledge base for policy and practice to substantially improve schooling was ill founded as it did not consider experience of practitioners. The most basic factor in educational reform is that “educational knowledge is for a large part tacit in nature; suggested estimates vary between 70-90% of teaching practice is tacit knowledge” (Aalst, 2003, 35). In addition, Lundvall (2000) argues that the reason that written reports for innovation are often disappointing is because to be able to use codified knowledge, “complementary” tacit knowledge is needed. A document has not only an informative component, but also a social one, “people need to develop interpretive meanings in order to make the document usable” (Aalst, 2003, 35). Networking may help to mediate the codified knowledge by developing the needed complementary knowledge and interpretive meanings. Ostensibly, the exchange of tacit knowledge requires different processes and structures than doing and implementing research: social learning processes and network structures. These processes and structures should not minimise the value of research and codified knowledge but enhance its value when explicitly embedded into the operation of a network structure.

As a learning community within an organization, Aalst (2003) defines “networking” as the “systematic establishment and use (management) of internal and external links (communication, interaction, and co-ordination) between people, teams or organizations (“nodes”) in order to improve performance” (p. 34). Respectively, the idea of what constitutes performance may require different consideration between business and public

schooling organizations as the ends of these respective organizations are quite different. One interpretation of this definition of learning community is that learning networks in organizations are purposeful social entities characterized by a commitment to quality, rigor, and a focus on student outcomes as a measure of performance. Another interpretation of a learning community may look at outcomes as teacher focused, such as increased confidence, leadership capacity, and engagement with new ideas (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 29).

Theoretically, NLCs share certain properties that are “to bring together individuals or institutions in a horizontal partnership, where the rationales are democratic exchange, and mutual stimulation and motivation, rather than top-down reforms” (Sliwka, 2003, p. 63). These networks may include both on-line networks as well as networks that require physical proximity. Thoughtfully organized and implemented networks can represent “vibrant motors of change in education” (Sliwka, 2003, p. 63). Networks as part of an organization’s operating structure, at some point one expects an intersection between top down expectations and the mutual stimulation and motivation for employees. As stated earlier, organizations exist for a particular end and the resources of an organization are unlikely to be expended without a benefit to administrative direction. The organization of public schools is to teach particular learning outcomes derived by the Ministry of Education, as such, the mutual stimulation and motivation for employees is secondary to student development. With this in mind, if monies are spent to support organizational actions, like networks, then a demonstrated benefit for student development must be seen.

Although network logic within public education is a relatively new idea, its utility is gaining momentum (Earl & Katz, 2005; Thorpe & Kubiak, 2005). Notably, NLCs are an innovative approach to professional development (Marshall, 2004) designed to promote the dissemination of good practice, enhance professional development of teachers, support capacity building in schools, mediate between centralised and decentralised structures, and assist in the process of re-structuring and re-culturing educational organizations and systems (Hopkins, 2003). I will explore these propositions of networks.

2.8.1 Dissemination of “Good” Practice

Generally, it has been uncommon for schools within the same geographic area to form partnerships for an exchange of ideas and good practice, and there has been “little incentive to do so” (Sliwka, 2003, p. 51). When schools districts organise in a way that enables participation in a NLC, it creates the possibility for an exchange of knowledge and practice with schools outside the immediate neighbourhood. In enabling this knowledge exchange, NLCs can build organizational capacity for improvement through the development of local, context-specific practices and solutions through sustained and inclusive opportunities for school-to-school collaboration (Thorpe & Kubiak, 2005). If network membership is diverse, the shared information may find many sites of application across schools.

One of the noted challenges in public schooling has been a limited connection between current research and practice (Jarvis, 1999). Ostensibly, it is not that practitioners do not value academic knowledge but there is little time to keep in tune with research when teaching. A key function of NLCs is to advance, share, and spread academic/research knowledge within a social and local context (Stone, 2002). A NLC enables knowledge sharing by creating networking as part of the day to day operation of teaching. In other words, teachers are provided release time during the school day to work with other teachers. The impact of NLCs at a local level may support re-culturing a school district from a “knowing community” to a “learning community”. In other words teachers can continue to learn about their practice and subject areas as an embedded part of their job. In determining the importance of learning networks, Gross-Stein et al. (2001) demonstrated that on various inter-organizational projects, if networks did not exist, then individuals would know less, would know differently, and would know more slowly and less widely. Essentially, the quality of networks improved learning for those involved.

Whether the NLC is an on-line community or face-to-face group, exchange of information and practice is the driving feature of the network. Networks as a focal point open access to a variety of sources of information (Aalst, 2003). Networks can provide space between and across individual schools and districts where practitioners share their knowledge. They offer a broader range of learning opportunities than is the case within hierarchical organizations.

Towards this end, face-to-face and on-line networks complement each other. The information in face-to-face networks can convey personal teacher experiences while on-line information can be virtually unlimited in content. Face to face interactions can clarify any misunderstandings of on-line information. For the purposes of this research, it should be noted that face-to-face information exchange is more likely to find its way into a teachers practice (Hargreaves, 2003) whereas on-line information is less likely to be filtered through secondary sources (Chen, 2003).

2.8.2 Enhance Professional Development of Teachers

“Teaching and learning are critical to our individual and collective survival and to the quality of our lives. The pace of change has us snarled in complexities, confusions, and conflicts that will diminish us, or do us in, if we do not enlarge our capacity to teach and to learn” (Palmer, 1998, p. 3).

Palmer (1998) contends that reform will never be achieved by renewing appropriations, restructuring schools, rewriting curricula, and revising texts if we continue to demean and dishearten the human resource called the teacher on whom so much depends. Organizations in general have to pay much more attention to the interrelationships between employees, management, and consumers (Castells, 2000). Key to teacher development are the interrelationships between employees. These interrelationships should provide the basis for the development of NLCs.

Current views on teacher professional development (Gess-Newsome, Southerland, Johnston, & Woodbury, 2003; Randi & Zeichner, 2004; Hargreaves, 2003) strongly support collaborative teacher networking. In particular, professional development involves teachers as “active learners in their own professional growth, rather than passive recipients of others’ ideas” (Randi & Zeichner, 2004, p.188). According to Randi and Zeichner (2004) the preferred direction of professional development builds individual and system capacity by respecting teacher knowledge, collaboration with peers to focus on reflections on practice and solving or addressing problems, and developing new knowledge from sharing of

expertise among members of teacher learning communities. Collaboration among community members is essential to knowledge building (Bruffee, 1999).

Within the British Columbia provincial context, the support of teacher networks as a structure for professional development has been stated by the British Columbia Teachers Federation in their professional development trainers guide (BCTF, 2004). The BCTF (2004) position is expansive reflective of Hopkins (2003) first level typology of simply groups of teachers joined together for a common purpose and for sharing good practice. No clear educational ends are considered. As such, it is unclear as to what end these “good practices” are focused and the assumption that all teachers know “good practice” across academic disciplines is questionable. A primary aim of a NLC is to create opportunities for an “ongoing exchange and collaboration of educational practitioners with focused ends” (Sliwka, 2003, 52). Through enhanced focussed collaboration, learners can become involved in learning activities that are associated with a network, which provides them with greater motivation and opportunity to articulate, discuss, and reflect on their learning strategies and the changes within themselves (Chen, 2003).

2.8.3 Support Capacity Building in Schools

Networks can support capacity building in schools by enhancing change agent skills and abilities in managing the change process in teachers, leaders, and other educators, as well as creating professional learning communities at the local level within and between schools (Hopkins, 2003). Key to capacity building is the role of leadership.

One goal of leadership is achieving desired organizational ends via the management of employees. Networks as an organizational tool used to meet organizational ends will naturally have implications for the concept of leadership. With this in mind, there are many ways to talk about leadership. Numerous definitions of educational leadership exist. The historical evolution is inclusive of trait theories (Stodgill, 1974), behavioural theories (Schmuck, 1992), situational leadership (Walter, 1980), instructional leadership and transformational leadership (Leithwood, 1992), value-added leadership (Sergiovanni, 1990), to a community of leaders (Barth, 1988), and leader as designer within systems thinking

(Senge, 1990). Each idea of leadership reflects the organizational thinking of a particular time, and is more or less relevant to practitioners depending on what a person's responsibilities are within an organization. Senge's (1990) definition of a systems thinker is more apt for an organizational leader responsible for network activity.

Systemically, the role of district leadership requires mediation between the provincial priorities, community specific challenges, and a "quality" schooling experience for children. In this milieu, leadership skills include the facilitation of collaborative processes that lead to quality outcomes for students. Notably, school growth plans, school planning councils, district accountability frameworks, professional development initiatives, and curriculum implementation encapsulate some of these processes in the province of British Columbia. Systemic capacity is enhanced when formal and informal leaders develop reflective inquiry practices and distributed leadership through these vehicles.

Lambert (1998) argues that the use of hierarchical structures to determine leadership positions is less effective than relying on the development of a community of leaders found in various positions in organizations. A dynamic leadership team requires individuals that complement each other's skill set and bring novel insights and different perspectives to the table.

Thorpe and Kubiak (2005) observed that the introduction of a NLC in England resulted in the mobilization of teachers with strong social capital, who were well liked and highly regarded by peers, as change agents. It is possible that the creation of networks provided an avenue for informal leaders to take on more formal leadership responsibilities. The NLC provided an opportunity for these teachers to act as change agents in that they had a direct role with the implementation of improvement initiatives. It was noted that ongoing communication and support was required to influence or penetrate any change in teaching practice across existing communities of practice (Thorpe & Kubiak, 2005).

In the end, there is little argument against the notion that the key to quality public schooling is having good teachers, and that good teachers have three noted characteristics: 1), they build quality relationships; 2), they demonstrate a strong command to teach their subject

matter; and 3), they are focused on student learning (Hargreaves, 2003). A teacher is an educational leader, and an educational leader is a teacher (Palmer, 1998). The formal positions of educational leadership have the decision-making power to support teaching, and student learning (Johnston & Caldwell, 2001). Ostensibly, teacher focused NLCs can build the concept and practicality of teacher leadership by enabling practitioners with high credibility and social capital to have direct influence on macro level change initiatives (Thorpe & Kubiak, 2005). In order to have a systemic impact, networks must be supported by those in formal leadership positions (Hopkins, 2003). The decision to financially support a teacher network, as well as promote district wide implementation is reliant on district level administrative support.

2.8.4 Mediate Between Centralised and Decentralised Structures

In the current times of greater school autonomy and accountability, it is recognized that networks are a platform to serve educational practitioners (Kaser & Halbert, 2004; Sliwka, 2003). NLCs act as a link between the centralised and decentralised schism that results from many contemporary policy initiatives. From one perspective, networks contribute to policy coherence and implementation horizontally and vertically (Stone, 2002; Hopkins, 2003). They offer a more flexible and, at the same time, more stable base for coordinated and interactive learning. From another perspective, networks contribute to decentralised centralism. In other words, they can act as internal forces within organizations that can be used by management to implement governmental policy under the guise of professional autonomy. As such, a NLC would lose some attributes of the “ideal” but conversely become more functional for the organization’s policy implementation.

In organizations, networks operate within a context of application (Stone, 2002), which involves the close interaction of partners throughout the process. Consequently, the process and the knowledge created are more socially accountable. As Gibbons (1994) argues, these networks are socially distributed knowledge production schemes where the dissemination of knowledge happens through those who are its active producers. The natural accountability as a function of a network of practitioners has particular appeal to public schooling agendas which have become focused on accountability measures (Reeves, 2004).

Another aspect to decentralizing is the development of local knowledge. The production of academic knowledge is expanding beyond university research and the related academic peer review to include the additional criteria of usefulness within a local context. This would now include the judgment of quality by a community of practitioners. NLCs in public schooling can mediate these judgments. NLCs at a local level may be a significant force in the re-culturing of schooling enabling local participants to bring their knowledge forward to define the problem and shape the agenda for action. Further, these networks can create social centers of expertise blurring the formal separation between academics, policy makers, and practitioners (Gross-Stein et al., 2001).

Related to practitioner knowledge is the challenge of transferring research to practice. Teaching like other professions has been inundated with an over abundance of information on how to teach, what to teach, and when to teach, to the point that it has become increasingly difficult to determine an individual direction, much less a common school or district vision. As a profession, there are few avenues for practitioners to personally dialogue with colleagues in order to deconstruct the messages being sent via research and policy makers, to discuss how this may relate to the day to day practice in their classroom, for their children, in their community. A growing concern would be that much of the world-wide research lacks a local flavour and risks being misconstrued as representative of the local context (Sefa Dei, 2000). The goal of developing a learning organization is to bridge the gap between research and practice, and for practitioners to engage in their practice as researchers.

Cross and Parker (2004) demonstrate that within organizations, networks are dynamic and conditioned by strategy, infrastructure, and the work completed at a given time. People add context, interpretation, and meaning as they receive information and pass it along (Cross & Parker, 2004). In addition, within employee networks information does not flow through unchanged as it does through internet routers (Chen, 2003). The NLC exists to create and share knowledge and practice, but also to accelerate the application of knowledge to economic or social development (Gross-Stein et al., 2001). This is also applicable to quicker dissemination and implementation of new policy.

2.8.5 Assist in the Process of Re-Structuring and Re-Culturing Educational Organizations

“Schools may be the starkest example in modern society of an entire institution modeled after the assembly line. This has dramatically increased educational capability in our time, but has also created many of the most intractable problems with which students, teachers, and parents struggle to this day” (Senge et al., 2000, p. 2).

Culture shapes how people interpret daily transactions and consists of the stable, underlying social meanings that shape beliefs and behaviour over time (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

Although a number of definitions of culture exist (see Mosley-Howard, 2003), a simple definition is the way we do things around here (Sackney, 2001). Expanding on this definition, organizational culture can be seen as behavioural regularities, including language and rituals; norms that evolve in working groups; dominant values espoused by people in the organization; rules of the game for getting along in the organization; and the feeling or climate conveyed in an organization (Sackney, 2001). Schein (1996) sees the essence of culture as the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization, that operate unconsciously and that define, in a basic “taken for granted” fashion, an organization’s view of it and its environment.

Culture is influenced and shaped by history, context, and the people within them. School districts are also influenced by external political and economic forces in the form of provincial educational policies. Core to a positive work culture is the role of trust and reciprocity. To what extent is culture or “the way we do things around here” changed through the development of relationships within NLCs? Of interest is how the culture of the school district has been influenced by its networks.

Fullan (1995) argues that today’s public education systems need to develop a culture of collaboration. This would include teachers working in teams, and sharing practice continuously while working towards a shared vision. The network context is important because it aids the development of norms of reciprocity, and trust (Field, 2003). NLCs provide benefits to members. Networks can foster norms of generalised reciprocity by creating expectations that favours given now will be returned later. They facilitate

coordination and communication, and thus create channels through which information about trustworthiness of other individuals can flow, be tested and verified (Putnam, 2004).

Networks also embody past success at collaboration, which can serve as a cultural template for future collaboration to address other problems. Finally, networks increase the potential risk to those who act opportunistically that they will not share in the benefits of current and future transactions (Sirianni & Friedland, 2004).

As a tool to influence culture, networks do not just facilitate innovation; they can also be an innovation in themselves by offering the possibility of new ways of working. Networks generally have a horizontal rather than hierarchical structure. It is this absence of hierarchy that gives networks their flexibility, their capacity to expand and contract in response to changing environments, and their potential to adapt (Castells, 2000). In teaching, this could reflect the changing teaching personnel from year to year, as well as when members move to new schools, or take on different teaching assignments.

Although networks offer some potential in re-culturing an organization, we need to be realistic about the organizational impact of a single network. To impact an organizational culture on a significant scale, a continual process of communication and intervention of participatory forms is required to bridge between communities, co-opt local structures of power, and build a language of shared values and commitments. Significant to this process is the commitment and related actions of district leadership.

2.9 SUMMARY OF LITERATURE REVIEW

The metaphor of a learning organization offers a new way of thinking about the organization of schooling. Presently, there is little evidence that school districts have attempted to create learning organizations. Learning networks may provide an intermediate organizational vehicle for school districts in the development of learning systems for teachers. Key to the utility of networks in public schools is a better understanding of the practical application of networks and network logic. The literature highlights a number of areas that warrant consideration for study. Key to the promotion of networks as a organizational learning vehicle are tacit knowledge transfer, freedom from bureaucratic influences, building teacher

leadership, creating organizational norms of reciprocity and trust, and building policy coherence. Cautions regarding networks include the possibility of shifting power relations, network use as a tool to control the practice of others, and the extent to which networks contribute to organizational priorities. Overall, there is a need to understand the application of a network in a school district, and how its operation compares to the “ideal” of a Networked Learning Community. Further, it is important to gain an understanding of networks as an organizational tool and what impact they have on the operation of a diverse organization like a school district.

To this end, the literature highlights the following questions to be considered: How does the network enable teacher knowledge transfer (e.g., tacit into explicit knowledge, explicit into tacit knowledge)? To what extent has teacher knowledge increased? In what way does the network contribute to organizational ends and support administration? In what way is the ESSN an image of the “ideal” NLC versus an extension of management? What impact does the network have on power structures and relations in the school district? What aspects of the ESSN limit or direct the practice of others? What is the role of leadership in the network? How does the network promote teacher leadership? In what way does ESSN contribute to policy coherence and implementation horizontally and vertically? To what degree is the ESSN a new way of working? In what ways are norms of reciprocity and trust developed? What impact did the ESSN have on the organizational culture of the school district? Most importantly, from the ESSN what are the things learned about networks in general as a tool for supporting educational practice? The questions highlighted via the literature review are to sensitise the researcher and reader to the case study findings. This research examines a real-life NLC from the perspective of those involved. Many of the questions highlighted are embedded and responded to in the study findings.

CHAPTER 3

CASE STUDY RESEARCH

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is composed of two sections. The first section presents an understanding of case study as the vehicle for this inquiry including definitional and epistemological critiques. The second section highlights the research framework including methodology, design, methods, techniques for data collection, data analysis, and reliability and validity checks of the research process.

3.2 CASE STUDY: A HEURISTIC DEVICE

Many different definitions of case study exist (Becker & Ragin, 2000; Cresswell, 2002; Hammersley & Gomm, 2000; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). Despite these varying perspectives on case study research, a common theme identifies the context in shaping the inquiry. In other words, the meaning derived from social context is not only significant but essential to the understanding of the unit of analysis and larger phenomenon of interest. Overall, for the purposes of this inquiry, case study is defined as a heuristic¹⁴ device. It is the narrative of how something came to be the way it is. And, in telling the story, the case is revealed (Becker & Ragin, 2000).

3.2.1 Characteristics of Case Study Research

Within the various definitions of case study, a few core characteristics are prevalent. First, the quintessential characteristic of the case study is holistic description and interpretation in context (Snow & Anderson, 1991). It is an empirical inquiry that investigates when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear or evident (Yin, 2003). Case studies can be used to describe, to interpret, or to evaluate some phenomenon, or to build theory (Merriam, 1998), but this should stem from the understanding of the case as a whole. Therefore, rich description of the context and unit of analysis (e.g., the case) is necessary. A

¹⁴ Heuristic means that case studies illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1998).

case study is not a data point that represents only a single observation. In fact, a case study as an analytical unit is on par with whole experiments (Yin, 1981). Although the study is focused by the use of particular questions or propositions (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003), the goal is the understanding of the case as a whole embedded within a broader context. In other words, the case can only be fully understood within its context.

Second, case study research lies in identifying the object of study (e.g., the unit of analysis, the case) (Stake, 1995). The case is a spatially and temporally bounded system (Merriam, 1998) or a phenomenon that occurs in a bounded context (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A case may be a program, an institution, a person, a process (Cresswell, 2002; Stake, 1995). The key is that the case can be clearly identified as a single unit under study. Although the context remains important to the in-depth understanding of the case or bounded context, the primary focus of analysis is the case. Examples of the broader context may include individuals impacted by the program or institution, the historical, political, organizational context, as well as competing programs.

A case study has a multidimensional quality. As Stake posits, “case study is the study of the particular and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi, 1995). Merriam (1998) agrees that a case study can be defined in terms of the process of actually carrying out the investigation of the unit of analysis (e.g., the bounded system, the case), or the final product. Although it is argued by Yin (2003) that a distinguishing characteristic of the case study is its attempts to examine a contemporary phenomenon in its real life context (Yin, 2003). The more apt interpretation is that case study allows the examination of a phenomenon over time (Stake, 1995). The event may be contemporary but, more importantly, the focus is on processes over time within and around the bounded case.

Third, case studies use multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2003) to create understanding. Expanding on this idea, case studies seek multiple voices and perspectives (Snow & Anderson, 1991). This approach means that the researcher considers not only the voices and experiences of the primary group of focal concern, but also the perspectives and actions of other relevant groups and the interaction among them. These multiple sources of evidence

support validity of findings through triangulation (e.g., the use of multiple data sources, methods, investigators and theoretical perspectives). As such, case studies tend to have an open-ended, emergent quality that facilitates discovery of both unanticipated data sources and findings (Snow & Anderson, 1991). The researcher needs to be open to novel and serendipitous findings.

These characteristics provide a conceptual landscape of case study research. Fundamental to tying these assumptions of case study together is that the researcher seeks to understand the case as a whole, as a single unit of study. Although questions and/or propositions may guide the study, unlike other modes of research, these are secondary to the case as a whole.

3.2.2 The Fit of Case Study and the Current Project

The purpose of my study was to investigate an ESSN in a particular school district. This group is a network of teachers formed in 2002 to find ways to prevent reading problems in kindergarten and grade one children. Initially, it was a voluntary group where interested teachers were provided release time to come together during the school day to share practices and reach consensus on a common assessment framework. Within three months, improved results were noted in student reading via reading assessment data, and network members appeared to demonstrate gains in practitioner and research knowledge as observed via network meetings. Subsequently, the network grew in the following school year to most schools in the district having at least one teacher involved. As well, it was determined that, although participation was voluntary, only one teacher per school, as a teacher leader, would attend the network meetings. The teacher leaders had the responsibility of sharing information, garnered via network meetings, with their primary grade colleagues at their school. This was an intentional effort to create systemic learning. In the second year of operation, network participation by school became an expectation of the district. Although teacher leaders were chosen from within their schools, there was an increased expectation of broad use of the core assessment framework, and an adherence to certain reading interventions such as phonological awareness or repeated reading activities.

I was interested in understanding this network. For example, what were the processes and experiences of the members? This network seemed to exemplify a purposeful social entity that was thought to improve teacher learning. As such, I wanted to look more closely at the dynamics of this group. For example, how did the network enable teacher knowledge transfer (e.g., tacit into explicit knowledge, explicit into tacit knowledge)? And to what extent had teacher knowledge increased? How did the network work within the school district? How did it come about? In what way did the network contribute to organizational ends and support administration? To what degree was the ESSN a new way of working? How did the network promote teacher leadership? What aspects of the ESSN limited or directed the practice of others? In what way were norms of reciprocity and trust developed? In what way did the greater context of the school district and Ministry of Education mandates influence the network? In what way did the ESSN contribute to policy coherence and implementation horizontally and vertically? In what way was the ESSN an image of the “ideal” NLC versus an extension of management? What influence did the network have on the context of the school district? What impact did the ESSN have on the organizational culture of the school district? What impact did the network have on power structures and relations in the school district? Most importantly, what can we learn about networks as a tool for supporting educational practice?

These questions are consistent with Becker’s previously noted purpose of case study research (e.g., a comprehensive understanding of the group under study). In gauging this understanding, it is important that the knowledge gained can be shared with others wishing to engage in similar work. To this end, the case study assesses the degree to which certain propositions about networks found in the literature were evident in this case. For example, research suggests effective networks facilitate the dissemination of good practice, enhance professional development of teachers, support capacity building in schools, mediate between centralised and decentralised structures, and assist in the process of re-structuring and re-culturing educational systems (Aalst, 2003; Hopkins, 2003; Thorpe & Kubiak, 2005).

Case study research was the most suitable approach for this study for a number of reasons. First, the real life context is pivotal to understanding the teacher network as it cannot be

understood outside of practice and the political and cultural nature of the particular school district. Second, organization theory suggests organizations are better understood as a system (e.g., holistically), therefore other methodologies, although informative, could not adequately capture the living and changing context wherein organizations develop (Anderson, Crabtree, Steele, & McDaniel, 2005; Daft, 2005; Wheatley, 1999; Leicester, 1996). Network impacts in an organization may be unpredictable and therefore research methodology needs to consider the whole of the organization. Yin (2003) suggests that “a case study allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events – such as individual life cycles, organizational and managerial processes” (p. 2). More importantly, case study can reveal the characteristics of complex systems such as non-linear and intricate relationships, and unpredictable dynamics (Anderson et al., 2005). Thirdly, case studies enable the researcher to deal with questions relying on “operational links that need to be traced over time, rather than frequencies or incidence” (Yin, 2003, p. 18). Finally, real life interventions are too complex to be understood through only survey or experimental strategies. The social and political impacts of the network structure may be too difficult to determine strictly from quantitative methods.

3.2.3 Case Study Critique

Case study is an avenue for acquiring certain types of understandings, particularly a contextual understanding of the phenomenon of interest. Although all modes of inquiry are subject to critique and have particular strengths and weaknesses, much has been made of the lack of scientific value of case study (Atkinson & Delamont, 1986; Flyvberg, 2001; Miles, 1979; Snow & Anderson, 1991; Walker, 1983; Yin, 2003). Critiques from Atkinson and Delamont (1986) and Walker (1983) capture much of the current basis for scepticism regarding case study research. In challenging the foundation of these critiques, I will draw upon the work of Flyvberg (2001) and others who argue that there are fundamental differences between the type and purpose of knowledge constructed within the social sciences, as well as relational differences between the researcher and the object of study. These differences call into question much of the critique of case study as it stems from research standards drawn from the natural sciences. Ostensibly, with a re-envisioned purpose of social science research, case study becomes the quintessential mode of inquiry due to its

focus on context. Its weaknesses become its strengths. From this perspective, the historical challenges to case study, based on the value standard in natural science inquiry (e.g., universal predictive theory), is understandable but misguided. I argue that the foundation for much of these critiques rests upon epistemological and methodological assumptions inherited from a natural science paradigm and inappropriately applied to social science inquiry.

To demonstrate, I use Atkinson and Delamont (1986) and Walker's (1983) critiques to highlight these fundamental differences between social science research and natural science. I point to the call for rigor and awareness of bias as critiques that are common to any research (e.g., social science or natural sciences), and the "new" role of generalization in case study. To end I point to the type of knowledge this research hopes to create.

3.2.4 Epistemological and Methodological Assumptions

First, Atkinson and Delamont's (1986) critique argues that case study does not have an "adequately formulated body of theory and methods, and that researchers have been, will be, unable to progress and generate a coherent, cumulative research tradition" (p. 252). Ostensibly, they call for methodological closure and the building of cumulative knowledge as goals for case study. Recent arguments contend that these are inappropriate goals for social science which have originated from the dominance of scientific reasoning as the basis for social inquiry, and the loss of an historically significant intellectual virtue, *phronesis* (Flyvberg, 2001). It is argued that social science and natural science should be different ventures resulting in what Aristotle considered different "intellectual virtues". Consequently, there should be different standards of determining quality research between social inquiry and natural science. In other words, the goals for social inquiry are different from what Atkinson and Delamont suggest (e.g., contextual knowledge versus universal knowledge).

To clarify, according to Flyvberg (2001) Aristotle articulated three "intellectual virtues", *episteme*, *techne*, and *phronesis*. He contends that social science has allowed itself to be colonized by the natural sciences to the extent that we do not even have a word for the intellectual virtue key to social inquiry (e.g., *phronesis*). He argues that a contemporary interpretation of *phronesis* is a "true state, reasoned, and capable of action with regard to

things that are good or bad for man” (p. 2), variously translated as prudence or practical wisdom is a way to develop a more appropriate conception of the value of social sciences. Phronesis goes beyond both analytical, scientific knowledge (episteme) and technical know how (techne) and involves judgments and decisions made in a manner of “a virtuoso social and political actor” (p. 2). According to Flyvberg, the reduction of social science and theory, either to episteme or techne, or to comprehend social science in those terms is misguided.

Flyvberg (2001) asserts that there “is a need to restore social science to its classical position as a practical, intellectual activity at clarifying the problems, risks, and possibilities we face as humans and societies, and at contributing to social and political praxis” (p. 4). This refocuses intellectual inquiry in social sciences towards value-based rationality versus instrumental rationality: that is, how we live better together versus predictive cumulative theory. To contribute to social and political practice, context is fundamental in defining social and political phenomena, therefore case study would be the quintessential mode of social inquiry. Paramount in this study is the relationships between the political context and the creation of the network as a social practice. The network impact can not adequately be understood without the relative and particular context.

Following this argument, social inquiry’s purpose is to aid the decision making of social and political participants within a real life context. The goal of social research is the development of practical wisdom and, therefore, research must consider context, power relations, and the realities of social life: that is, knowledge of the particular not the universal. Within the school district under study the context and power relations between the district staff and school staff is of particular importance in understanding the evolution and opportunity for the network vehicle.

With the development of practical wisdom as the base of social science, I revisit Atkinson and Delamont’s (1986) critique. Their call for methodological closure and the building of cumulative knowledge as goals for case study becomes impractical, impossible, and inappropriate as context and the interplay of power relations, as well as the realities of social life not only define the research problem but are implicit in proposed interventions. This is not to dismiss their concern for researchers to think deeply about methodological

considerations, as well as rigor in the design and analysis of findings. Key to understanding the ESSN in the school district was the historical and political context of both the district and Ministry of Education. Cumulative knowledge would be an inappropriate goal for this research as it is time sensitive and outcomes, as well as events, are intrinsically linked to the policies and practices of a particular time and place. It is the knowledge of the particular not the universal that is valued.

3.2.5 Double Hermeneutics

I now turn to Walker's (1983) concerns regarding case study. Walker (1983) argues that case study as a mode of inquiry intervenes and changes people as such it is inherently biased, and conservative. Ostensibly, Walker is surfacing another critical difference between natural science and social science inquiry which is the relational differences between the researcher and the object of study. Natural science researchers study physical objects while social science researchers study self-reflecting humans and must, therefore, take account of changes in interpretations of the objects of study (double hermeneutics) (Giddens, 1982). In other words, the object in social sciences is in itself a subject.

The double hermeneutic includes two types of interpretation. First are the self-interpretations among those people the researcher's study. These self-interpretations and their relation to the context of those studied must be understood in order to understand why people act as they do. The second aspect concerns the researcher's own interpretations. Just as the people studied are part of the context, research itself constitutes a context, and the researcher is a part of it (Flyvberg, 2001, p. 32).

Walker's (1983) reasons for not doing case study research are noteworthy cautions regarding the potential impact of this mode of inquiry. Researchers need to be thoughtful about these impacts. With the goal of research to develop phronesis, then asking important questions and challenging others to problematize the status quo is a responsible action. Intervening in the social world is implicit in phronetic research. In my experience in interviewing network participants in this study, each participant was asked to reflect on their involvement and

subsequent actions as a member of the ESSN. This reflexive exercise is important for these members as their actions have a potential impact on others.

In regards to Walker's concerns of researcher bias and the conservative nature of research, these are not exclusive to case study research and can be made of all forms of inquiry (social or natural). As Guba and Lincoln (1981) note, "an unethical writer could so select from among available data that virtually anything he wished could be illustrated" (p. 75). Both the readers and authors of case studies need to be aware of their prospective biases that can affect the final product. This would include the bias of the inherently political nature of case study evaluations. I recognize that the awareness of biases is important information to highlight in the writing and reporting of this research as the researcher's and reader's biases are often unrecognized and limit critical evaluation of a case.

I am particularly sensitive to this concern because I was the District Administrator responsible for the network group, as well as the network facilitator the first two years of operation. I began this research with a strong and evident bias that the ESSN was a promising construct. Fortunately, for this research, I have been out of the school district for two full years and I believe have developed a more balanced perspective regarding the ESSN. Respectfully, the reader needs to gauge their appreciation of this work with the knowledge of my initial investment and professional bias for the value of a structure like the ESSN.

Again, researchers should not take lightly possible biases, or overestimate their ability to capture reality. Essentially, Walker offers a response to Atkinson and Delamont's (1986) concern that ethics get in the way of theory building by highlighting why ethics is paramount given the nature of the relationship between the object of study and the researcher. This leads to a greater scope of concern regarding ethics in social inquiry.

The implication of this increased ethical scope is reflected in this work by the care with which questions were asked of participants, realising the interview questions may challenge their past behaviour. I was mindful that research findings may impact the reputation of a school district and its employees. In addition, no specific teacher is referenced in this work.

3.2.6 Rigor and Verification Bias

After addressing what I perceive as the core of case study and social science critique I will now address specific concerns of rigor and verification bias (Atkinson & Delamont, 1986). Related to the general argument, they imply that anyone can do case study research and that little rigor¹⁵ exists. As such, there is a bias towards verification of the researcher's already held beliefs. Even if such criticism is useful, because it sensitizes us to an important issue, experienced case researchers see the critique as demonstrating a lack of knowledge of what is involved in case study research. Campbell (1979) and others have shown that the critique is fallacious, because the case study has its own rigor, different to be sure, but no less strict than the rigor of quantitative methods (Ragin & Becker, 1992). Notably, researchers who have conducted intensive, in-depth case studies typically report that their preconceived views, assumptions, concepts and hypotheses were wrong and that the case material has forced them to revise their hypotheses on essential points. In other words, it is a bias towards falsification of already held beliefs, not verification that characterizes the case study. For me, the time that this case study has taken, as well as the different administrative role I have undertaken in a vastly larger organization, has provided me a psychological distance to the ESSN project. I have experienced a change in my understanding of the ESSN from supporting the practice of teachers to the recentralization of power to the school district; as well as from a vehicle to support teacher practice to an equal supporting vehicle for developing policy coherence and as such controlling teacher practice. I am not inferring that these are bad things but I offer these thoughts as a more mature appreciation of systems and the role a network must adhere to in a system.

3.2.7 Generalization

A response to critiques of case study would not be complete without addressing the most commonly noted concern, the issue of generalization of findings. Attempts to refocus the purpose of social inquiry must deal with the issue of generalization. Much of the critique of social sciences and case study has focused on the idea of generalization, but the definition of

¹⁵ Rigor involves adherence to principles and procedures, methods, and techniques that minimize bias and error in the collection, analysis, interpretation, and reporting of data (Ogawa, & Malen, 1991).

generalization has its roots in “episteme”. Generalization for social sciences must reconsider its heritage from the conception of developing practical wisdom or “phronesis”.

Drawing on the goal of increasing phronesis, the intellectual virtue of social sciences, generalizability becomes more contextually determined and individually applied to reflect how the reader of the research may improve their own socio-political judgments. This is the goal embodied in the development of an expert or “virtuoso social-political actor” (Flyvberg, 2001). With these considerations in mind, the generalization of social science research becomes fundamentally different from the historic natural science standard. Paradoxically, each individual’s application of case knowledge to new social-political arenas determines the generalization of social inquiry research. Personally, this research experience has been of great practical value for me. In my new role as a Director of Instruction in a system with over 7000 employees, the ability to impact system direction is very different than school districts where there are 250 employees. The personal relations in a small organization can make a significant difference in a short amount of time. In a large system, social technologies such as networks become of increasing value for communicating a district position, and providing direction. It is the reflection of networks as a tool via this case study that has enabled me to see possibilities for providing system direction in my current role.

Research supports generalization by seeking to understand how individuals become experts (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986). For example, Lesgold (2000) demonstrated that complex cases provide experiences that are likely to allow one to find connections between skills, procedural rules and knowledge. As well, Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) in demonstrating a model of learning based on developing an expert capacity, contend that the development of a “virtuoso socio-political” actor depended on the ability to generalise case knowledge. These are very different notions of generalization than Kaplan’s assertion that “it must be truly universal, unrestricted as to time and space. It must formulate what is always and everywhere the case, provided only that the appropriate conditions are satisfied” (1964, p. 91). From the position of natural science inquiry, the production of this type of generalizable finding is the most basic function of research (Snow & Anderson, 1991). This standard does not appear to hold meaning in the world of social inquiry.

Ostensibly, the attempt made by researchers to re-envision generalizability for the social sciences is a reflection of natural science knowledge construction not fitting social science inquiry. This has resulted in challenging traditional notions of generalizability in a number of ways: naturalistic generalization (Stake, 1995), comparability and translatability, accommodation and assimilation of vicarious experience (Donmoyer, 1990) and fittingness (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Each of these efforts to reframe generalizability supports the goal of phronetic social-political action. To this end, these terms allow a new language to articulate this deeper meaning. Within the context of developing expert capabilities, each of the previous re-definitions may be of practical utility to writers and readers of social inquiry research. Ultimately, it is in this way that insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research (Merriam, 1998). In other words, how we can live better together. This should be the big picture goal of social inquiry. Toward this end, Flyvberg (2001) poses four questions for research. Where are we going? Who gains, and who loses, by which mechanisms of power? Is it desirable? What should be done? As such, “we must drop efforts to emulate natural science towards the production of cumulative and predictive theory, and instead take up problems that matter to the local, national, and global communities in which we live” (p. 166). The purpose of social science is not only to develop theory, but to contribute to society’s practical rationality in illuminating where we are, where we want to go, and what is desirable according to diverse sets of values and interests. The goal of a phronetic approach to social science is one of contributing to society’s capacity for value-rational deliberation and action. I see the outcome of this research process as one example of a teacher network, its creation and evolution in relation to a particular cultural and political context. The contribution of the study is in my development as an observer and leader of an organization, as well as a case for other practitioners to reflect upon in relation to their work.

For the purpose of this research, I sought generalization according to Yin (2003) and Stake (1995) keeping in mind that the intellectual pursuit is value-based rationality not instrumental rationality, and that the utility of the analytical generalizations are for the readers to consider within their context. First, Yin (2003) identifies that case studies are generalizable to theoretical propositions not to populations or universes. Second, Stake (1995) argues a more

intuitive, empirically grounded, context-specific generalization that he refers to as “naturalistic”. That is, case studies may be epistemologically in harmony with the reader’s experience and thus to that person a natural basis for generalization (Stake, 1995), and a basis to improve, as well as provide insight into other’s practices. This study was guided by core propositions and describes the case in sufficient detail so that the case is bounded but yet descriptive.

According to Yin (1981), the craft of detective work provides an analogous example for the generalization of case study research. To paraphrase, suppose a detective has provided a tentative explanation for one case (within-case analysis) and is now confronted with another case in which many of the conditions of the first case are the same. Modifications may be needed in applying the explanation to the second case, and the detective should learn to ignore irrelevant variations from case to case. This is the paradox of case study. By studying the particular, we come to understand the universal (Simons, 1996). This is consistent with the development of a “virtuoso social-political” actor. An individual’s ability to apply phronetic skills across cases defines their expert status.

To conclude, the purpose of social inquiry is to improve social conditions. Therefore, social inquiry’s main goal of supporting the development of expert (“virtuoso”) social-political participants through their development of phronesis is paramount. The understanding and breadth of case knowledge is implicit to the development of expert social-political skills (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986). For me, as a practitioner/researcher, the development of my case knowledge via this study is significant. In grappling with the complexity of the ESSN’s evolution, the experiences of those involved, as well as my biased role as a researcher, I believe I have gained far greater insight into my role as an administrator, and the broad array of influences both internal and external to an organization that impact direction setting. Further, this research has increased my sensitivity to the ethics of action, how my actions may be controlled somewhat by Ministerial policy, and how my actions may in part control the action of others. Ostensibly, the noted weaknesses and critique of case studies, from a scientific lens, become its primary attributes towards improving social practice.

3.3 RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The research framework section is organized according to four broad categories of methodology, research design, data collection techniques, and analyzing and reporting the data.

3.3.1 Methodology

A research methodology is much more than the path taken by the researcher to answer their particular questions. The researcher must explore their guiding principles associated with a paradigm or worldview, which encompasses ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In other words, what do you believe about the nature of reality, about knowledge, and about the production of knowledge? (Merriam, 1998). In reviewing these guiding principles and paradigmatic positions, a researcher is ready to make choices on research process (e.g., case study), types of evidence (e.g., quantitative, qualitative), and types of data collection methods (e.g., survey, interview) (Yin, 1981).

Defined broadly, research paradigms originate from different sets of assumptions about the nature of knowledge and nature of reality, and they aim to achieve different goals. Quantitative or positivistic research paradigms aim to test existing theories, to investigate cause-effect relationships, to predict and to control, and to place emphasis on measurement and explanation. The qualitative research paradigm focuses on understanding the experiences of individuals and groups (Cresswell, 2002). Quantitative research stresses control of the independent variables whereas qualitative research has no control over independent variables. Qualitative research attempts to capture the complexity of real world experiences.

Notably, recent methodological understandings provide a more suitable approach for the social sciences: complexity theory. Complexity theory postulates that within the social and natural world there are both aspects of the quantitative and qualitative paradigm (Anderson, Crabtree, Steele, & McDaniel, 2005). Reality is not defined as a single truth but as a

constantly moving and shifting landscape which can only be defined at any moment by the particular viewer in question and from their particular viewpoint.

Complexity theory posits that organizations are organic, living systems (Capra, 2002). In other words, the health of the whole is dependant on the health of its subparts, and their ongoing symbiotic relationship. They are complex adaptive systems in which relationships are critical, are generally nonlinear, and lead to unpredictable dynamics (Wheatley, 1999). Case study designs can be more informative when they assist us in revealing these characteristics of complex systems (Anderson et al, 2005). Complex systems can only be understood as a whole not as a sum of parts (Cilliers, 1998). In regards to the ESSN, its role in the broader organization of the school district is of particular interest. It became a key element of the district accountability framework as well as a recentralization of power. It had an influence on a number of system directions and became a model for other networks/focus groups that were core to the district educational plan.

Single case study research through the lens of complexity theory provides a basis to merge both qualitative and quantitative understandings towards a more holistic understanding of a phenomenon as it exists in real life practices. As such, this study used a mixed methods approach. Mixed methods analyzed through the lens of complexity theory within a real life case is a good fit.

3.3.2 Mixed Methods

Mixed methods approach to research uses both qualitative and quantitative forms of evidence to understand a phenomenon. Primarily, this study used qualitative methods of document analysis, and interviews. The use of quantitative data, such as historical student achievement data, was used as part of case illumination, and proposition testing.

3.3.3 Design

The design of a study is the plan, or map. It helps you get “from here to there, where here may be defined as the initial set of questions to be answered, and there is some set of conclusions (answers) about these questions” (Yin, 2003, p. 20).

This case study was a single case design. The rationale is that the school district's NLC represents a critical or unique case. Given the unique location of the school district, the student population is a microcosm demographically of British Columbia. The communities of the school district are culturally diverse representing five First Nations Bands, a distinct Indo-Canadian population, as well as a South Pacific Asian population. In addition, the socio-economics of the communities range from poor to very affluent. The NLC offered an opportunity to look at a real world example of a school district's use of a network to support teacher learning. It is of interest to compare real practice to the theoretical "ideal" of a network.

According to Yin (2003), the case study design must have five components: the research question(s), its propositions, its unit of analysis, a determination of how data will be linked to the propositions, and criteria to interpret findings. Accordingly, this study's focus was to develop an understanding of the processes and impacts of a particular Networked Learning Community from the perspective of practitioners. The unit of analysis was the ESSN in the school district. The propositions informed the inquiry and analytic framework, and data matching was focused around these indices.

3.3.4 Network Participants

For research purposes, the people interviewed as part of this project included all the teachers who were members of the ESSN during the 2005 school year, two school based administrators, and one District Administrator. Most teachers had been members of the network for more than one school year, and the minimum number of years of teaching experience was 10 years within the school district. A teacher from each elementary school in the school district was included. The school based administrators were in the two largest elementary schools with an average population of 400 students in each school. Each principal had been in the school district for more than five years. The District Administrator interviewed had been in his role for ten years and had been in the school district for thirty years as a teacher, principal, and District Administrator.

The individual teachers interviewed work in different contexts as the school district is very diverse with three very distinct communities. For example one teacher would work with an aboriginal population of 60% of the student enrolment, another teacher worked in a school with 50% Indo-Canadian student population, another teacher works in a school located in one of the more expensive housing markets in the province, and another teacher worked in a very inner-city school population. During the interview process, some teachers noted that this was one of the powerful features of the network as they heard their colleagues work stories and this empowered them to reflect on their work and that their difficulties were not that bad.

All teacher participants were female and had been teaching primary for 5 years or more while all the administrators were male.

3.3.5 Data Collection Techniques

It is important to note that data collection in a case study is a recursive, interactive process in which engaging in one strategy incorporates or may lead to subsequent sources of data (Merriam, 1998). In order to improve reliability and validity of research findings it is recommended that researchers': a) use multiple sources of evidence; b) create a case study data base; and c) maintain a chain of evidence (Yin, 2003). This study used two main sources of data: interview and documents.

3.3.6 Interview Data

The main purpose of an interview is to obtain information about what is “in and on someone else’s mind” (Patton, 1990, p. 278). Interviews can be defined as a conversation – but a “conversation with a purpose” (Dexter, 1970, p. 136). Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behaviour, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them. As Patton explains (1990), “we interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe... we cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intention. We cannot observe behaviours that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people

questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective" (p. 196).

A semi-structured interview was the main data collection vehicle for this study. The reason for this was that it was practitioner understanding and meaning that was of primary interest. A flexible format was desired to enable surfacing of divergent viewpoints and avoid forced idiomatic closure. Interview questions focused on the processes of the ESSN, the participant's role in the group, and propositions about the NLC. A total of ten teachers and four administrators were interviewed. Each interview took roughly one hour and thirty minutes. Being a semi-structured interview, an interview protocol was used but participants were not bound to answering all the questions. My intent was to use the interview questions to prompt participants to tell me as much as possible about their role in the network, how the network operated, and what outcomes they experienced. Interview questions ranged from describing personal involvement and core processes of the network to those that probed the strengths and weaknesses of the network. For example, after all interview data was transcribed, I analysed it noting patterns to identify common themes. This is described in the data analysis section.

3.3.7 Documents

Documents can be used as an umbrella term to refer to a wide range of written, visual, and physical material relevant to the study at hand. Documentary data are particularly good sources for case studies because they can ground an investigation in the context of the problem being investigated (Merriam, 1998). The data found in documents can be used in the same manner as data from interviews or observations. The data can furnish descriptive information that helps to verify emerging hypotheses, advance new categories, offer historical understanding, and track change and development (Merriam, 1998). Types of documents include public records, personal documents, physical material, and researcher generated documents. Public records include program documents, organizational manuals, and letters to the public (Merriam, 1998).

Merriam (1998) outlines that like other data collection techniques, documents have their strength and limitations. Because they are produced for reasons other than research, they may be fragmentary, they may not fit the conceptual framework of the research, and their authenticity may be difficult to determine. This being said, documents exist independent of the research agenda, and they are unaffected by the research process. They are a product of the context in which they were produced and therefore grounded in the real world. In addition, many documents cost little or nothing and are easy to obtain.

Document collection focused on policies directly related to the ESSN development as well as current meeting agendas, notes, and related student data.

3.3.8 Data Sampling

Selecting the sample is dependent on the research problem. As this was a case study of the ESSN, all the individuals that were participating in the network at the time of the study were included. In addition, it was important that individuals who had an active role in the evolution of the ESSN, and represented different levels of the organization were represented. Therefore, two school principals, and a District Administrator were also interviewed. This was important as the district education plan has been considered the focal point of system learning. Individuals from different levels of the system provide unique perspectives on the organization as a whole.

3.3.9 Data Analysis

The goal of case study is to generate meaning from data to describe as accurately as possible the most complete description of the case. In general, this study used the data analysis processes of pattern matching and continual comparison. Triangulation of data sources was used to support conclusions. Under this analytical umbrella, Miles and Huberman (1994) propose a number of pragmatic tactics for generating meaning. These tactics move from descriptive to explanatory and from concrete to abstract. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), the first three tactics tell us “what goes with what.” The next two tell us “what’s there.” The next two help “sharpen our understanding.” The next four help us “see things and

their relationships more abstractly.” Finally the last two help us to “assemble a coherent understanding of the data” (pp. 245-246). Those underlined below were used for this study:

1. What goes with what: (a) noting patterns; (b) clustering; and (c) seeing plausibility.
2. What’s there: (a) making metaphors; and (b) counting.
3. Sharpen our understanding: (a) making comparisons; and (b) partitioning variables.
4. See things and their relationships more abstractly: (a) subsuming particulars into the general; (b) factoring; (c) noting relations between variables; and (d) finding intervening variables.
5. Assemble a coherent understanding of the data: (a) building a logical chain of evidence; and (b) making conceptual/theoretical coherence.

The mode of analysis used was pattern matching along with constant comparison. In using pattern matching, I compared an empirically based pattern with a predicted one. If the patterns coincided, the results helped to strengthen internal validity (Yin, 2003). This method of constant comparison involved comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences, in the end, data were grouped together on a similar dimension. This dimension was tentatively given a name; it then became a category. The overall objective of this analysis was to seek patterns in the data, and then to arrange these patterns in relationship to each other towards the building of understanding (Merriam, 1998).

During data collection, my analytic activity was to immerse myself in the data, reviewing interview transcripts, notes, and documents. This process was a necessary step to acquire a feeling for the experience of all respondents and the history of the group. I identify significant statements, which were those phrases, sentences, or paragraphs that related directly to the experience of the NLC. The purpose of identifying significant statements was

to describe aspects of the phenomenon as experienced by individuals involved. The product of this analytic activity was a collection of significant statements. In addition, I compared the significant statements from each source, paying particular attention to the commonalities across sources and the testing of core propositions. The purpose of this analytic strategy was to identify categories of significant statements that were common among sources. The processes of the case are identified, and the NLC propositions are tested, I reconnect significant statements to original context and validate outcomes.

3.3.10 Quality of the Research

Lincoln and Guba (2000) suggest that the emerging criteria for quality in interpretive inquiry be based on considering the relational aspects of the research process. In so doing, Merriam (1998) argues that the distinction between quality or rigor and ethics collapses. In many ways, the value derived from my data analysis depended on the overall thoughtfulness of my case study process. As much as my case study design attempts to understand the problem holistically, each part of the case study development was reliant on previous steps. This case study must itself be appreciated in a holistic way. The quality of case study design depends on the relevant tests including construct validity, external validity, and reliability (Yin, 2003).

1. Construct validity: establishing correct operational measures for the concepts being studied.
2. External validity: establishing the domain to which a study's findings can be generalised.
3. Reliability: demonstrating that the operations of a study such as the data collection procedures can be repeated with the same results.

Construct/Internal Validity

Construct or internal validity deals with the question of how the research findings match reality (Merriam, 1998). Yin (2003) identified three tactics available to increase construct validity. One tactic is to use multiple sources of evidence in a manner encouraging converging lines of inquiry. A second tactic is to establish a chain of evidence. And the

third tactic is to draft a case study report and have it reviewed by key informants. Each of these tactics is relevant to this case study.

In the development of the case study, data collection techniques were triangulated using interview and document data sources. The case summary includes a chain of evidence. A field diary was kept to record the evolution of the research process. Finally, care was given to elicit critique and correction of misinterpretation or misrepresentation.

Participants were provided with copies of summaries of interviews for feedback. In addition, recognizing that both the researcher and participants bring biases, predispositions, attitudes, and other characteristics that color the interaction and the data elicited, the researcher was mindful of the responsibility to establish rapport, being respectful, non-judgmental, and non-threatening (Merriam, 1998).

External Validity (Generalization)

As noted previously, this study uses analytical and naturalistic generalization as espoused by Yin (2003) and Stake (1995). Key to naturalistic generalization is the transferability of case understandings to other sites of practice. It is the degree to which this case is helpful for other practitioners grappling with related issues in their organization that will be the test of external validity. I know that in my new role in the Surrey School District I have found the results of this case analysis helpful in understanding the role of politics and provincial policy in impacting district direction. Further, I have a greater appreciation for the use of networks as a form of centralised decentralization in support of organizational direction.

Reliability

The natural scientific objective of reliability is that if another investigator were to follow exactly the same procedures as presented in a study, they would attain exactly the same results and draw similar conclusions. Reliability is based on the assumption that there is a single reality and that studying it repeatedly will yield the same results (Merriam, 1998). The goal of reliability is to minimize the errors and biases in the study. In case study research, researchers seek to describe and explain the world as those in the world experience it. Since

there are many interpretations of what is happening, there is no benchmark by which to take repeated measures and establish reliability in the traditional sense (Merriam, 1998).

For case study, Lincoln and Guba (1984) propose trustworthiness as an alternate way to think about reliability. Such trustworthiness derives, however, not from convincing, life-like detail, but from the careful presentation of a logical, well-evidenced argument: an argument supported at each step by documentation from field recordings or observation notes, and strengthened by the researcher's own systematic scrutiny of his or her own theorizing as it develops (Brooker, 2002). Trust builds upon the dependability or consistency of the results obtained from the data. Rather than demanding that outsiders get the same results, a researcher wishes outsiders to concur that, given the data collected, the results make sense.

Yin (2003) posits that one approach to ensuring reliability is to make as many steps as possible as operational as possible. As such, I have collected all data from documents, assessment results, and participant interviews in two binders. All data can be easily reviewed by those interested.

Ethics

Fundamental to both the data collection and the dissemination of findings is the researcher and participant relationship. Consideration was given to the research purpose, how informed the consent can be, and how much privacy and protection from harm is afforded the participants.

In this research, there was a weighing of the costs and benefits of an investigation, with safeguards to protect the rights of participants, and with ethical considerations in the presentation of research findings. As this study was intended to illuminate the practices within a particular organization, additional care was given to the protection of individuals in order to elicit truthful perspectives while not putting them under future negative consequences from those in positions of power. In addition, as some judgments might be made about the school district as a whole, care was taken to protect the district as a whole from harm (e.g., its reputation with the public). A pseudonym shall be used to refer to the school district in all written reports.

Informed consent was gained from each individual interviewed, as well as from the district administration. Subsequently, data gathered was provided back to participants for review prior to inclusion in analysis. In regards to documents, the data mined from such sources was used consistent with the intended purpose of this study.

3.3.11 Writing the Report

The reporting of this study takes three different forms. First, the dissertation presented in part of the requirements for a doctorate in education. Second, a brief report to the School District Board of Education and senior management chronicles the research process and substantive theory developed. Finally, a power point presentation will be made open to school district employees and community members. I believe these reporting mechanisms will also contribute to the validity of the case study as it will provide further insight into the case as a process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

3.3.12 Purpose of Research

The evolutionary momentum of fragmented and incremental thinking may pose a significant barrier to a management paradigm such as learning organization (Senge, 1990) that relies on holistic thinking and consequently fundamentally antithetical to the prevailing practice. New ideas take time to be understood and trusted and many business and educational managers may be highly reluctant to change (Argyris, 1991). This research intends to ameliorate such challenges and promote recognition/acceptance as well as reduce confusion around learning organizations and networks and their potential in public schooling. In addition, this research supports the utility of case study as a vehicle to develop phronesis.

CHAPTER 4

CASE CONTEXT

4.1 FINDINGS: CHARACTERIZING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CASE

Case Study - It is the narrative of how something came to be the way it is. And, in telling the story, the case is revealed (Becker & Ragin, 2000). How did it come about? What made it work within the school district? The purpose is to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the group under study (Becker & Ragin, 2000).

This chapter contextualises the case of the ESSN within the political and educational trends evident during the network's inception and evolution. This context is intended to sensitize the reader to how the network was born, and the social/political trends evident that may have influenced its evolution. First, the case is explored within the broader educational and political trends evident in 2001-2002 which ostensibly influenced macro to micro educational policy such as the Accountability Framework (Ministry of Education, 2004) to Assessment to Instruction (District Education Plan, 2003). Second, the case is explored within the particular educational and political context of the school district. Third, the case is explored from the sequence of decisions that resulted in the creation and evolution of the ESSN, as well as its purported guiding principles, and operating structures.

4.2 EDUCATIONAL AND POLITICAL TRENDS INFLUENCING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ESSN

How are they related to one another and how is the group related to the rest of the world? (Becker & Ragin, 2000)

In what way does the greater context of the school district and Ministry of Education mandates influence the network? The ESSN was established initially as a pilot project by a District Administrator and a group of teachers who expressed interest in the project. The primary aim of the group was improving end of grade one reading results for children considered "at risk" on key indicators of learning to read. Pertinent to this case study is an appreciation that social problems and their subsequent solutions are a reflection of their

context and the dominant culture's ideology. According to Edelman (1988), not all social issues develop a level of notoriety to where they become a "problem" requiring intervention. The creation of a problem in society is ostensibly fraught with competing interests, power relations, and a grid of social realities which frame only certain issues as problematic (Scheurich, 1994). Key to the group's work was the increased focus by the Ministry of Education on early reading.

The ESSN in the school district evolved within and because of broader trends in government and education, as well as the utility of early reading outcomes to support particular directions from the B.C. Ministry of Education (e.g., data-driven dialogue, evidence based decision making, and accountability contracts). These directions were influenced by academics and educational policy brokers as a significant focus was being brought to the importance of early literacy skills and the impact on schooling (National Reading Panel Report, 2000, Early Reading Report Ministry of Education, 1999, etc.), and the use of quantitative reading data to forward educational policy (e.g., No Child Left Behind, B.C. Accountability Framework).

4.3 PROVINCIAL POLITICAL CONTEXT

Upon election in 2001, the B.C. Liberal party held a significant majority government, and had promised during the campaign to provide a leaner government where deregulation would be a macro-level policy (Government of British Columbia, 2004). The government perspective for public services outlined in their service plan as a commitment to minimal intervention in the operation of public goods, while requiring the maintenance of high standards (Government of British Columbia, 2004). This perspective was consistent with movements to "reinvent government" with a focus on accounting for results as opposed to accounting for expenditures (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). With this new direction publicly established in the early days of office, the Liberals reorganized and revised roles and functions of most government ministries such as Education and developed new policies such as the Accountability Framework to meet this end (Ministry of Education, 2004b).

In general, the role of accountability became more visible in public service sectors. In particular, public schooling had seen the resurgence of a standards-based movement where

schools and teachers were being asked by governments to demonstrate improved student performance (Reeves, 2004). In 2001, after the election of the British Columbia Liberal Party, the new government described their focus to be performance-based service and standards, transparency, and accountability in the management of public goods like education (Government of British Columbia, 2004). On its website, the Ministry of Education (2004a) specifically articulates goals of “improving student achievement”, and “creating a high quality, performance-oriented education system”.

To this end, the Ministry set forth a new policy entitled the “Accountability Framework”. The express purpose of this framework was to hold school districts responsible for explicitly addressing student achievement in specific areas such as literacy (Ministry of Education, 2004a).

The accountability framework was a significant shift in practice. Prior to 2001, system review or schooling accountability happened at the school level through a process of accreditation. School districts did not undergo a review of their practices in supporting the academic agenda of schools. In other words, post 2001, school districts as a system had to plan more systemically and find vehicles to support district-wide initiatives. Further, the Ministry of Education’s articulated focus on “good schools” found expression as achievement. Related to this notion of achievement, the Ministry of Education implemented, province wide, the Foundational Skills Assessment (FSA) for grades 4, 7, and 10. Many school districts used the FSA results as a measure of their districts achievements. The focus on FSA as a key indicator of school success was a significant narrowing or, alternatively, focusing of what “student achievement” meant.

The key elements of the Accountability Framework include: 1) District Accountability Contracts; 2) District Reviews; and 3) School Planning Councils (Ministry of Education, 2004b). It was directed through this policy that schools, school boards and the Ministry will develop accountability contracts, monitor progress toward improving student performance using data from sources such as Foundational Skills Assessments, and will report these results to parents, and the community (Ministry of Education, 2004b). District Review Teams are to focus on improving student achievement through school and district planning.

Up to twenty district reviews are to be conducted annually as part of the Accountability Framework. Teams include parents, teachers, school principals and District Administrators. School Planning Councils consist of an administrator, a teacher and three parents elected by the Parent Advisory Council (Ministry of Education, 2004b). School Planning Councils are to examine how well students are performing and develop annual plans for schools that include goals and outcomes for student improvement. From a systems perspective, the Accountability Framework was designed to connect schools to a district plan or accountability contract, and brought parents into the decision making process in a new way through School Planning Councils.

The Accountability Framework marked a dramatic shift in public education governance. This shift in governance may be part of a larger social/political context as Osborne and Gaebler (1992) argue that there is a trend in Western governments to become more “corporate” with a focus on accountability, standards of performance, and measurable outcomes. For example, certain provincial governments such as the Klein and Harris governments of Alberta and Ontario respectively reflected this trend with their strong “results-based” mandates for public education (Graham, 1999; News in Review, 1998). Graham (1999) further argues that both Klein and Harris have supported corporate interest groups instead of the broader public interests such as education. With these Canadian precedents in mind, it can be alleged that the B.C. Liberals adopted a similar strategy; and the Accountability Framework is consistent with this larger political movement to convert government to a more business-savvy entity, boasting surpluses and numbers to “prove” success rates.

Prior to the Accountability Framework, depending on the school and/or school district, low performing students were identified by disparate measures (e.g., authentic assessment versus standardized testing) (Reeves, 2004). Other areas of concern (e.g., as identified by the government) were that school improvement efforts were teacher focused and often reflected instructional needs as opposed to learner outcomes (Schmoker, 1999). Further, the focus by the Ministry of Education for improving schooling was primarily at the individual school

level as opposed to an entire district, and parents had relatively no input into school goals and planning. The Accountability Framework made prominent shifts in all of these areas.

In addition to representing a new approach by government to improve schooling, the Accountability Framework was a response to certain public attitudes. A public opinion poll conducted by the Globe and Mail in 1999 pointed to 82% of parents expressing concern over their child's education (Bricker & Greenspon, 2001). The respondents did not stress concern with a decrease in the current or historical quality of education, but that the expectations of the "real world" had been raised significantly. These parents were concerned that in order for Canadian students to remain competitive in the global economy, the quality of schooling must improve (Bricker & Greenspon, 2001). Other research also tends to support this conclusion (Schweitzer, 1995; Hepburn, 1999; Canadian Newswire, 2004). While such research cannot be generalised to all Canadian parents, it suggests that this visible proportion, likely those with access to certain resources (e.g., education, money), may hold these opinions. The Accountability Framework appears to be directed at these kinds of concerns.

At the school level, the Accountability Framework was implemented through policy established by district management, expected to be consistent with Ministry and school board guidelines. In the school district, individual schools were required to develop "school growth plans" in which key achievement goals are articulated. These goals are also required to be congruent with district goals and supported by Ministry data such as the Foundational Skills Assessment. Much like the government controls the implementation of the Accountability Framework; the school district focused financial resources such as collaboration time and other targeted resources toward the achievement of the overarching accountability contract goals (District Education Plan, 2003). Therefore, schools, given fiscal realities, are heavily influenced to support the district accountability goals.

The ESSN was born in this context of government change and the genesis of the Accountability Framework. It began as a grassroots movement by a number of teachers interested in the focus of early reading development. The main focus was on the sharing of teacher practices and the improvement of reading skills for "at risk" grade one students, however, its timing was perfect as a vehicle for system change given the emergence of the

Accountability Framework, and the focus on quantitative measures of school improvement. The ESSN appeared to meet the needs of: 1) the school district as a vehicle to connect schools and to promote a district-wide agenda; 2) it also appeared to meet the needs of principals who needed a focus for school growth plans that were more quantitatively driven; 3) it appeared to meet the needs of School Planning Councils as a focus for their school improvement deliberations; and 4) it appeared to meet the needs of teachers in working through the increasing literature and pressure on early reading results and the drive for evidence-based intervention. The ESSN, although not intentionally designed to meet all of these ends, appeared to provide each stakeholder group with support via data collection and analysis at a school and district level. In other words, given the context of 2001, the system was primed for a district-wide network, collaborative school teams, shared assessment data, and the sharing of research supported practices in the area of early reading.

4.4 EDUCATIONAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT

What influence does the network have on the context of the school district?

Within the broader context of political and educational trends surrounding the inception of the ESSN was the history and specific context of the school district. Four key contextual elements need to be highlighted. First, prior to 1999 there had been a long period of stability in teaching and administrative staff and a highly centralised budget process. Secondly, in 1999, the school district decentralised. Thirdly, between 1999 and 2003, there were four different superintendents. Fourthly, the schooling community in the school district is very diverse both geographically and demographically. Each contextual factor will be discussed in turn.

In 1999, the district decentralised all its educational supports and funding including those pertinent to special education and curriculum initiatives. This decentralization movement was a reaction to the long period of a highly controlled central budget process. In effect decentralization diminished the role of a central education office. As noted by District

Administrators and principals, “there was neither role nor monies for district office to support an educational direction. In effect schools became their own fiefdoms”.

From a funding to service perspective, school administrators became closed mouthed about their operating budgets, and there appeared little evident motivation for a shared educational agenda. No sharing of monies occurred between schools. As a District Administrator noted regarding a district-wide educational agenda:

I hate to use the word fragmentation, but in a sense there was a fragmented approach to the concentration on literacy. There was a decentralised model; schools were largely autonomous in how they approached education per se and literacy in particular. There was no meaningful interaction amongst educators. There were some ad hoc literacy projects and inservice – it was very much a piece meal approach. In essence, there were thirteen separate little school districts operating independent of a district vision.

With the onset of the Accountability Framework, a district focus re-emerged and a district educational agenda with supporting monies. At the same time, the ESSN was born from a Ministry of Education grant. There was little appetite for principals to release monies to the district in support of a collective initiative. It was the success of the ESSN alongside of the Accountability Framework that embedded the ESSN into district-wide practice.

Another pertinent factor to the school district context was a high turnover in superintendents. There were four superintendents between 1998 and 2003. The ability to have a focused district office led educational plan within this context of leadership change was difficult. This high level of change reinforced and solidified schools as independent contractors. Consequently, this was fertile ground for a grass roots movement to begin given there was no competing educational agenda to impede its evolution. In many ways, the ESSN operated outside of the purview of the power brokers. The participants asked for no money from the system and as such were not seen as a threat to the status quo. It was within this context of decentralised budgeting, and no district wide educational agenda that the ESSN was given time to develop and build system utility and momentum. As noted earlier, the timing of the ESSN appeared serendipitous. The Ministry of Education’s Accountability Framework provided the leverage to legitimate the ESSN as well as a platform for the Board Office

Administrators to recapture a role in providing an educational agenda. In essence, the Accountability Framework assisted the district to shift the balance of power from predominately in the hands of school principals to a more balanced place of individual school principals and district administration. The ESSN provided a vehicle for this shift as it was noted as being successful by teachers, included a number of schools, and consumed few resources. The last contextual factor to comment on is the complexity of the schooling community in the school district. Given the unique location of the school district, the student population is a demographic microcosm of British Columbia. The communities of the school district are culturally diverse. They represent Caucasian population, five First Nations Bands, a distinct Indo-Canadian population, as well as a South Asian population. In addition, the socio-economics of the communities range from poor to very affluent. This level of diversity across communities and from school to school was one of the arguments against a district wide agenda. The argument being, “how could we have a district wide agenda when communities are so unique... just give us the money”. Therefore, one of the challenges to a district plan for student achievement was that individual school personnel were logically prepared to challenge any single initiative, program, or strategy that was to be implemented district-wide.

The ESSN needed to fit the prevailing context “that every school is unique”. Therefore the only common expectation for participating schools within the ESSN was the use of a common assessment tool called the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (e.g., DIBELS). The DIBELS was the shared assessment tool agreed upon by the initial teacher group that came together. Subsequently, there was training provided by the district for practitioners. Although research on reading was reviewed and interventions were shared by network participants, no specific approach or program was held up as being the “one” the district would adopt. Given the demographic, political, and social context of the school district, this approach worked very well in solidifying the ESSN as a district vehicle for change. The ESSN could bring teachers together to provide a district focus on early reading assessment to intervention while side-stepping any impediments typically brought about by the critique of “one-stop-shop” teaching methods/programs. The ESSN enabled teachers to

keep their current teaching practices while trying on new ideas, and/or critiquing old ideas through a refreshed lens of the academic literature on early reading development.

4.5 CREATION AND EVOLUTION OF THE ESSN

What were the sequence of decisions, purported guiding principles, and operating structures? What was the perceived evolution of the ESSN, as discerned from documents and district personnel?

The ESSN was a grassroots movement by classroom and learner support teachers in the school district. As noted previously, this movement was supported by a Ministry of Education grant for early reading intervention initiatives, as well as influenced by prevailing social/political trends. Specifically, in 2001, the Ministry of Education offered small grants to districts that put forward a plan to provide intervention to students considered “at risk” for early reading problems. Consequently, in my role as a coordinator of special education, I sent out an invitation for teachers who would like to put together a proposal for the Ministry and participate in the pilot project if we received funding. An initial team of eight teachers representing six schools as well as district administration met to put together the initial proposal.

The proposal had three key parts; 1) collaboration time; 2) a shared assessment tool; and 3) a focus on the current academic literature on early reading. In particular, the plan proposed a collaborative structure at the school level, as well as a mechanism for “team leaders” from each school to come together to share practices and insights at their individual schools (this became the ESSN). There was agreement from the start that no one method of intervention would be espoused but that teachers would be reviewing and sharing the literature on early reading. The common foci were a key shared assessment framework (e.g., DIBELS) and the development of collaborative structures at the school site within grade or department level groups. Initially, the District Administrator was the sole facilitator of the group (me). My role was to provide research articles, collect data from schools, aggregate the data, and facilitate team leader meetings. Initially, the team leader meetings became known as the

Early School Success Focus Group. This title came from the Ministry of Education grant process which labelled projects as Early School Success projects.

The initial grassroots project was for roughly 6 months in the 2001 school year. The results of this pilot project appeared significant in regards to student success and empowerment of the teachers involved. Further, the cost of the ESSN was minimal (\$9,000 out of \$33,000,000 budget or .0002727 of district budget).

A report to the Ministry of Education on project outcomes highlighted these outcomes: “Initial assessment identified 25% of students at high risk before intervention. Follow-up assessment after intervention demonstrated 7% of students “at risk”... anecdotally, teachers involved in the project consistently report that their students are making noticeable improvements and that the project has helped enhance their classroom practice” (Ministry of Education Report, 2001).

Given the apparent positive results of this project and minimal costs, district administration received a budget allocation to expand and support the continuation of the Early School Success group beyond 2001. In 2002, the Network, as a recognised system tool to bring teachers together for the purpose of sharing practice, formally began. Two features highlight this: 1) the district encouraged all schools to participate in the network; and 2) provided funding for release time for a team leader at each school to attend four team leader network meetings a year. The district also provided grants to each school that chose to participate to support school based collaboration time during the school day. In addition, the district provided release time (total of two days a month) for a teacher to co-facilitate the district team leader meetings (the ESSN). At this point in time, school participation was still considered invitational, but with participation, the principal was expected to support in school collaboration time, and teachers were expected to use the DIBELS as an assessment tool. As a result, the network expanded to 9 out of 11 elementary schools.

In the 2003 school year, with increasing focus on district accountability contracts and a favourable Ministry Review Team Report (e.g., Ministry Review teams were made up of educators and Ministry personnel whose role it was to review the district’s progress towards

its accountability contract) that highlighted the work of the ESSN project, district administration initiated three other focus/network groups in the areas of Social Responsibility, Numeracy, and Intermediate Level Reading. In addition, the district made participation in each group mandatory. That is, a team leader from each school was expected to participate in the noted groups including the ESSN group. This new mandate was not met without negativity. Much of the concern was voiced about the expansion into other areas of learning such as intermediate level reading. The ESSN group had been in operation for two years and as such had developed a value for those involved.

4.6 SUMMARY OF CASE CONTEXT

The evolution from policy to practice and from a grass roots movement to an organizational mandate is interesting and somewhat reflective of the shifting power bases within the school district. The ESSN started with a small group of teachers interested in improving the reading results of grade one students. The network's development appears to have been strongly influenced by Ministry policy, as well as socio-political dynamics of the school district. The evolution of the ESSN within these contexts acted as a fulcrum in changing power dynamics within the school district. As a result, there was a significant shift from a decentralised system to a more centrally controlled schooling agenda. In addition, the direct influence of Ministry of Education Accountability Framework inclusive of a District Accountability Contract, and a Ministry Review Team process that focussed on district wide educational initiative versus the historic school level accreditation model enabled and created a space where the ESSN was seen as a useful vehicle for supporting schooling in the school district. The ESSN timing was excellent. It supported an assessment to instruction framework, provided support to the district administration grappling with an Accountability Contract; it provided support for school administrators dealing with School Planning Councils and School Growth Plans; and it supported fellow teachers being asked for concrete data on how students were performing with regard to early reading. It was the innovation of this district educational network structure for an early school success initiative that provided a structural framework for a District Educational Plan wherein teachers came together to discuss practice in specific areas. The teachers involved in this project did not see the ESSN as some grand design to change power dynamics in the school district. The ESSN served a more practical

need of supporting their teaching practice. The focus of the next chapter is on participant interviews and how they perceived the ESSN.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

5.1 FINDINGS: OPERATION OF NETWORK FROM KEY PLAYERS

This chapter presents the findings of interview data collected as part of the case study. Each participant was asked specific questions related to the ESSN. The questions were guided by the academic literature as well as my desire to explore understandings and impacts of the ESSN from network members.

5.2 SUCCESS: THE BIG IDEAS

Of interest, each person interviewed framed the ESSN as a success. In addition, “teacher talk”, building a shared language, shared assessment practices, a relaxed environment, and the network architecture were articulated as pillars of the ESSN. In reviewing the interview data it is apparent that each pillar is linked to the other in a non-linear manner and it is this inter-dependence that defines participant perception of success. I present the interview data in regards to apparent themes.

5.2.1 Teacher Talk

When each participant was asked about why they felt the ESSN was a success, the primary response each gave was the opportunity for teachers to talk to one another about practice. Importantly, this comment was qualified with words like “focused conversation”, “our agenda”, “classroom teacher can become isolated”, “I never met a teacher from another school”, “outside of group think of my own school”, and “sharing practices”. Essentially, teachers talk to one another all the time in their schools but it is usually in an informal manner and not focussed on a particular theme for an extended period of time. This was an essential aspect of the ESSN and how it supported teacher reflection and practice. “Teacher talk” in this research became synonymous with an intensity of focus on Early Literacy.

Participant comments that reflected the value of “teacher talk” were:

I think teachers are more open to talking to teachers. It is not that they are afraid of administrators, but I think administrators sometimes have a different agenda or perhaps not an agenda that you know about.

I find our teacher talk time to be incredibly focused... because you are talking with other teachers in an environment where everybody is focused on the same topic area. Instead of sitting in a staff room where you are talking about children and behaviours of children or parent involvement... you are talking with colleagues about a particular teaching practice. I found the opportunity to engage in focused discussions around effective literacy practices to be very rewarding.

These quotes highlight some common themes captured in the interview data. First, it seems apparent that the idea of trust and the balance of power are seen as important in the perception of participating teachers. Second, teachers articulated that these groups needed to be focused not simply a social network. As one participant commented, “if this was not a support to our practice we just wouldn’t show up”.

A related issue that reinforces the need for teachers to come together to discuss practice was linked to the awareness of how isolating teaching can be. Although this has been highlighted in the literature on why learning organizations offer important changes for schooling, it was interesting to see it commented on strongly from practitioners.

Teacher isolation:

Teachers have to get out of their school building. I never met a teacher from another school except at District day. Teachers have to expand their professional networks beyond their school and district. Prior to coming together as a network there were very few opportunities within our district to come together to focus on sharing teaching practices.

If you confine yourself to the people on your own staff, which so many of us do, you limit your professional development. You often don’t know what other teachers in the district are doing. The ESSN gives you opportunity to explore, discuss, and share each others practices. We share practices, such as something positive that has happened in early literacy in your school. Everyone who is part of the group is provided an opportunity to share and contribute. It is eye opening.

It is typical of teachers to operate autonomously and perhaps whether it is right or wrong, you get use to it – it works for you. You kind of get stuck in a groove and sometimes it is difficult to pull yourself out.

The link between teacher isolation and the value in discussing practice with other teachers is clear. Of interest, many participants commented on the need to get away from their school context. This is of particular interest to highlight the difference between Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of "communities of practice" and "learning networks." That is each type of community may have a different value for practitioners. Communities of practice support and teach new practitioners the culture within their particular school whereas networked learning communities enable teachers to think beyond the way things are done at their school. In addition, the informal power structures existing in a teacher's school that may limit new approaches to practice do not exist in the network.

Building on the theme of "teacher talk" and the value of becoming networked outside of your particular class or school is the perception of power and empowerment as evidenced through these comments.

I think there's so much power in people working together and sharing strategies and sharing different programs that they've run. Whether it's a program like Readwell, or a strategy like Repeated Reading... I think that the network provides the space to do that. I think it's great for colleagues to get together and sit down to ask about each others practice. If we're having some challenges in an instructional area we get to find out what other teachers have found successful in their context.

Involvement in the network gave me the push to get out of my school and dialogue with colleagues. Sometimes it's easy with, life is busy in the classroom, to shut the door and practice in isolation of others not necessarily improve your practice. I think involvement in the network has been a really good vehicle for my own professional growth. My involvement stimulated questions that I have, specifically in the area of literacy and early reading.

My impression is that teachers want to come to things like this network. Currently, the teachers involved are not forced to come. They seem to enjoy being a member of the group. Everyone is open to sharing their ideas. I would see the group as being successful.

The relationship between focused “teacher talk” and decreasing the feeling of teacher isolation, and the subsequent impressions of being empowered, and having power as a group is significant. The value of “teacher talk” is a primary benefit of this network. Of interest, “teacher talk” as implied by the variety of comments is much more than simply a community of practice idea. It is not a general conversation about education nor is it about conforming to a one-best way to conduct teaching. More so, “teacher talk”, facilitated by the network, includes a focussed conversation around some key aspect of schooling, the sharing of a variety of practices that occurs outside of a teacher’s typical classroom or school context. Essentially, “teacher talk” is a euphemism for shared practice and a metaphor to counter teacher isolation and singular understandings of practice. Further, a key underpinning of “teacher talk” is that administrators are not in charge of the agenda. This connotes horizontal decision-making as it implies that there is not an “administrator’s agenda” hovering over or controlling the flow of information. One attribute or gauge of a successful network is the level and quality of “teacher talk”.

This network is different than a work place community of practice. The creation of a space that enables “teacher talk” is a direct result of a number of factors inclusive of focus, and a sharing of practices across diverse schooling environments. Within an individual school and typical teacher gathering places like the staffroom, conversations are noted as being much more general regarding what is happening in the school or in the political world, and/or the allowable conversations are constrained by the norms of communities of practice in that particular school. This is a fundamental difference between a network that is more diffuse and enables a variety of voices and a community of practice which reinforces the culture of that particular workplace.

This more expansive notion of “teacher talk” also seems to provide some psychological comfort to participating teachers, as well as a greater level of connection to the organization as a whole. These sentiments were captured in the following statements:

One great aspect of the group is that you hear what colleagues are doing in classrooms and school that have completely different student populations. I work at a school with a homogenous student population but as a member of this group I hear the challenges teachers face with a more heterogeneous student body. I find that I

stop beating myself up a bit. I realise that we all have our challenges because teaching is complex. When I listen to colleagues talk about their class being a box of Crayola crayons, you think, 'my problems aren't that bad'.

I think my involvement in the ESSN has made me more aware. When you don't come together as teachers at the District level, you are confined only to your school. I realise that the more I get to visit with colleagues across the district and even more when I get out of the district and find out what is happening in other school districts, it influences my practice. I believe it changes my practice every day. It seems to me that this form of creating teacher connections is absolutely necessary to improving the quality of teaching.

Sometimes we live too much in a bubble within our own classroom and within our own school. I think schools are now starting to meet more within the schools and because of the opportunities created by the early success group, it's enabled us to meet teachers from other schools and explore other teaching and assessment tools.

A number of interview comments highlighted how bringing teachers from different school contexts together enriched the personal thinking of practitioners. Although these comments were linked to practitioner isolation, they went beyond isolation to include considerations of other practitioner's experience. In effect, one could label the consideration of other practitioner's experience as professional practice empathy. From this professional empathy, a number of practitioners commented on how their individual practice was enhanced by a greater understanding of their colleague's contextual realities.

In addition, participants' comments seemed to build from this appreciation of other contexts to a more generalised sense of district cohesion as evidenced by the following comments.

I think we are becoming a more connected school district. Our district is unique in the fact that it has a relatively small student population but yet geographically the district is spread out. It is important for our teachers to be able to talk to each other. There are teachers in my school that so rarely get out of the school. Unless somebody is going to bring new information back to them they aren't going to know any different.

Before coming together as part of the network we never interacted with each other, you never saw teachers from one end of the district to the other, you pretty much felt insulated and isolated. You relied on the teachers at your school to get the things

done. If you heard about a project at another school there was no opportunity to get involved with that school or to work with those teachers. A benefit of the network is that now there is a way to send information back and forth to share practices. Previously, we found out about new initiative through our administrators or didn't find out at all, which generally would be the case. Now we know what's going on in other schools and when we go to our meetings, we get to see people like you (Pius) and other district administrators. Now, when I go to the Board Office I feel like I am more a part of the district team.

A sense of connection to others engaged in a similar pursuit beyond each person's individual school house seemed to be a very important psychological feature to the value of the network. The sense of connection and appreciation for a broader social context has implications for organizational coherence in systems where fragmentation exists due to geography or ideology.

5.2.2 Shared Language Development

Creating the space where "teacher talk" happens is an intentional exercise that is built from a common assessment framework and the development of a shared language, both of which enable participants to have a more focused instructional conversation. Participants highlighted that development of a shared language was accomplished in part by an ideological framework of "assessment for learning"¹⁶ and at least initially via a shared assessment tool.

A guiding principle to the network group was assessment to instruction. Assessment to instruction refers to assessment of a student's needs prior to teacher decisions regarding which aspects of the curriculum to provide direct instruction. In other words, the focus of instruction is not a pre-determined approach to content or process but more of a reflection of the assessment of a child's needs. This idea was fundamental as part of the underlying operating structure of the network as articulated by a District Administrator:

Assessment to instruction has been a driving force in our district to improve teacher practice. To be able to come together and talk about assessment and instruction is

¹⁶ Assessment to instruction is the idea that instruction is guided by pre-assessment, and that ongoing formative assessment is used to calibrate the instructional focus. Ostensibly, this is a more student responsive teaching rather than teaching the curriculum without formative assessment (Black & William, 1998).

vital because I am concerned that too many teachers don't really understand assessment practices.

The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) was chosen as the shared assessment framework for the network. As described in the evolution of the ESSN, this was the tool that the initial group of teachers agreed upon as a shared tool. Although, there was not wholesale agreement as to it being the best framework in that some members found it too fluency oriented, and some did not like the level of organization required to conduct timely assessments and/or district reporting. Albeit, a common assessment tool enabled the development of a shared language for practitioners to share practice, contest practice, as well as challenge the quality of assessment(s).

Interview comments seemed to support practitioner awareness that for the group to have a level of cohesion, a common assessment tool was needed. As some participants commented:

I think we need a common language and a way to compare what's working and what's not. The DIBELS has been a great tool for this. When you introduce a new assessment it takes a while for people to feel comfortable with it.

I think there has been a significant increase of awareness district wide regarding assessment. Whether it is because of the DIBELS or whether it is because of some sort of formalized assessment at the school level, at least we are all focused on a similar end. We are all talking... the language has become clearer.

The shared assessment tool helped with communication amongst teachers. Even though there are teachers that really don't like the idea of a common assessment tool, it's needed. Teachers need to have commonalities in the district, it is very important as part of early reading success for students. In spite of some negative talk that went along using one particular assessment tool (the DIBELS), we have educated a lot of teachers about quality assessment.

Of interest, the implementation of a common assessment tool brought forward a number of issues related to assessment that concerned teachers, such as the reliability and validity of our assessment practice, and the development of an understanding of student performance.

It gets you talking the same language. I shared a particular story with the group about a student in my class. It gets everybody talking about fluency, for example. It gives you all a common language. If you don't have a common language, you are all over the place.

When teachers speak the same language we are able to communicate more effectively about the practice in our schools. We are able to help children who struggle by sharing teaching strategies.

Although participants saw a value and link between a shared assessment and the building of a shared language, all participants saw the shared assessment tool as only part of a more expansive battery of assessment tools they would use in practice. The fear that the DIBELS was narrowing the role of assessment seemed unfounded.

Examples include:

I like the idea of having one common assessment tool but using one tool doesn't provide you with a comprehensive assessment of a child's skill. You need more than one assessment tool to assess a child as a whole and to report on their progress in school.

Our school has used the district assessment and combined it with writing samples, comprehension. We used the DIBELS to make decisions about grouping of children along with each teachers own informal assessments. It really helped to guide us, keep track of those scores, as well as keep track of the student's progress. The assessment helped us to make good choices for the students, our choice of teaching practices, and grouping decisions rather than just relying on our gut instinct.

Some participants recognized the need for a common tool with its inherent limitations as a vehicle towards development.

Such as:

There is value in a shared assessment tool and even with the limitations of a single assessment tool it allows us to do the other positive things like district communication, networking, and the exposure to new materials.

Overall, participants highlighted the need for a common point of reference such as an assessment tool that enabled a shared language. This was critical in the understanding of each other's practice, as well as building an appreciation of each other's context as there was some level of normative criteria to judge each other's context and student make-up. The shared focus and purpose for teachers appeared to be driven from the development of a shared language towards the particular ends determined by the assessment tool. Clearly, the focus was integral to the development of the network.

5.2.3 Relaxed Environment – Voices Matter

The creation of the network space that supported “teacher talk” and a shared language relied significantly on a psychologically safe environment. In other words, participants had to feel that their voices mattered and that they were in a safe environment to share their understandings and practice.

As one participant said:

It is important to know that you are not going to be judged by colleagues, know that your aims and motives are similar, that you have a common purpose, that you are actually helping each other develop professional expertise and can do so safely through the building of a relationship and the building of trust.

Four factors seemed to contribute to developing a safe environment. One was all participants were from different schools and as such they were not confined by the community of practice from their school.

As one member commented:

Any time you get a representative from each different school you can't help but mediate the message. It is the same as the district professional development committee. You get a representative from each school and you talk. I think it reduces teacher anxiety.

Two, the flexibility or choice on how teachers were able to utilise and share information gained via the network was very important as part of the network's success.

One teacher noted:

Every teacher has a different teaching style... so if you are taking two hours out to come and meet with other teachers, many teachers do not consider that a break. Some teachers see this as time they are sacrificing with their children. Teachers want the time spent at the network meetings to be valuable. If I am just sitting here listening to somebody tell me how to practice that would be the last time I would come to the group meeting. I am thinking 90% of teachers act in a similar manner. If the group is not meeting teacher needs they would shut it down super fast.

Three, the conscious development of a shared agenda was highly valued.

As one participant noted:

Because we have a reasonably relaxed environment... you don't get the feeling that you're being directed so much as you're part of a group... sometimes in meetings and focus groups it can be more officious. In our meetings, you are the messenger for your school...you're reporting your data...your information...it's your agenda. I think that for the network to be of value to teachers, it has to be driven from the teachers' agenda and not directed from the top down.

Four, the length of membership was also seen as an important contribution to creating a sense of safety.

As one member noted:

It is getting better because the same people are attending regularly. If new people attended each time, I think the group would struggle in creating a depth to the conversations. Having the same people, I think, makes a difference. We've all established a relationship.

Teaching is a complex activity and some teachers expressed concern that their understandings or practices of teaching would not be validated by the group. Psychological safety and valuing of each person's perspective was a high priority of the group but clearly certain structures and group understandings had to be consciously put in the design and operation of the network. In particular, the network was made up of teachers from different schools, and the understanding that there was no "one best way" to conduct practice.

Teachers did agree, however, that the common goal of improved literacy results was important for group cohesion and focus.

5.2.4 Network Architecture

Core to creating a trusting space leading to shared language and “teacher talk” was the actual design of the network meetings. The network was an innovation in the structural design of the HSSD schooling organization. It was a conscious creation of a space where the practices across schools (via “teacher talk”) were shared as well as an impetus for within school sharing of practice from teacher to teacher. Prior to the ESSN, schools operated in isolation from one another and teachers did not get to know each other from different schools. As noted, they would see each other once a year at the district professional development event.

The network meetings (e.g., team leader meetings) operated with a common set of processes. In some ways these were repetitive from meeting to meeting but this was intentional to bring form and comfort for participants (e.g., psychological safety) and team leaders knew what to expect. The basic architecture included scheduled embedded time to meet, food, agenda, clear connection with bigger picture and organization direction (valued work), clear assessment tools towards agreed upon end, group facilitator, and each member having a responsibility beyond the group, built in connections with provincial networks and district leadership.

Key to the creation of safety was how meetings started with an unstructured lunch. Many participants commented on how this was extremely valuable for getting teachers thinking about the purpose of meeting, developing group cohesion, and for sharing practice.

Sample comments supporting this theme were:

Lunch – It kind of warms you up doesn't it? There are all these hats we wear as teachers, so lunch provides us that special time. It is like when I teach in my classroom, I say to the kids ‘when you first come to school, come in the classroom, give yourself five minutes to go around and chat to everybody in the room. You don't have to walk through those doors sit down and get ready to work.’ As an adult, I never use to do that ever. At the network meeting, I walk into the room and the first thing I do is reconnect with the people I know. Lunch provides that opportunity. If

we didn't have lunch provided, I would stay in my classroom or school until 10 to 1 and then I would run down here and all of a sudden have to shift gears to the meeting agenda... I really wouldn't because I would chat to the person beside me and do all those social things... so I think the lunch allows us the time to make the transition.

In regards to sharing practice one participant noted:

Let's talk about the on the side stuff. I almost find that is where I learn more. That is where I build collegial relationships. I build trust in someone, and they build trust in me and that's where we start communicating beyond these meetings.

Other key elements of the network meeting structure included the general meeting processes and facilitation. General meeting processes included a review of assessment results, a discussion of school/teacher interventions in response to assessment data, a sharing of resources, and possibly some recent academic literature on early reading.

We always do a share your school success...we want to share what has been going on in our schools... we need to know where everybody is beneath their data... and then either a sharing of resources or ideas... it is important for people to walk away with something in their hands that they can use tomorrow if they wanted to or something that they could pass on tomorrow easily.

The meetings were facilitated by teacher coordinators. This was an important feature as noted by participants, "There has to be some common ground. There has to be somebody that links the team together." It could just be a whole teacher group but who is going to facilitate it? Would it ever come together? I don't know.

The content of Network meetings changed over time. This was important as members needed a voice in what would be of value to them as practitioners; however this did require mediation as there was a tendency to move away from discussing assessment data, and academic literature. Teachers appeared more comfortable in discussing teaching practices and methods. Ostensibly, an effective network requires consideration and possibly a balance between the sharing of teaching practice, assessment, and review of current academic thinking within the related discipline. This is a precarious balance and is interrelated with who the members of a network are, how it is designed, and how meetings are facilitated.

5.2.5 Experience of Membership

A contributing factor to the success of a networked learning community as a vehicle for system improvement is the level of social capital members of the network have at their individual sites of practice. This appeared to be an important feature to the ESSN as the minimum number of years teaching experience for members was 10. Most participants had more than 15 years teaching experience. Teachers were not chosen by the district. The typical process was the administrator at the school level would ask for a representative from their primary department to attend the network meetings. Members reported that the experience of their colleagues was an important factor to the network, however this was calibrated by the ability to enable all voices. As one member commented:

It is valuable to have experienced people on teams like this, however, it also depends on what their personality is like...some people are very strong minded and opinionated and then they don't leave room for listening and allowing other people to grow and learn at the same time.

These teachers were then considered “ESSN Team Leaders” representing their respective schools. They were to share what was happening at their schools in regards to early literacy, and then relay any information they saw as relevant from the ESSN back to their primary department. In addition, they were responsible for ensuring the DIBELS was conducted at the appropriate times in their schools and to send that assessment data to the central office to be collated.

The experience of the participating teachers was important for a few reasons. One, these teachers were at a stage in their career when they had developed the management skills of teaching, and as such, they were able to focus on instruction. They each had enough experience to be seen as a valuable contributor to the group as a whole, as well as credible to their teacher colleagues in their schools. Finally, each had enough experience to also feel very comfortable in asking questions of each others practice. Overall, participants seemed to be at a place in their career where they were becoming reinvested in their practice in that they had 10 plus years experience and had mastered the day to day operation of their classrooms and were now in search of improving their practice.

One participant noted:

I'm in a different place in my life, I'm getting to where I have more room in my life for my own professional goals...there are times when you fall into the trap of going through the motions even though you're doing a good job of going through the motions but you don't seek other opportunities for professional growth and development.

The uptake of a shared assessment across schools was linked with each team leader's credibility in their schools as well as with other team leaders. If the network was composed of relatively new or less "respected" teachers it may not have resulted in moving from a grassroots movement to a system change vehicle.

5.2.6 Balance of Leadership

Another indirect support to group development and "teacher talk" was the embedded teacher leadership and its recursive influence on the psychological safety and power of the ESSN. The psychological safety experienced by members enabled them to develop a more comprehensive understanding of other's experiences, which, in turn, validated their own experiences. This, in turn, seemed to empower participants to take on leadership roles in their schools and have a more direct impact on the practice of others. In essence, network participants were developing a catalogue of case studies from participating members and, as such, had a greater awareness of others' practice to act in a leadership capacity. The ESSN was a vehicle for developing teacher leadership and it did so in the simplest of ways by valuing teacher knowledge, which empowered teachers to see themselves as educational leaders. This teacher empowerment was reinforced by the network structure of having a team leader from each school.

As one colleague stated:

By having a team leader in the school and saying, we value you and you can have this release time to be a team leader in this school, it validates what they are doing.

In turn, the opportunity for leadership led to more initiative at the school level. Another participant commented:

Every time you get a teacher into a leadership role, even if it is small, like being a part of our group, they seem to take more initiative at staff meetings and in their school.

Last but not least is the realization by participants that teachers are leaders as noted by one member:

What membership in the network helps me with is that it reinforces that you don't have to be the Principal of the school to be a leader. Each of the focus groups, including this one, appears to promote and encourage best practices. It's a neat thing, teachers being leaders.

Using the idea that power is the capacity to act, it was clear that the teachers in the network saw their power increase.

Fullan (2005) argues that one of the key jobs of educational leaders is to support the development of educational leaders. Participant responses reinforce that a network structure that provides for "teacher talk" is an excellent vehicle towards this end.

5.2.7 Connections with Larger Networks

The last component that enabled the perception of the ESSN success was the connection of the district network with provincial networks. At the same time that the ESSN was in action, a Lower Mainland Literacy network was established. A number of the team leaders were provided the opportunity to attend the cross district networks where they collected information on what other school districts were focused on regarding early literacy. This was significant as many of the Lower Mainland school districts are substantially larger than the school district in my research and, as such, have literacy specialists who speak with authority on the topic of early reading.

As was noted by one participant:

Provincial networks added the validity to local groups.

By validity, the participant seems to be referring to power or the power to act. In other words, network members were able to comment on the practice of other school districts in relation to the ESSN work. This awareness of the practices in other districts is a powerful tool when you translate it into the staff room conversation and politics of a small school in a relatively small district.

Just as individual teachers were empowered by their involvement with the group, the group was empowered by knowing that their conversations regarding practice were not too far off the mark from larger networks. Some saw the connection with external networks, such as the Provincial Early Literacy Symposium, as very significant, as noted by one participant:

External networks are very important, because if you are isolated as a district, it is the same as being isolated at your school you don't know what promising practices are happening in other places. Networking with teachers in other school districts is just like a entering a whole new world. It is like sending a kid into a candy store. You can't get enough candies in your bag. I love it so much. The very first time I went to the early literacy symposium in Surrey I just couldn't write fast enough, I had reams of paper filled up.

The point of "connection" and being part of something greater than an individual classroom, school, or district seemed to be a powerful notion for many members of the network. It seems to be linked with a greater sense of district cohesion and teacher leadership.

5.2.8 Participant Critique

Although generally seen as a successful vehicle for system change, several participants saw room for improvement. In particular, some would have liked more explicit direction from the district, as well as written formal rules of operation. Others wanted more clear direction on what should be communicated to school colleagues in their role as team leaders. Others thought that increased district facilitation at school sites was needed.

There was a measure of ambivalence regarding the DIBELS as an assessment framework. Some felt that it was an important asset towards group cohesion and a shared vocabulary while others saw it as necessary evil as a starting point to a more holistic assessment framework.

There was also a measure of ambivalence towards whether the facilitator needed to be a classroom teacher or not. Some felt that this was vitally important for credibility; others saw it as unnecessary as long as the facilitator allowed all voices to be heard. The idea that a ‘teacher is a leader’ and ‘a leader is a teacher’ or more pointedly that the qualities of a teacher leader that promote a safe and democratic space is what was implied.

5.3 NARROWING OF PRACTICE

A critique in the literature regarding networks is referred to as the “dark side” and cautions those involved with what might be “group think” or a narrowing or controlling of practice. A legitimate fear of networks or any group that has influence is whether it starts to control or limit practice.

This was recognized by District Administrators in relation to the assessment to instruction framing:

Yes. We recognized that the narrowing of the assessment practices was constrictive at times. One concern expressed by teachers was ‘all we do is test, test, test’. We’re focusing on assessment and not talking enough about what we need to do in classrooms in terms of our instruction, resources, and programs. The narrowing of assessment had to happen prior to going to instructional practice and looking at programs. So it was a valid narrowing and if you want to call it a bit of a “dark side”, yes, and we recognized that. However, we were aware of this concern and talked about it as an issue – we know that, we are aware of that, we wanted to move toward the instructional practice, we wanted to build a network base of knowledge in terms of lesson plans and share them. We came to look at some programs, but we want to do it from the enlightenment of knowing what assessment should look like, how practice would develop from that and how it would be shared across the system.

Interestingly, the teachers in the group saw the network as having little impact on narrowing their practice.

For example one participant commented:

The network is such a small piece of what I do that I don't think there would ever be a risk of that. I think in order for there to be a risk for that it is has to take much more of my time.

Others noted that:

Even if you are in a group, you don't take what everyone says works, you take what works for you, and you try it. It either works or it doesn't work. If it works you can go and get a little bit more information, if it doesn't work you toss it. I don't think teachers could ever become victims of group think and I thought that when I first read about it.

Again, a contributing factor to this sense of being impervious to group think or controlling practice was that most teachers were very experienced. Some commented:

We have too big of a frame reference already. Maybe I am speaking as a veteran teacher. I hate thinking of myself as a veteran teacher but... you already have a whole frame of reference in your head and in your practice.

Some recognized the danger of group think but noted that the level of teacher experience and personality are key mitigating factors. One participant noted:

I guess you can't keep it from happening but I think it's a bit due to the personalities involved within the group. Some people would feel more pressure, I suppose to conform. Certain personality types or teachers with limited experience might feel more pressure to conform... I'm not a conformist.

Keeping in mind that the minimum number of years of experience in the group was 10, one could argue that it would be a more difficult group to co-opt. The concern of networks controlling practice, however, is warranted as seen by some of the participant critiques calling for more formal rules, and specifics as to what they should impart to colleagues at their schools, as well as more common facilitation at each school site. It is reasonable to be concerned about any group that attains a level of power in an organization as for some there appears to be desires to have other teachers agree with their way of thinking.

5.4 SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Overall, network members saw the network as a teacher development vehicle. It allowed for facilitated and focused “teacher talk”, promoted district cohesion, and empowered teachers as leaders. Clearly a number of serendipitous factors contributed to the network as a teacher development vehicle inclusive of the extensive experience of the membership, the balance of district and teacher facilitation, and an appreciation of side talk which occurred over lunch.

The spirit of the interview data seemed best captured by the following interview excerpt:

There is only one way to improve student achievement and that is to improve the quality of the teacher in the classroom. You can buy kits, you can buy resources, you can spend money on all kinds of things, but if you don’t spend money on teacher development, you might as well forget it. I have umpteen kits in my classroom to prove that fact.

In the interview analysis a number of particular themes became evident. First, all participants viewed the ESSN as a success and attributed this success to some common attributes of network design, membership, and noted outcomes. The perception of network success appeared to stem from a number of interrelated themes that defined the participants’ network experience.

Key themes highlighted by this research include: 1) focussed “teacher talk” which led to building teacher knowledge, decreased teacher isolation, and the building of district cohesion; 2) the building of a shared language via a common assessment tool regarding early literacy which enabled practitioners to talk across practices; 3) the importance of establishing shared assessment procedures; 4) the need for a psychologically safe and relaxed environment to support the sharing of teacher practice; and 5) the basic architecture required for the network and its meeting structure. Contributing to these core themes were the relative age and experience of the network members, a balance of district leadership versus teacher leadership, the length of time each participant was a member of the larger group, and connections with larger networks at the provincial level.

Areas of critique included the articulated need from some members to have more explicit district direction on the purpose of the network, formal rules of operation, and clear direction on what aspects should be communicated via network members to their respective school colleagues. Along these lines, some members wanted to see more direct facilitation at the school level regarding directions of the network. There was some ambivalence noted regarding group facilitation with some participants articulating that it needed to be done by classroom teachers, whereas some others felt it did not matter as long as membership voices were valued. What was clear is that training in facilitation or skilled facilitation would be a valuable asset to any emerging network. Finally, although the role of assessment was seen as fundamental to group cohesion and building a shared language, some concern was noted as to the specific assessment tool being used.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is organized in the following sequence. First, a discussion juxtaposing the “ideal” with the “real” network is provided in order to aid a comprehensive understanding of this network. Second, each of the core propositions identified via the literature review is discussed in turn. Third, the role of power is reviewed within the context of the network’s evolution, as well as a consideration of its role in the “dark side” of networks. Fourth, the “dark side” of networks is reviewed within the context of this study. Finally, the comprehensiveness of the case study is explored inclusive of general theoretical statements that can be made in regards to the regularities in the network’s social structure and process.

6.2 THE IDEAL VS. THE REAL

In understanding our world we often use the concept of the “ideal” to organize, categorize, and appreciate how we are doing on a particular task. This case study provided an opportunity to juxtapose a “real” network with the “ideal” and in the meeting of the two, provide practitioners with a medium to inform their actions in facilitating system direction. Through this research it became increasingly apparent that reality is messy and the complexity of a social and political environment has as much serendipity to it as determined action. This does not displace the need for an “ideal”; in fact, it reinforces the necessity to have a guide post or vision towards a better future. An “ideal” or model enables a practitioner to gauge how they are doing, as well as provide a consistent vocabulary to contest and develop a shared understanding with others. It is this touchstone that provides a measure of clarity within the messiness of reality. I present the juxtaposition of the “ideal” network principles and predicted outcomes as presented in literature and the “real” network or experience of a particular network experience for the reader’s consideration.

The principal components of an effective “ideal” networked learning community as described by Sliwka (2003) include: 1) democratic exchange; 2) horizontal partnerships; 3)

an explicit aim of enhancing teaching and learning; and, 4) mutual stimulation and motivation. If these conditions are met then it is expected that the network will have a positive impact on the up skilling of good practice (Thorpe & Kubiak, 2005), enhance professional development of teachers (Marshall, 2004), support capacity building in schools (Hopkins, 2003), mediate between centralised and decentralised structures (Stone, 2002), and assist in the process of re-structuring and re-culturing a system (Senge et al., 2000). Ostensibly, an organization that utilises this type of network would be on their way to creating a learning organization as espoused by Senge (1990).

It is the creation of this space within an organization that supports the flow of ideas amongst participants. A cautionary note is that in reality, the adherence to these democratic principles is difficult. The reality is that power differentials exist (Flyvberg, 2001). More importantly, our work in schooling is not defined by our individual perceptions of what we should teach. In other words, there is a set amount of monies that those in formal roles of power must allocate, and the Ministry of Education determines the learning outcomes for students. Therefore, the best we can do in the organizational life of public schooling is to recognize that our actions are bound by certain realities, and to create structures that support teacher learning (like networks). In building networks, it is important to remain conscious of the aforementioned components and attempt to support each of them (Sliwka, 2003).

The “ideal” as described in the literature cannot articulate all of the practical steps within the context of a particular practice that must be taken into consideration in the “real” world, to reach this end. It cannot take into consideration the political actions of government on down to classroom teachers. It cannot mediate the motivation of the participants involved in social actions, nor account for power differentials, or less principled, or less moral agendas. In particular, a number of practicalities need to be attended to in an organization to support a network. This study highlights a number of practical considerations that took place within the specific context of the network under study, such as the need to consider the practicalities of scheduled time during the school day to meet, dedicated time for teachers to talk informally with a prepared lunch, a shared/co-developed agenda, clear connection with a

larger vision and organization direction (valued work), etc. A quality network experience relies on both theoretical direction and practical organizational actions.

Key to the bringing together of the theoretical and practical is leadership. Leadership that supports network development should embed democratic processes and horizontal decision-making in their actions (Senge et al. 2000). These processes engender a way of being with one another. Arguably, these processes are guided by core democratic beliefs embedded into a person's ethical framework. Leadership is paramount if these "ideal" democratic processes are to occur. This being noted, the applied fundamental beliefs bring in an understanding of leadership that is not always found in schooling practice (Lambert, 1998). If much of schooling is about control (Wiens & Coulter, 2005), and if an organization is serious about networks as a vehicle for development, then an area of focus highlighted by these research findings is leadership development that builds a more democratic perspective into the schooling agenda. This study suggests that this type of leadership development is necessary for teachers, administrators, and policy makers to align with these democratic principles.

One significant difference between the "ideal" network highlighted in the literature and the "real" network or the one experienced in practice is the practicality of supporting district direction and navigating the status quo inclusive of existing power differentials. Essentially, each person involved with the ESSN benefited in terms of their ability to act. Certainly, the District Administrators were able to re-establish a central vision, but the individual teachers involved also reported gains in their capacity to act. Although, the "ideal" principles of democratic exchange and horizontal decision-making may have applied at times within the ESSN; these principles did not necessarily transfer to those outside of the network who would have been impacted. In other words, some of the decisions arrived at via a democratic process within the ESSN were then applied systemically, impacting other teachers and administrators who were not part of the decision-making process. This poses a concern for network proponents in that the "ideal" is bounded within particular contexts and may have, as Driver (2002) points out, unintended but oppressive consequences for fellow employees. Essentially, the "ideal" within a sub-group of an organization can lead to the tyranny of the few versus a broader democratic process.

All participants noted that their involvement in the ESSN improved their practice. In addition, assessment documents supported increased student learning in early reading. The ESSN represents one small example of the change called for in public schools (Fullan, 1995). Notably, the unintended consequences that a network of teachers can have on practitioners not a part of the network needs to be considered carefully. To illuminate the impacts of the “real” network, I will now focus on the key propositions from the literature.

6.3 NETWORKS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A number of propositions were postulated in the literature review. Networks support the dissemination of good practice; enhance professional development of teachers; support capacity building in schools; mediate between centralised and decentralised structures; and assist in the process of re-structuring and re-culturing educational organizations. Consideration of each of these propositions in light of the findings is presented.

6.3.1 Networks Support the Dissemination of Good Practice

The findings suggest that the ESSN did support improved teacher practice. A number of the themes in the findings, such as “teacher talk”, shared language development, and relaxed environment relate to the acceptance of this proposition.

In accordance with Jarvis’s (1999) contention that knowledge is contextually constructed and the process of learning is non-linear, the findings organized under the theme of “teacher talk” highlight that it was the individual experiences of each teacher in relation to their current schools that contributed to network members gleaning a greater understanding of best practices. In addition, these learnings did not always happen during formal meeting time, but were more serendipitous for network members. For example, a number of members commented that it was the side-bar conversations which occurred over lunch that contributed greatly to their understanding of other practices. Each member’s reported experience within the network drew connections in different ways and at different times. Consequently, meeting their immediate needs in relation to their practice, whether that was to realise that their classroom composition was not as challenging as they thought, or to the utility of a particular reading strategy and how it might generalise to their particular setting was unique.

This research also supports Lundvall's (2000) argument that the reason that written reports for innovation are often disappointing, is because to be able to use codified knowledge, complementary tacit knowledge is required. Although this research supports Lundvall's contention, it poses an intermediary step for consideration. This research suggests that if the goal is to disseminate innovative knowledge, then one has to develop a shared language through which tacit knowledge can be communicated systematically. In this study, the dissemination of ESSN practice was reported to rely on the development of a common language. The networks design and focus had been to develop early literacy skills in Kindergarten/Grade 1 students. Participants had been provided a significant amount of professional literature on the subject throughout their time in the network, but it was via a common assessment tool (e.g. common ends) that participants noted a shared language developed. Thus, this shared vocabulary and language enabled network participants to better able to understand each others practice as well as mediate through the professional literature. In addition, the development of a shared language had an additive effect on the role of academic literature enabling what Aalst (2003) refers to as interpretive meanings. That is, a document has not only an informative component, but also a social one, people need to develop their understandings within a social context in order to make the document usable.

Finally, the theme termed "relaxed environment" was significant to supporting the dissemination of practice. As noted in the literature review, Senge (1990) highlighted the importance of organizational architecture and processes that enable a psychologically safe place for shared work. The findings emphasized how important it was for members to feel they were safe. Being judged was a considerable concern for many of the teachers involved. Many commented that their willingness to share their practice was contingent on them feeling valued and safe, and that their colleagues were genuinely interested in what they had to say. To reinforce the point, several teachers commented that if they were being dictated to or their voice wasn't valued, they would not have participated.

What this study cannot comment on, is the quality of practice that was disseminated. This may be an area of focus for additional research.

6.3.2 Enhance Professional Development of Teachers

The findings support the proposition that the ESSN enhanced the professional development of the teachers involved. The evidence for this assertion is linked to a number of the developed themes that weave throughout the findings. The key attribute to this is that the teachers involved saw themselves as active learners in their own professional growth, rather than passive recipients of others' ideas. This outcome is aligned with Randi and Zeichner's (2004) literature summary of professional development trends for teachers.

In accordance with this notion of active learners versus passive were the participant and administrative reports that network members demonstrated increased active leadership in their schools, and sought out other provincial network opportunities. In other words, the ESSN experience appeared to act as a catalyst to creating a level of professional development momentum that carried over into the search for other professional development opportunities by those involved. In essence, the activation of network members appeared to empower teachers consistent with Palmer's (1998) strategy to support reform. It is worth noting that after the ESSN, many of the teachers involved committed to a graduate diploma with SFU.

Chen (2003) proposed that through enhanced focussed collaboration, learners became involved in learning activities that are associated with a network, which provided them with greater motivation and opportunity to articulate, discuss, and reflect on their learning strategies and the changes within themselves. Although the findings via the themes such as "teacher talk" and "connections with larger networks" support this evolution, there is an additional factor that warrants consideration. In order for enhanced collaboration, participants need to be at a place in their practice where they are not struggling with the day to day operations of being a teacher (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986). Many of the participants commented that in their early years of practice, they did not have the time or space to engage in professional development as actively as they were presently. This impacted their professional development in two ways: 1) they were not able to be as active in their professional development; and 2) their contribution to others was limited. To put this in the context of a network learning community, which relies on both activation of an individual

member, and also on the energy and knowledge individuals have to share with others, the place a teacher is in his/her career is important.

A related finding by Thorpe and Kubiak (2005) was that effective network members also had a high degree of social capital within their school sites. This relationship could be further explored in future research. If a primary aim of a NLC is to create opportunities for an ongoing exchange and collaboration of educational practitioners with focused ends (Sliwka, 2003), then paramount to its optimal functioning is the capacity of the individual members. This research suggests that membership criteria consider not only teachers who have an interest in networks, but also where they are in their career and the degree to which their current practice is aligned with best practice.

6.3.3 Support Capacity Building in Schools

The proposition that the ESSN supported capacity building in schools is difficult to support with the present findings. The ability to discern the validity of this proposition was outside the scope of this research, as the evidence gathered does not provide sufficient data to comment on school capacity. This being said, the data does suggest that many of the network members were seen as teacher leaders and took on informal leadership roles at their schools. As this linkage may be sufficient for some readers, I will comment on leadership.

The informal leadership demonstrated by network members is linked with the experience of the teachers involved. Thorpe and Kubiak (2005) observed that the introduction of a NLC in England resulted in the mobilization of teachers with strong social capital, who were well liked and highly regarded by peers, as change agents; this was similar in the district under study. This may have more to do with who is likely to volunteer for network groups than network participation developing leaders. As has been argued, psychological safety is a key consideration in the functioning of a network. The risk of being judged is more likely to be accepted by practitioners with a high level of existing credibility and, as such, referent power.

In this way, the opportunity of being part of a network may reinforce existing power positions for teachers within a particular school. From a systems perspective, a network may reveal a community of leaders existent within various parts of a school district that a hierarchical structure can not. This revealing of a community of leaders is consistent with Lambert (1998), who argues that the use of hierarchical structures to determine leadership positions is less effective than relying on the development of a community of leaders found in various positions in organizations. The connection with capacity building at the school level is tenuously that these school leaders will be better able to share the knowledge gleaned from their participation in the network and, as such, increase overall knowledge sharing. In this way, the network is constructed to support the “flows” of theories, thoughts, cultures, and innovations between schools and other education institutions (Chapman, 2003).

6.3.4 Mediate Between Centralised and Decentralised Structures

The context and timing of this study highlights the role of the ESSN as a systems vehicle in mediating between centralised and decentralised structures. The case context provides a history of both the school district and how it was a completely decentralised organization, and the changing Ministry of Education focus on a particular method of governance and accountability (Osbourne & Gabler, 1994). From a different perspective, this study could be viewed as a case study of how a district moved towards a version of decentralised centralism (Karlsen, 2000).

The context of this case describes the evolution of the school districts educational agenda from being ‘individual fiefdoms’ to having a more centrally determined focus. Equally, the Accountability Framework adopted by the Ministry of Education is reviewed. Unique to this case is the timing of the network. It was initiated when the district was at the extreme point of decentralization (i.e., no monies were held centrally for an educational plan), and just prior to a new accountability mandate from the Ministry that was fuelled by literacy levels as a political tool (e.g., No Child Left Behind). The case context chronicles how it was the networks contribution to policy coherence and implementation, horizontally and vertically that not only mediated between the central policy and practice, but quite literally contributed to a new form of management in the district (Stone, 2002; Hopkins, 2003).

In this study, the network provided the vehicle for district administration to set direction for schools as a whole. The network participants were, albeit unknowingly, complicit in recentralizing some of the decision-making. As the network created a local centre of expertise, the direction set within the network had considerable weight in educational decision-making. Linked to this centre of expertise was the high level of referent power of network members making opposition to central direction difficult. In essence, the network, given its timing, was an agent of centralization. Given that the intent of a network learning community is to support horizontal decision-making, this is an interesting finding to this network. The development of local centres of expertise may be part of what Gross-Stein and others (2001) were referring to as the blurring of the formal separation between academics, policy makers, and practitioners as noted by researchers. In addition, this also supports the idea that network outcomes are not predictable, as they exist within a particular time and space where context is significant in shaping outcomes.

6.3.5 Assist in the Process of Re-structuring and Re-culturing Educational Organizations

The findings marginally support the proposition that networks assist in the process of restructuring and re-culturing an educational organization. By marginally, I am referring to the extent to which the ESSN had an impact on the organization of the district as a whole, as well as the network's level of impact on teaching practice as a whole. In general, the network's impact on both district organization and teacher practice was relatively small. Although, findings show that the network did contribute to a more centralised educational plan and that the teachers involved developed norms of collaboration, reciprocity, and trust, the overall impact was predominantly on those participating in the network.

Towards restructuring, the network was an attempt to bring the knowledge of local practitioners forward to define the problem and shape the agenda for shared action (Stone, 2002). The thinking of restructuring was in alignment with Coleman's (1993) contention that poor achievement in schools is the result of incorrect organizational design. Clearly, the network was different than assembly line notions of school organization and decision-making.

If we accept Sackney's (2001) definition that organizational culture can be seen as behavioural regularities, including language and rituals; norms that evolve in working groups; dominant values espoused by people in the organization; rules of the game for getting along in the organization; and the feeling or climate conveyed in an organization, then given the interview evidence the culture of the district was impacted as a result of the ESSN. Practically, I would caution extrapolating the cultural impact too far beyond the parameters of the ESSN as the context, facilitation, and membership in the network were different than the general framework of individual schools, but this might warrant further study specific to culture impacts.

As Schein (1996) notes, the essence of culture stems from basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization, that operate unconsciously and that define, in a basic taken for granted fashion, an organization's view of itself and its environment. The ESSN supported a culture of collaboration defined by Fullan (1995) as teachers working in teams, and sharing practice on a continuous basis, while working towards a shared vision, but this culture was only reported within the confines of the group.

Ostensibly, networks hold promise towards re-structuring and re-culturing a school district, if they were designed on a grander scale and embedded in the ongoing operating structure of a district. In addition, if District Administrators could capitalise on systemic networks to inform ongoing budget decisions and educational directions, then the full utility of networks as a engine for systemic re-structuring and re-culturing could be assessed.

6.4 POWER RELATIONS AND POWER CONFIGURATIONS

In illuminating the case of the ESSN, it is evident from the social and political context of the province, the school district, as well as the micro-politics of the network, that the power to act is a fundamental element to the motivation and practices that led to the development, evolution, and continuance of the ESSN. As Flyvberg (2001) notes, if social science's goal is to improve social conditions, then social science research must include an analysis of power.

Of note in this case history is that at the starting point of the ESSN the school district had left a long period of centralised stability and recently completely decentralised operational and budgetary processes. One can assume this complete shift in practice occurred due to a dissatisfaction with historic practices where power was held centrally (Karlsen, 2000). This decentralisation essentially removed any decision-making of the district educational staff from any “real” influence on the schooling agenda, and left them essentially powerless. The context of having no central influence in the educational direction led one District Administrator to see schools as their own fiefdoms, each with their own agendas and little commonality binding them to the school district.

The coalescence of the early school success grant, a cohesive teacher network group, and then the Ministry requiring the implementation of the Accountability Framework provided the opportunity for the district educational leadership to take back a measure of power. This quickly turned into a perception of redistribution of power at least in regards to the educational direction of the district.

I offer an account from a District Administrator as it highlights this part of the discussion:

The early school success actually triggered the whole accountability concept and allowed us to be accountable at a district level and in a focused area. The other structures then came into play, the Ministry mandated a district accountability contract, so there was a clear link in terms of what the Ministry was trying to achieve in terms of accountability and the early school success project. In fact that was the basis of our first meaningful accountability contract which was built from the early school success project because of the clear focus on assessment and instruction. The data from the project was recognized by a Ministry Review Team and linked to the work of the district accountability contract process. The link to the accountability contract brought utility of the network to school principals, in addition to improving teaching practice. At the same time, school planning councils were mandated by the Ministry. Schools had to develop school growth plans and align to a district plan. We were able to capitalise on that in terms of formalizing those linkages to the early school success network. The project gave everyone a common basis of what an accountability cycle and framework might look like in a normal concept.

From the District Administrator’s perspective, it was the alignment of these aforementioned events that changed the future power relations in the school district. The ESSN effectively

established a new form of centrality under the umbrella of a decentralised system. From the central office perspective, the value-added to the organizational ends of the school district was the re-established power to influence the schooling focus through district-wide educational policies such as the District Educational Plan. As stated previously, unless an innovation is seen to support organizational ends and to some degree reinforce those in power, it has little chance of being supported in the budget allocation process. This being said, organizations exist for a reason and organizational ends are determined by people placed in roles to do so (Daft, 2005). Each level of the organization of schooling has a particular role and responsibility to forward the goals of the organization (British Columbia, School Act). Whether it is the Ministry of Education, District Office Staff, a School Principal, or a Classroom Teacher, each has a role in the delivery of the policy which is public education (Fullan et al., 2004). Individuals at different levels may disagree with decisions made at another level but our individualism must find expression in the appropriate forms such as a Board of Education appeal process and grievances under respective collective agreements. An organization that operates under more democratic principles remains conscious of the goals of the organization, but creates mechanisms/channels where the flow of ideas that calibrate the means or actions of the organization are more participatory in nature. A network design might aid this democratic flow of information, as in the school district under study, the ESSN enabled a central policy from the Ministry of Education which reinforced the District Administrator's roles, as well as supporting school principals and teachers. The network enabled more democratic decision-making that supported organizational ends.

Individual teachers involved in the network also experienced an enhanced power to act. Power relations worth noting are in relation to network members and their responsiveness to taking on leadership roles in the district and their schools. Implied in the assuming of leadership roles is the shifting of power relations. Network members were clearly more empowered than before which was evident in their articulated leadership activities at their schools. Members repeatedly articulated taking on leadership roles in their schools where they communicated what their practice was and attempted to influence improved teacher practice in their schools. In the literature, however, the exclusivity of a network may be a

concern as innovative groups can become part of the establishment and used to limit and determine the acceptable behaviour of others (Driver, 2002).

Without taking a position on the value of this being a positive or negative shift in power dynamics, there was an evident change where the district leadership staff had greater influence on educational direction and related budgetary priorities. In interviewing two principals, both commented on the value of the additional educational leadership at their schools but, I wonder what they might say if the additional educational leadership was not in line with their point of view. I would predict that, as one teacher commented, if the network did not support them, they would “shut it down super fast”. I would argue that in my experience, school and district administrators would have the same response if they were not supported.

Either way, the network had an impact on how the power structure in the district was organized both at a district wide level, as well as at individual schools. This change in power structure was evident in a reconstitution of a District Educational Plan and the diverting of funds to support the plan. In addition, there was a clear district wide focus amongst primary teachers towards early literacy. One could look at this as a form or method to achieve decentralised centralism, and to argue that the ESSN was not a true network. I would argue that to the degree that it was possible, the ESSN resembled the attributes of the “ideal” as a support for teacher practice, but for any ‘network-like’ innovation to be accepted as a part of an organization’s practice, it must support the goals of the organization and those who are in positions of formal leadership.

6.5 DARK SIDE

This study suggests that the “dark side” of networks or perceived negative effects depends upon the position held within the school district. In my role, as a District Administrator at the time, I saw no “dark side”, as the network helped the district administration regain a measure of power and influence. Principals in favour of the decentralised model might contend that the network was a negative force. In particular, they would question how

resources were now being allocated to a central body limiting the capacity of school-based decision-making.

I also observed that for teachers who were a part of the network, they saw a particular assessment framework as a needed piece towards building district cohesion, whereas those teachers not a part of the network had commented that this was an example of narrowing their professional autonomy, not to mention a less holistic assessment of student skills. Keeping in mind that those interviewed were members of the network, there is an inherent bias in their attribution of value. They may be unaware of their subjugation of fellow teachers under a particular assessment and way of determining valued ends.

In addition, it was evident that a number of network members had greater influence and input in other school-based initiatives. I wonder what some colleagues thought of the increased leadership and which colleague's power might have been displaced due to this. This being said, the influence of the ESSN as a group placed other teachers under a constant gaze that was teacher activated and sustained via the shared assessment framework.

According to Thorpe and Kubiak (2005), teacher credibility is an important factor in the success of a network enterprise. The perceived success of the ESSN was related to each team leader's credibility in their schools as well as with other team leaders. If the network was composed of relatively new or less "respected" teachers, it may not have resulted in moving from a grassroots movement to a system change vehicle.

The issue of power and who gets to make the decisions is important to this study. Indeed, Driver (2002) highlights the two research camps with opposite views of the learning organization as either Utopian sunshine or Foucauldian gloom. Is it the "ideal" qualities of people working together to collectively enhance their capacities and to create the results they care about or is it a form of totalitarianism for organizational ends using social controls in a humanistic guise (Driver, 2002). The concept of decentralised centralism highlighted in the literature offers merit as a mediating concept to temper these opposing positions (Karlsen, 2000). This research indicates that a network can be created for an organizational end (e.g., improve reading results), but still provide a flexible and democratic space for teachers to

determine the concrete directions and actual classroom practice. A more realistic use for networks in an organization based on this study seems to fit within a clear organizational end being defined, but the operational actions towards the organizational end being more democratically determined as close to the site of practice as possible. I would argue that the utilization of networks within the broader governance structure of decentralised centralism makes sense as an organizational framework. It allows for the organization to remain clear on its vision, purpose, and goals, but allows for individual contexts and capacities to determine particular actions.

This research also supports the need for organizational leaders and employees to be aware that a network can have a controlling influence on general practice of those outside of the network. Of interest, interview data did not indicate an awareness of this by network members, but a number of network members had taken on leadership roles in their school regarding early reading initiatives. Each member of the network supported and promoted a district level determined assessment tool which forwarded a particular way to look at early reading and consequently what appropriate intervention looks like. Network members had a direct influence and a potentially limiting effect on the practice of colleagues. This potential lack of awareness is noteworthy as it speaks to the legitimacy of concerns by some researchers that networks have a controlling impact, but under the humanistic guise which can make them more dangerous to individuals than other forms of operational methods (Marsick & Watkins, 1999). Individuals can be convinced that the actions of the network are for their own good and the good of others and as such they become the most powerful of control mechanisms and potential threat for worker exploitation.

In grappling with the myriad complexities that surround the micro-politics of power and its relation to “real” world interventions, Flyvberg (2001) notes the best we can do is recognize that it exists and where possible minimise the deleterious impact that might occur.

Fundamentally, teachers noted the value of flexibility in that they did not have to practice in the same way and indeed this was honoured in the principles of the network structure. It is important to note that a district determined macro goal and related assessment was imposed and reinforced by the network. The balance of district determined ends and flexible practice

determined by network members appeared to exist. In the future, I would propose that the network facilitator go further with network members to highlight the possibility of their influence and control on their colleagues' practice.

6.6 COMPREHENSIVE UNDERSTANDING OF THE CASE

The primary focus of this study was to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the ESSN. This understanding includes the temporal and social context of the networks inception and evolution; the story of how it came to be the way it is (Becker & Ragin, 2000). The goal is the understanding of the case as a whole, embedded in the broader context. This context is multi-layered, social and political, where individual participants contribute to each other's practice. It is, as complexity theory articulates, a complex adaptive system in which relationship is critical, nonlinear, and leads to unpredictable dynamics (Wheatley, 1999).

It is intended that through the revelation of the characteristics of this complex system (Anderson et al, 2005) others can attain practical wisdom useful to their social and political practice. In judging the quality of this case, a reminder is needed as to the inherent double hermeneutic of the interpretations of interpretations regarding participant interviews. The broader case context is more a matter of historical, political and policy events. It is the recognition and appreciation of the breadth of events and actions that contributed to the development of the ESSN, that I believe provides insight (practical wisdom) for practitioners interested in network development. Fundamentally, an appreciation of "good timing" for new initiatives or "ways of doing things" differently comes from an appreciation of the greater political context, and finding the lever that will in some ways go unnoticed until it has gained sufficient momentum.

Reality can be defined as a constantly moving and shifting landscape which can only be defined at any moment by the particular viewer in question and from their particular viewpoint (Anderson et al, 2005). Although the creation of the specific network was intentional, it was a result of the political and organizational context of the time. One should ask, was the network the result of innovative thinking or simply a consequence of converging social and political events? Was it one trend (district accountability) leading to another

(district network)? In effect, these questions highlight the complexity of social sciences and the reality of social/political practice. The cause and effect leading to the development of the ESSN as a vehicle for system development are not easily discernable when a simple thing could have been the root of the ESSN becoming a legitimate practice, or conversely remaining on the periphery of practice.

The ESSN's contribution to solving certain problems within the school district and its contribution in supporting school and district administration was important to its evolution. In particular, it supported the re-establishment of a district educational plan with the related power shifts to central office administrators, and it provided school based administrators the required data for their school growth plans. As such, the ESSN may be an example of how something that was valued to solve a particular problem (e.g., Accountability Framework) had significant unintended results (e.g., teacher development) that in many ways are more important than the initial concern.

The ESSN is an example of one organization's micro attempt at developing a learning organization. The noted positive outcomes of teachers sharing their tacit knowledge, and a building of inter-relationships across a school district created a sense of greater engagement with the practice of teaching and led to teacher empowerment to lead. Each of these attributes help to define the essence of a learning organization "ideal" by enabling practitioners to bring more of their personal engagement to their work (Senge, 1990). In addition, the call for organizations to pay more attention to the interrelationships between employees is met through the ESSN. To a degree, the movement from hierarchical to horizontal decision-making was seen as a result of the group becoming teacher led and facilitated. The degree of horizontal decision-making was contained within the parameters of district direction.

The ESSN demonstrates that the design of an organization has a direct impact on the learning that will occur (Coleman, 1993). For example, many participants noted that the network was very different than their school based learning as the "teacher talk" was much more focused, and a safer environment existed to share practice. If teachers are to be catalysts for the knowledge society (Senge et al., 2000) they need to have more experiences as evidenced with

the ESSN; that is working together in teams with the intention of sharing practice and building each other's knowledge.

Because much of teacher knowledge is considered tacit (Aalst, 2003), and because sources of innovation multiply when organizations establish bridges to transfer tacit knowledge to explicit, it is worth noting that many of the teachers involved in the network saw themselves as being empowered to lead. Many were involved with numerous initiatives at their schools and some became engaged in other initiatives outside of the school district. This level of engagement and initiative might not have occurred without their involvement in the ESSN. One cannot predict this with surety, as complexity is at the heart of social practice, but the idea of momentum is important as a determinant of future behaviour (Rhode, Jenson, & Reaves, 1993). Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that network involvement creates a momentum to become increasingly engaged in educational practice. As clarified by a participant:

The more you hear, the more you read, the more you want to find out. It just keeps going on. It reminds me of throwing a rock into a lake. The idea is that you start at a single point but the ripples continue far beyond where the rock first entered the water... it just keeps going...

Essentially, a single network in a school district will not change district culture or significantly improve organizational health, but, in appreciating the complexity of organizations, leadership should commit to the development of as many positive cultural shifts as possible. It is in the building of each one that momentum can take hold and a critical mass is achieved (Gladwell, 2004). Sarason (1990) alluded to this as the key to "real" educational reform, as all other methods of "system reform" are destined to fail. Given the level of teacher engagement and espoused learning that occurred due to participation in the ESSN, a systems response to educational reform should consider creating space for focused "teacher talk". This argument is consistent with network logic that it is the experience of practitioners that is the most important factor to change.

Another powerful attribute noted by practitioners in the ESSN was the value of external networks to the school district that provided a sense of validity and consequently power and

influence to the internal network. The combination of the district and provincial networks added a sense of legitimacy to practitioners as well as a greater connection beyond the school district. This was an unintended consequence but clearly highlights the idea of connection to a greater purpose as the underpinning of a learning organization “ideal”.

Clearly, a diffuse and broadly defined network inclusive of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) is not the vehicle for system change, at least not in the context of this research. The network must have a clear focus and educational aim. As participants in this study highlighted, there is a requirement for focused conversation towards a particular end for a network to have an impact on practitioners. This idea does reinforce the typology endorsed by Hopkins (2003) stressing that a networked learning community must include teachers and schools joined together with the explicit aim of enhancing teaching and learning, not just sharing practices. Inherent in this type of network is the need for boundaries that help to focus the “teacher talk”. In the ESSN this was done through the use of an explicit assessment framework (DIBELS). Members recognized the need for a shared assessment practice as a means to developing a shared language and common ground to articulate practice. This reinforced Hopkins (2003) second typology of a networked learning community, that there must be measureable outcomes to a successful network. In this case it is the improved reading results derived from the shared assessment. Unfortunately, this does not provide consideration of more complex outcomes related to teacher development as a measure of successful outcomes.

From a governance perspective, the findings suggest that the school district evolved from a decentralised educational decision making model to one where there was a centrally determined educational plan and commensurate reallocation of resources. This evolution was attributed to the ESSN as the vehicle for change. With this in mind, Karlsen, (2000) provides a different reading for the use of networks; that is the possibility of the teacher interaction in the network was a method to forward and support central policies via the work of practitioners versus the central authority. In other words, networks may be used as a policy tool to promote decentralised centralization. The control and power for educational direction and related accountability is centrally determined and the networks provide a way

to legitimate the central authority and implement policy. In this case, the power to act and the recentralization of some educational and related budgetary decisions was one result of the network and related Ministry policies.

6.7 SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

The goal of a case study is to increase the practical wisdom of educators involved in the use of networks and this is contextually determined and individually applied to reflect how the reader of this research may improve their own practitioner judgements (Flyvberg, 2001). Consequently, it is in each individual's application of case knowledge that determines the worth of a case analysis. The practical application of any case knowledge must consider the power dynamics in one's own context as well as potential negative outcomes.

The juxtaposition of the "ideal" versus the "real" network highlights a fundamental issue that may relate to why networks have not been fully utilised as an organizational tool. Networks in the "ideal" rely on democratic principles and horizontal decision-making, whereas organizations are by nature designed to meet particular ends that have been pre-determined. Organizations will always have a power structure, whether this is seen as hierarchical or referential, and, therefore, unless the 'network' supports the organizational end and more importantly, those in positions of power, they will not be adopted. This being said, it is evident that the "real" network described in this study was a very useful policy tool to support a centrally determined system direction from the Ministry of Education's policy framework on down. Within this context, the network was also a support for teachers. As such, I see the "real" network that is informed by the "ideal" as a useful tool for supporting system change and coherence in public schooling. Those in leadership positions must be aware and cautious that the democratic principles applied within sub-groups of an organization may have results that allow for the network decisions to result in the tyranny of a few over others in the system.

Ultimately, the principles and processes of an "ideal" network are important in network creation, however this type of organization needs to be situated within and built from consideration of the ethics of and intent of the network towards what ends. The ethical

consideration and subsequent actions make NLC's difficult to construct and generalise across contexts. The development of a networked learning community in a schooling organization depends on thoughtful mediation and leadership with a shared vision towards teacher development that includes the flexibility enabled by networks, not to agree on any one right course of action, but to provide a space for reflection to challenging of beliefs. Towards these ends, this research highlights the value in juxtaposing the "ideal" and the "real" networked learning community as a rich conceptual landscape in supporting practice.

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

7.1 STUDY OVERVIEW

The purpose of this research was to develop a deeper understanding of the formation, operation, and impacts of a NLC within a geographically and culturally diverse school district in British Columbia, Canada. The school district has approximately 4500 students who represent three geographically and socio-economically diverse communities. The general approach used for this research was case study methodology. As such, the work must be appreciated as a whole and as a ‘narrative of how something came to be the way it is’. In other words, to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the group under study: Who are its members? What are their stable and recurring modes of activity and interaction? How are they related to one another and how is the group related to the rest of the world? The primary data sources for the study were network participant interviews, and documents related to the network.

The case study recounts the history of an ESSN in the school district. This history starts prior to 2001, where the district had a long period of centralised control and administrative stability, and proceeds through a complete decentralization, and back to a more centrally determined educational model. At the same time, shifting government policies are discussed in regards to their contributing impact on the operation of the ESSN. The network itself is explored from the participants’ experience. Again, the evolution of the network and its increasing role in the organizational structure and power dynamics of the school district are presented.

The particulars of the case are juxtaposed with recent calls for the restructuring of schools and school districts towards the organizational metaphor of a ‘learning organization’. In particular, the idea of a networked learning community is applied to this case as a form of the “ideal” network that can act as an organizational vehicle towards the creation of a learning organization.

The main findings of the study include a deeper understanding of the impact Ministry and school district level policies and practices had on the network's inception and evolution; the operational details and structure that supported the network in order to create the conditions for learning; and how the perceived success by network participants was based upon focused "teacher talk" across sites of practice. The findings also illuminate how power or the power to act shifts when a new organizational vehicle based on network logic becomes part of the organization's operating structure.

Implications for practice include an understanding of how seemingly minor system actions, like a teacher network are influenced by a broad array of macro and micro socio-political actions, as well as the historical context of an organization. The research also suggests that networks are not an end in themselves or fit into a prescribed typology but constitute a shifting terrain with impacts beyond the life of the network. The content of the ESSN meetings changed over time. This was important as members required a voice in what would be of value to them as practitioners. Teachers reported becoming more comfortable in discussing teaching practices and methods. To this end, this research has implications for the sustainability of public schooling, as this network created a dynamic that built teacher confidence and passion. On a smaller scale, this case may be used as a reflective and practical example for practitioners who wish to create teacher networks within a school district. Future recommendations include how networks can be utilised more explicitly as part of the tri-level development (e.g., Ministry, District, and School) in view of bringing about educational reform. The goal of the case study was to illuminate the "case" by providing readers with a rich description of the socio-political, contextual evolution of the ESSN in the school district as well as develop NLC propositions for analytical generalization to their sites of practice.

7.2 THE THIRD SPACE

The metaphor of the third space positions the ESSN outside of the classroom, and outside of the school. As such, the network was new ground for practitioners to meet teachers working in differing contexts. The results of the network meetings and the network's evolution had an impact on power relations in the district. The network practice changed over time and

could be seen moving through different levels of the typology proposed by Hopkins (2003). This research suggests that networks need consideration as being relatively fluid entities that shift and evolve over time. Much like case study research, the historical context and the evolving social and political events and personal interactions will shape and change a network. Networks are fluid. They can change incrementally in how they are positioned in an organization, to the degree to which network outcomes influence administrative decision making.

This research also suggests that networks are not an end in themselves, fitting into prescribed typologies but with impacts that go beyond the life of the network. Networks may not be ends in themselves, but rather means to other ends. The unintended impacts of a network may be more powerful than an intended network focus. For example, the network studied no longer exists in the district, but potentially a more valued network has evolved. Many of the teachers historically involved with the network are pursuing their Masters in Education and have started a professional network across the school district with the support of Simon Fraser University. To this end, this research has implications for the professionalizing of public schooling as the creation of a space outside of a teacher's classroom practice, and school that promotes focused professional conversations which helps to build teacher confidence, and creates a dynamic that sustains teacher passion.

The 'third space' created by the ESSN may be an organizational step to support a more communal practice of teaching. Given the noted conditions of the network, participants engaged in sharing their practices in a quasi-public forum. The teachers of the ESSN found that their 'teacher talk', which was in part the sharing of individual practices, was professionally and personally validating. In addition, their 'teacher talk' provided a conduit for personal reflection in relation to each individual teacher's practice, as well as specific community needs, and particular classroom compositions. In essence, each teacher's practice or case knowledge was shared in a more public forum (e.g., a 'third space') with the possibility for critique from colleagues, and as a potential reference point for either transferability to another ESSN participant's practice and/or their reflective critique. Either way, the utility of the ESSN as a 'third space' ultimately encouraged ongoing conversations

about quality teacher practices. In addition, it offers insight to leaders (e.g., teachers, principals, district administrators, etc. interested in strategically developing teacher professional judgement relative to improving instructional practices).

The ESSN was a move towards the public (e.g., democratic exchange regarding quality schooling), but it remained constrained by organizational influences (e.g., power relations). The school board and the province, as expected, set the agenda and influenced much of the process. The complex relationship between public, private and organizational responsibilities is beyond the scope of this research. As stated previously, the ‘third space’ while a step toward the public practice of teaching is only one of the steps required for the democratic contestation pertaining to ‘what is more fully public about public schooling’.

Networks in school districts exist outside of the potential controls of classroom management and particular school cultures that may limit professional learning and autonomy. In addition, a network can exist between central policy and the day to day teacher practice in the classroom. Network participation appears to promote teacher leadership and has a positive effect on participant desire and motivation to learn. Networks interface with public schooling as a greater good in their capacity to aid teacher development as well as policy coherence.

7.3 CREATING A LEARNING ORGANIZATION

Overall, this study is about the search for a means to support the development of learning organizations in public schools. Public schooling may represent the most challenged environment to create a learning organization (Senge et al, 2000). Public schools’ egg crate structural design, which reinforces separateness of teachers, to a bureaucratic decision-making structure that reinforces power-differentials (Wiens & Coulter, 2005), have led some researchers to argue that public schooling has significant challenges impeding professional and system learning (e.g., Knight, 1998). A way to influence greater learning as a system has been proposed as the creation of networked learning communities. These networks have certain principles as well as logistic features that enable their operation. Ultimately, their utilisation is dependent on the ends in mind and the ethical motivations of leadership. It is

the tension between the operational features and ethical principles that define the work of a network.

In this case, the evolution from policy to practice and from a grass roots movement to an organizational mandate is interesting and somewhat reflective of the shifting power bases within the school district under study. The shift in power bases was evident, as during the time of the network the district moved from a decentralised school system to a more centralised school system. The direct influence of Ministry of Education Accountability Framework inclusive of a District Accountability Contract, and a Ministry Review Team process that focussed on district wide educational initiative versus the historic school level Accreditation model enabled and created a space where the ESSN was seen as a useful vehicle for supporting schooling throughout the school district. It was the innovation of this district educational network structure for an early school success initiative that provided a structural framework for a District Educational Plan, wherein teachers came together to discuss practice. In the end, this case could be seen as an example of reconstitution of centralised decision making towards what Karlsen (2000) termed decentralised centralism.

In my practice, the ideas of central or decentralised decision making are important in creating greater clarity as a system and towards systemic understanding in who gets to decide what. The Ministry of Education is responsible for centrally determining macro themes like the Provincial Learning Outcomes, Boards of Education are responsible for local schooling towards these outcomes, and classroom teachers teach towards these outcomes. The methods of instruction that a teacher uses will differ depending on their previous teacher training, current professional development trends, and class composition. Given this context, professional educators and school District Administrators already work within a decentralised centralism and our job in organizational leadership is to find the appropriate balance of centralised versus decentralised decision-making within the composition and historical context of our organizations. Perhaps, the learning organization is one that first recognizes the tensions of central direction (organizational ends/operative goals) and decentralised methods (teacher practice) to fulfill that direction, and secondly is attuned to adjusting central direction based upon feedback garnered from decentralised processes.

In regards to system reform, Fullan (2005) argues that what is needed is to bring about tri-level development or more specifically what new capacities are needed at the school/community, district, and system or policy levels. Further, he contends that not only must each level develop new capacities in its own right, but also the levels must interact in new mutually reinforcing ways. If I juxtapose this statement with the notion that educational change is as simple and as complex as what a teacher thinks and does, what direction should the broader system embrace? Clearly, the practices of a tri-level solution must be aligned in supporting a teacher's practice.

If Aalst (2003) is correct in his estimation that 70% to 90% of a teacher's knowledge of practice is tacit, then teacher development relies on turning tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge, the sharing of the explicit knowledge, and then the subsequent transference of new explicit knowledge into practice (e.g., tacit knowledge). Fundamentally, if Coleman (1993) is correct, that our organizational design directly enhances or impedes learning, and that it is the role of leadership at all levels to search for better ways to organize to facilitate learning, then networks need to be considered as part of a sustainable school district professional learning framework. In public schools where we are focused on teacher development, we need to organize in a manner that facilitates teacher learning in a knowledge-building organization that turns tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge via avenues for inter-relationships between workers (Nonaka, 1994). A purposeful social entity to enable system alignment, and promote knowledge building is a networked learning community. This case study is a narrative of how one school district supported teacher development via a network structure. I believe there is a measure of practical wisdom one can generalise from this project to enable their decision making towards the creation of other networks whether small in nature or grand in political scale.

7.4 NETWORKS AS A DISTRICT PRACTICE

Much of the research on the improvement of schooling has focused at the teacher or school level. This research adds to the literature that highlights the value and capacity a school district has in promoting teacher development as a part of the organizational structure of the district. Indeed, participant comments suggest that the district network, comprised of

individuals from different sites of practice, was a fundamental contributor to “teacher talk” and teacher empowerment. In addition, as schooling is, at the core, a relational enterprise, the network enabled a greater connection for participants to the district as an organization. Teachers saw beyond their individual schools and in part saw their work as less isolating and having greater purpose.

A number of considerations were highlighted for those interested in the creation and use of a networked learning community. In practice, the creation and operation of a networked learning community has three parts. One is more a checklist of basic actions. The second has to do with the ethics and general ethos with which a network is formed. The third is how the network supports the direction of the organization and those in formal positions of power.

The basic architecture of a networked learning community in a school district includes:

1. Scheduled time during the school day to meet;
2. Strategic allowances for side talk such as a dedicated time for a prepared lunch;
3. A shared/co-developed agenda;
4. Clear connection with the “bigger picture” and organizational direction (valued work);
5. Clear assessment tools towards agreed upon end;
6. Recognition that teachers will have flexible practices in meeting agreed upon ends;
7. Reflection on research and current best practice (e.g. literacy, early reading article review, etc.);

8. Group facilitator that is skilled in creating a democratic space;
9. Facilitation that allows the development of psychological safety;
10. Explicit linkages with school practice;
11. Members having a responsibility beyond the group such as a school based team leader;
12. Built in connections with provincial networks and district leadership;
13. Membership criteria, members should have a level of experience so that they are not grappling with basic classroom management;
14. Common assessment framework; and
15. School and district leadership with clear connections to school and district improvement initiatives.

This list captures the key practices highlighted in this case study. This list of criteria will enable the creation of the space for practitioners to come together.

A second consideration of the “ideal” processes crosses into moral terrain where right action and intentions are paramount.

As one participant noted:

An ideal meeting would require people who were willing to communicate openly with colleagues, and people who have actually made some attempt to improve their own knowledge. If they come with that basis, then you have the recipe for an ideal meeting. Once you have that, then you need an identified leader who can structure an agenda that will draw from people’s knowledge, fears and difficulties. The leader is required to skilfully pull together varying ideas, emotions, and concerns towards the creation of an emotionally safe environment. In this space, participants must feel

supported to reveal weaknesses and strengths in order to be able to set direction for the future. To me that's the ideal meeting.

The third necessary component of supporting those in positions of power is shared with any initiative in an organization if it requires funding and/or policy support. The support for central decision making with decentralised methods may lead to a form of decentralised centralism which supports the allocation of central resources and some flexibility to practitioners regarding implementation of centralised macro policy.

7.5 NETWORKS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PERSONAL PRACTICE

My actions as an educational leader are undertaken in regard to other human beings (Fenstermacher, 1990), and as such have an ethical quality that must consider what is good and right (Greene, 1978). Essentially, it is the mediation of my personal understanding and vision of the “ideal” and good that guides my ethics. My ethics are conditioned and constrained by the cause and effect of actions in practice. My ethical principles and learned realities come together in future decisions I make in my leadership role. Therefore, in consideration of my understanding of networks that evolved within this project, I must view them from the perspective of their implications for my practice.

There were two orders of conceptual framing that evolved for me through this study. One was the relationship of epistemology and practicality, the other, the “ideal” and the “real” of network theory. As the research process unfolded, the utility of complexity as a lens to reflect on my actions became clearer. As an educational leader in public schooling, the dynamic nature of a socio-political practice, such as teaching, is that human interaction is complicated and replete with competing notions of how best to act. These notions range from practitioners and parents wanting to control the action of others, to a laissez faire approach to quality schooling. Having a conceptual frame or lens to take with me into social and political environments decreases my personal expectation to have the right answer and consequently empowers me to listen more intently for the competing interests that might exist. Hopefully, this intentionality can help me in mediating the better answer or action required for a particular circumstance.

The second order conceptual understandings derived from this research were the explicit understandings of networks as a purposeful social entity towards the goal of creating a learning organization. Again, the practical realities of an organization and the “ideal” of network principles provide points of reflection that provide a way to navigate my understandings of the possibilities and limitations of a NLC. The realisation that the “ideal” is a point of reflection for practice, as well as a place to contest and appreciate the less tangible principles was an important conceptual development for me. In addition, the juxtaposition of the “real” network, and the practicalities needed to simply create the space for teachers to come together, allowed me to see the actions and influences necessary from the broader political ground to the micro practices of strategic lunch time for teacher side talk. In addition, the juxtaposition of the “ideal” and “real” enabled me to have greater consideration of how the “ideal” within particular sub-groups of employees may lead to the application of the antithesis of democratic principles outside of the group.

Case study provided the vehicle for me to better understand networks in my practice by bringing both the theoretical and the practical understandings of networks together. I appreciate the utility of case study as a method to uncover and understand social practice as it pertains to the development of practical wisdom. My ability to investigate practice has deepened through this project using case study as a method of inquiry and reflection, theory within the context of practice.

For others who read this research, the following core learning may be gained. As a practitioner, the value in seeing the complexity of social and political interactions, and accepting that you cannot control the ebb and flow of events, will enable you to have a greater influence as your decisions will likely be more inclusive of context, and motivations of others. Like a rock strewn in the path of flowing river, you will adjust accordingly and flow on, and not get stuck on the natural formed barrier (Wheatley, 1999). In regards to network theory, I believe the learning for a practitioner is more the realization that both the “ideal” and the “real” in any area of practice have merit, and the development of a NLC requires significant consideration of practical actions, and the ethical ends. One guides the other in an iterative way, and as a professional educator, one should intentionally grapple

with both. The “ideal” enables reflection while the “real” provides the practical application of ethical decision-making.

The use of a case study illuminates the complexity of “real” world events and how they come to be. It is the building of practitioner case knowledge which enables professionals to become expert (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986). The transferability of this study is how it helps other practitioner’s development of phronesis or practical wisdom and, with that, informs the judgements they make in their future practice. I hope that this case analysis lends itself to this end by illuminating the importance of the historical context of organizations, the influence government and district policy may have on events, and the different perspective groups members will have of an initiative. In addition, this case analysis provides the reader with some insight into how power within an organization is a key factor to any system initiative.

7.6 POLICY MAKERS AND RESEARCHERS

The focus of EdD research is to investigate practice. This is an interesting and challenging process, as typical academic research affords the researcher a level of detachment. If you are investigating your own work, this detachment does not exist. The distinction between researchers and practitioners breaks down. Historically, researchers provided the basic and applied science from which to derive techniques for diagnosing and solving problems, whereas practitioners furnished researchers with problems to study and with tests of utility of research results (Schon, 1983). Schon (1987) posits that often the problems faced by practitioners cannot be solved by the practitioner drawing on scientific or technical knowledge acquired in school, but often depends on the capacity to reflect before taking action in cases where established theories do not apply. The practitioner researcher need for reflection is amplified when you are also the system policy maker. At the system’s policy making level, you are making decisions that impact an entire organization, and you have attained the position in part due to your deeply held beliefs. These deeply held beliefs and their roots are the lens through which all data in your environment are filtered. Clearly, my roots and beliefs are attuned with the utopian notion of learning organizations. Further, for me, there is considerable moral weight given to the systemic decision of the ESSN and

consequently, I remain convinced that the policy direction was the right one. To become an academic researcher on my own policy, built from my core beliefs was a reflective process - one not easily accomplished.

In grappling with the professional knowledge and the role of researcher, Schon (1983) posits that, “in real world practice, problems do not present themselves to the practitioners as givens... they must be constructed from the materials of problematic situations which are puzzling, troubling, and uncertain (p. 40).” He reframes the question of the relationship between practice competence and professional knowledge by asking “what we can learn from the careful examination of competent practitioners (Schon, 1987, p. 13)”. The spirit of this research project was to learn from practice.

In some ways, I was fortunate to change districts after starting my research, and therefore, was physically and temporally removed from the project. If I had remained in the district, I wonder how much more difficult this reflective process would have been or what the extent of the limitations of this work under study would have been?

With this in mind, I found a number of influences that helped to shape or enable me to become critical of my work. A literature review revealed new ideas or ways to perceive past actions, and the subsequent participant interviews also shaped my understandings. I found the historical analysis of the case easier as I did not feel any vested interest in the past nor am I worried about my role in the district under study. As well, many of the historic events occurred prior to my time in the school district and were, therefore, someone else’s story. I cannot say the same for the analysis of the ESSN as I had a direct role in its inception, formation and implementation.

When I first initiated my research, I thought there was nothing better than the ESSN, and as I went through the process of examining it as a case study, taking the appropriate courses to help me understand the biases inherent in case study, as well as being conscientious of the dual roles of researcher and practitioner, and moving districts, I believe I arrived at a more critical place of understanding. As stated previously, key to researching your own practice is the use of a conceptual “ideal” and related framework built from the academic literature as a

mirror to your personal perspectives. You cannot have a non-emotive and non-biased appreciation for the subject under study, but I believe the concept of the “ideal” helps you to reflect more deeply about the subject matter.

The dual position of policy maker and researcher impacts my ability to be unbiased regarding the utility of networks as an organizational tool. As a policy maker, I have difficulty promoting the use of networks within an organization unless they are clearly linked to organizational ends. This consideration of organizational ends is juxtaposed with my appreciation of learning organization theory and stems from a desire to provide employees space to create and hopefully meet their needs. I believe these biases have directed me to arrive at a balance between organizational direction/control and teacher flexibility/context. In my continued leadership role, and with the purpose of utilising this research to illuminate my practice, this balance between district direction and teacher practice in the utilisation of networks is key.

My appreciation of networks as an organizational tool has moved from a practitioner perspective of how it might improve student results to seeing a network as an organizational tool to promote centralised policy directions. The value of networks as an administrator is the conscious vetting of policy direction through practitioners for implementation via network groups. I no longer see networks as being inherently good but simply as a tool that can be used to promote a good or nefarious organizational direction. I have come to appreciate networks as a means to share information, build relationships across an organization, and a vehicle to forward policy implementation via a convergence of practice. Although a network may be built on the premise of no one control centre, it can be used within a macro decentralised centralism governance structure to facilitate central direction through local contexts and practices. Through the research process, I am significantly more aware of the role decision-making power has in an organization and the influence of timing and macro policies on power dynamics.

As a practitioner, the EdD research process was a powerful influence on expanding my awareness. The experience of investigating and critically examining my practice revealed biases, and influenced my thinking on the utility of “ideals” in decision making. The process

of case study as a tool for developing expert socio-political practice defines for me the EdD research process. I have become my own case as the outcome of this research is the impact on my thinking about practice.

7.7 CRITIQUE AND AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The strength of this research lies in the narrative of the holistic picture from a macro political context to the practical functioning of the ESSN. Like most things, its strength is the basis of its limitations. From my position as a District Administrator, the broad strokes of creating networks and their use as a purposeful social entity is what I am looking for to inform my practice. Networks, as described in this research, warrant consideration as one part of a school district's organizational framework towards a systemic professional development model. Networks offer a method to promote decentralised centralism. There are ethical considerations in that, via networks, those in positions of policy making can have relative control over the actions of teachers, so the ends or intended outcomes for networks need to be carefully considered. But these ethical considerations are no different than the ethical considerations a teacher has in regards to their students. Power differentials exist and we need to work in a moral and ethical manner. As such, a leader is a teacher, and a teacher is a leader. In the organization of public schooling, those in formal leadership positions would be well served to still consider themselves as teachers.

This case study focused on the inception and evolution of a networked learning community within a particular context. It is the interplay of power relations and the realities of the social life in this context that not only defined but shaped the problem of early reading and the solution of the Early School Success Network. Therefore a general limitation to the transferability of this study's findings, similar to other case studies, is the degree to which another community and network shares similar features (Delamont, 1986). With this in mind, broad generalizations regarding networks would not be appropriate. Further limitations of this case study are for practitioners who are seeking more discrete answers to more discrete problems; this research may not meet those needs.

A number of areas warrant future investigation. First, although propositions were used to guide this study and give some shape as to the utility of networks, a deep analysis of any individual proposition was outside the scope of this project. Any single proposition could form the basis for a study on impacts of a NLC. Second, any change in the structure of an organization to meet its ends is worthy of a deep analysis of the resultant power differentials created. The development of the ESSN was embedded in many different shifting power structures from the Ministry of Education's introduction of an Accountability Framework to the decentralisation of the school district. A focused study on shifting power dynamics caused by the introduction of a network vehicle would be worthy of pursuit. Third, a follow-up in schools to determine the impact the network had on the practice of individual teachers would have added perspective to this work. Fortunately, these can all be areas for future research into networks in schools.

A larger research theme that is warranted has more to do with the aims of organizational vehicles like networks; in particular, the aims of such vehicles within social institutions like schools. The ESSN had clear aims of improving early reading. Albeit, the tool used to discern this in many ways defined the end. If the tool focused on reading fluency, then by default the aim of the group was to improve fluency. I am not saying this is a bad thing, but from a broader perspective, that considers public schooling as a policy to reach particular societal goals, how are societal goals considered in the organizational structure of school districts? How are societal goals grappled with in meeting specific organizational goals? I believe the values of the "ideal" network processes that include democratic and horizontal decision-making are part of this work, but there are higher order principles to be considered inclusive of what is right and good. How do these aims of education manifest themselves in thinking related to the organizational design of schools and school districts?

Given the limitations of this research and the complexity of social action, there is no shortage of future research questions. Some suggestions include:

1. How can networks influence the tri-level development needed to bring about educational reform?

2. What role should Boards of Education have in the governance of a new organizational structure such as a network?
3. How do networks impact power differentials in a school district, and within schools?
4. What influence does a network have on the allocation of resources in a school or district?
5. What are the impacts of teacher influence at the school level when involved in a district network?
6. What is the impact on a principal's positional authority?
7. How are assessment frameworks best used by a networked learning community?
8. How can the concept of a networked learning community be utilised within a particular community of practice?

Although I present these questions for consideration, the purpose of case study is to aid the decision making of social political participants, not to forward knowledge of the universal, but to enable practical wisdom through an appreciation of the particular. Therefore, the “real” questions that need to be considered in the future are the particular questions individual practitioners grapple with in their practice. It is hoped that this project provides those readers with a useful case to enhance their judgements and actions.

7.8 CLOSING COMMENTS

The development and use of a NLC, in my estimation is a practical step towards the “ideal” of a learning organization. It provides a bridge for teachers to explore their tacit knowledge set as well as promote explicit knowledge in a particular area. It creates a space where

teachers can step out of their classroom practice, and their individual school to build relationships with teachers whose day to day experiences and student demographics might be quite different. Like any social practice, a quality network is a precarious vehicle and it can fall to the “dark side” or become driven by a few powerful voices at any given time. To maintain a thoughtful and shared focus requires leadership.

To come full circle, the type of leadership required for networks in my view is the ultimate tension in my work in schooling, which is to create a space where people can get to know one another’s understandings while at the same time adhering to the policies, procedures, and practices that create borders for public schooling. The process of schooling, as well as the role of leadership in schooling, is to balance and minimize the impact of administrative responsibilities while enabling creativity and freedom in others. For me, the core motivation for this work is the belief that teachers want to do a good job and work hard, but sometimes lack the psychological freedom to experience a more fulfilled work experience. Their practice is controlled by prescribed learning outcomes and their professional development is directed by current trends and not by a deeper exploration of their practice in relation to another teacher’s practice. The research suggests that teachers, who are involved in a network structure under the “ideals” presented, find it a professionally rewarding and empowering experience. Many report a sense of reconnection with their teaching practice, as well as seeing themselves as educational leaders. At a minimum, the teachers involved in the network reported that they were more informed and more passionate about their work.

The case of the ESSN is a narrative of how one school district created a third space for teachers to grow and see themselves differently. I hope that this work may help others in the journey to illuminate and develop their practice.

REFERENCES

- Abbott, J. (2002). *The unfinished revolution*. London: The 21st Century Learning Initiative.
- Alavi, M., & Leidner, D. (2001). Review: Knowledge management and knowledge management systems: Conceptual foundations and research issues. *MIS Quarterly*, 25, 107-136.
- Aalst, Hans. (2003). Networking in society, organizations and education. In Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (Ed.) *Networks of Innovation: Towards New Models for Managing Schools and Systems*. Paris: OECD Publications.
- Anderson, R. Crabtree, B.F. Steele, D.J., & McDaniel, R.R. (2005). Case study research: the view from complexity science. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15, 669-685.
- Antonacopoulou, E. (1999). Developing learning managers within learning organizations. In M. Easterby-Smith & L. Araujo (Eds.), *Organizational learning and the learning organization* (pp. 217-242). London: Sage Publications.
- Argyris, C. (1991). Teaching smart people how to learn. *Harvard Business Review*, May-June, 99-109.
- Argyris, C., & Schon, D. (1996). *Organizational learning II: Theory, method, and practice*, New York: Addison-Wesley.
- Atkinson, P., & Delamont, S. (1986). Bread and dreams or bread and circuses? A critique of 'case study' research in education. In Hammersley, M., (Ed.), *Controversies in classroom research* (pp. 238-255). London: Open University Press.
- Barth, R. (1988). School: A community of leaders. In A. Lieberman (Ed.), *Building a professional culture in schools* (pp. 131-147). New York: Teachers College Press.
- British Columbia Teachers Federation. (2004). Report on accountability in K-12 education system [On-line]. Available: <http://bctf.ca/Publications/briefs/OCG/Briefingnotes.html>
- Becker, H.S. (1970). *Sociological work: Method and substance*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Becker, H.S. (1990). Generalizing from case studies. In E.W. Eisner & A. Peshkin (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in education: The continuing debate* (pp. 233-242). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Becker, H.S., & Ragin, C.C. (2000). *What is a Case?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Black, P., & William, D. (1996). Inside the black box. *Phi Delta Kappan*, October, 139-148.

- Bricker, D., & Greenspon, E. (2001). *Searching for certainty: Inside the Canadian mindset*. Toronto: Doubleday.
- Brooker, L. (2002). Five on the first of December. *Journal of Early Literacy* 2(3), 291-313.
- Bruffee, K.A. (1999). *Collaborative learning: Higher education, interdependence, and the authority of knowledge*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Burbules, N. C. (2004). Ways of thinking about educational quality. *Educational researcher*, 33(6), 4-10.
- Calvert, G., Moberly, S., & Marshall, L. (1994). Grasping the learning organization. *Training and Development Journal*, 48(6), 38-43.
- Campbell, D. (1975). Degrees of freedom and the case study. *Comparative Political Studies*, 8, 178-193.
- Canadian Newswire. (2004). City, parents and community tackle rebuilding Toronto's underfunded public education system [On-line]. Available: <http://newsire.ca/en/releases/archives/June2004/10/c3547.html>
- Capra, F. (1996). *The Web of life*. New York: Anchor Doubleday.
- Carr, A. (1997). The learning organization: New lessons/thinking for the management of change and management development? *Journal of Management Development*, 16(4), 224-231.
- Castells, M. (1996). *The rise of the network society*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Castells, M. (2000). *The rise of the network society (Revised)*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Chapman, J. (2003). Schooling for tomorrow: Networks of learning. In Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (Ed.) *Networks of innovation: Towards new models for managing schools and systems*. Paris: OECD Publications.
- Chawla, S., & Rensch, J. (1995). *Learning organizations: Developing cultures for tomorrow's workplace*. Portland, OR: Productivity Press.
- Chen, T. (2003). Recommendations for creating and maintaining effective networked learning communities: A review of the literature. *International Journal of Instructional Media*, 30(1), 1-6.
- Cibulka, J., Coursey, S., Nakayama, M., Price, J., & Stewart, S. (2000). *Schools as learning organizations: A review of the literature. The creation of high-performance schools through organizational and individual learning* [On-line]. Available: <http://www.ericsp.org/digests/ProfDevLitRev.htm>.

- Cilliers, P. (1998). *Complexity and postmodernism: Understanding complex systems*. New York: Routledge.
- Coleman, J. (1993). The design of organizations and the right to act. *Sociological Forum*, 8(4), 527-546.
- Coleman, P., & LaRocque, L. (1989). *Struggling to be good enough: Administrative practices and school district ethos*. Philadelphia, PA: Falmer.
- Coulter, D. (2002). What counts as action in educational action research? *Educational Action Research*, 10(2), 189-206.
- Creswell, J. (2002). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. London: Sage Publications.
- Cross, R., & Parker, A. (2004). *The hidden power of networks*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Daft, R. L. (2005). *Organization theory and design*. Mason, OH: Vanderbilt University: Thomson South Western.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1998). *The right to learn: A blueprint for creating schools that work*. San-Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Deal, T., & Peterson, K. (1999). *Shaping school culture*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Denzin, N. (1989). *The research act (3rd ed.)*. Englewood Clifles, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (1994). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Boston: Sage Publications.
- Dexter, L. A. (1970). *Elite and specialized interviewing*. Northwestern University Press.
- Dodgson, M. (1993). Organizational learning: A review of some of the literatures. *Organization Studies*, 14(3), 375-394.
- Donmoyer, R. (1990). Generalizability and the single case study. In E. W. Eisner & A. Peshkin (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in education: The continuing debate* (pp. 175-200). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Dufour, R., & Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work*. Bloomington, Indiana: National Education Service.
- Dreyfus, S., & Dreyfus, H. (1986). *Mind over machine: The power of human intuition and expertise in the era of the computer*. New York: Free Press.
- Driver, M. (2002). The learning organization: Foucauldian gloom or utopian sunshine? *Human Relations*, 55(1), 33-53.

- Eagan, K. (1997). Chapter one: Three old ideas and a new one. In *The educated mind* (pp.9-32). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Earl, L., & Katz, S. (2005). *Research report: Learning from the networked learning communities*. London: National College of School Leadership.
- Earl, L., & Katz, S. (2005). *What makes a learning network?* London: National College of School Leadership.
- Easterby-Smith, M., & Araujo, L. (1999). Organizational learning: Current debates and opportunities. In M. Easterby-Smith, & L. Araujo (Eds.), *Organizational learning and the learning organization* (pp.1-21). London: Sage Publications.
- Edelman, M. (1988). The construction and uses of social problems. In *Constructing the political spectacle* (pp. 12-36). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Elkjaer, B. (1999). In search of a social learning theory. In M. Easterby-Smith, & L. Araujo (Eds.), *Organizational learning and the learning organization* (pp.75-91). London: Sage Publications.
- Fenstermacher, G. S. (1990). Some moral considerations on teaching as a profession. In Goodlad, J., Soder, R. and Sirotnik, K.A. (Eds.), *The moral dimensions of teaching* (pp 130-151) San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Field, J. (2003). *Social capital*. London: Routledge.
- Flyvberg, B. (2001). *Making social science matter: Why social inquiry fails and how it can succeed again*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Fullan, M. (1992). *Change Forces: Probing the depths of educational reform*. London: Falmer Press.
- Fullan, M. (1995). The school as a learning organization: Distant dreams. *Theory Into Practice*, 34(4), 230-235.
- Fullan, M. (2000). The return of large-scale reform. *Journal of Educational Change*, 1, 5-28.
- Fullan, M. (2004). Leadership across the system. *Insight, Winter*, 14-17.
- Fullan, M. (2005). Tri-level development: It is the system. *Education Week, March*, 1-9.
- Fullan, M., Bertani, A., & Quinn, J. (2004). New lessons in district wide reform. *Educational Leadership*, 61(7), 42-46.
- Frankl, V. (1946). *Man's search for meaning*. New York: Washington Square Press.
- Gess-Newsome, J., Southerland, S., Johnston, A., & Woodbury, S. (2003). Educational reform, personal practical theories, and dissatisfaction: The anatomy of change in college science teaching. *American Educational Research Journal*, 40(3), 731-767.

- Gibbons, M. (1994). *New production of knowledge: Dynamics of science and research in contemporary societies*. London: Sage, 1994.
- Giddens, A. (1982). *Hermeneutics and social theory, in profiles and critiques of social theory*. Berkely, CA: University of California Press.
- Gladwell, M. (2004). *The tipping point*. San-Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Glasser, B. G., & Straus, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Gould, N. (2000). Becoming a learning organization: A social work example. *Social Work Education, 19*(6), 585-596.
- Government of British Columbia. (2008). The BC School Act.
- Graham, B. (1999). WTO threatens our health and education systems [On-line]. Available: http://www.caut.ca/english/bulletin/99_dec/editorial.htm
- Greene, M. (1978). Chapter three: Wide-awakeness and the moral life. In *Landscapes of learning* (pp.42-52). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gross-Stein, J., Stren, R., Fitzgibbon, J., & MacLean, M. (2001). *Networks of knowledge*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Guba, E., & Lincoln, Y. (1981). Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiry. *Educational Technology Research and Development, 29*(2), (75-91).
- Gunter, H. (1996). Appraisal and the school as a learning organization. *School Organization, 16*(1), 89-100.
- Hammersley, M., & Gomm, R. (2000). *Case study method*. Boston: Sage Publications.
- Hargreaves, A. (2003). *Teaching in the knowledge society*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hepburn, C. (1999). The case for school choice [On-line]. Available: <http://fraserinstitute.ca/shared/readmore.asp?sNav=pb&id+215>
- Hoban, G. (In press). *Teacher learning for educational change: A systems thinking approach*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Hopkins, D. (2003). Understanding networks for innovation in policy and practice. In Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (Ed.) *Networks of Innovation: Towards New Models for Managing Schools and Systems*. Paris: OECD Publications.
- Isaacson, N. & Bamberg, J. (1992). Can schools become learning organizations? *Educational Leadership, 50*(3), 42-44.

- Istance, D., & Kobayashi, M. (2003). Networks of innovation. In Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (Ed.) *Networks of Innovation: Towards New Models for Managing Schools and Systems*. Paris: OECD Publications.
- Jarvis, P. (1999). *The practitioner researcher*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Johnson, J. (1998). Embracing change: A leadership modal for the learning organization. *International Journal of Training and Development*, 2(2), 141-150.
- Johnston, C., & Caldwell, B. (2001). Leadership and organizational learning in the quest for world class schools. *The International Journal of Educational Management*, 15(2), 94-103.
- Karlsen, G. E. (2000). Decentralized centralism; framework for a better understanding of governance in the field of education. *Journal of Educational Policy*, 15(50), 525-538.
- Kaser, L., & Halbert, J. (2004). *Networks of inquiry for school and district improvement* [Online]. Available: www.npbs.ca/Articles.htm
- Knight, J. (1998). Do schools have learning disabilities? *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 30(9), 1-14.
- Kofman, F., & Senge, P. (1995). Communities of commitment: The heart of the learning organization. Learning Organizations. In S. Chawla, & J. Rensch (Eds.), *Learning organizations: Developing cultures for tomorrow's workplace* (pp.15-45). Portland, OR: Productivity Press.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lambert, L. (1998). *Building leadership capacity in schools*. Virginia: ASCD Publications.
- Leicester, M. (1996). Organism and organization. *Adult Learning*, 7(5), 123-126.
- Leithwood, K. (1992). The move towards transformational leadership. *Educational Leadership*, 49(5), 8-12.
- Lesgold, A. (2000). On the future of cognitive task analysis. In J.M. Schraagen, S.F. Chipman, & V. L. Shalin (Eds), *Cognitive task analysis* (pp. 451-465). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, G. (1984). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverley Hills, CA: Sage.
- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (2000). The only generalization is: There is no generalization. In R. Gomm, M. Hammersley, & P. Foster (Eds.), *Case study method* (pp. 27-44). London: Sage.

- Lipnack, J., & Stamps, J. (1986). *Virtual teams: People working together across boundaries with technology* [On-line]. Available: www.virtual.com/library/publications/download_vt2.htm
- Lortie, D.C. (1975). *Schoolteacher*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lundberg, C. (1995). Learning in and by organizations: Three conceptual issues. *The International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 3(1), 10-23.
- Lundvall, B.A. (2000). The learning economy: Implications for the knowledge base of health and education systems. In OECD, *Knowledge management in the learning society*. Paris: OECD Publications.
- Maguire, P. (2003). *District practices and student achievement*. Society for the advancement of excellence in education. Kelowna, British Columbia.
- Marion, R., & Uhl-Bien, M. (2001). Leadership in complex organizations. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 12(4), 389-418.
- Martin, J. R. (2002). The ideal of the educated person. *Educational Theory*, 31(2), 97-108.
- Martin, J. R. (2002). *Educational metamorphoses*. George Kneller Lecture, American educational studies association.
- Marshall, M. (2004). Networked learning communities. *Education Journal*, 82, 27-35.
- Marsick, V. J., & Watkins, K. E. (1999). Looking again at learning in the learning organization: A tool can turn to a weapon! *The Learning Organization*, 6(5), 207-211.
- Merriam, Sharan. (1998). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. San-Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Miles, M. (1979). Qualitative data as an attractive nuisance: The problem of analysis. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24, 590-601.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: an expanded sourcebook*. (2nd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Ministry of Education. (2004a). *Ministry Overview*[On-line]. Available: http://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/ep2004/educ/educ_overview.htm
- Ministry of Education. (2004b). *Accountability Framework* [On-line]. Available: http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/policy/policies/accountability_framework.htm
- Mossler-Howard, S. (2003). Best practices in considering the role of culture. In (Eds.), *Best Practices in School Psychology Volume 3*, (pp. 337-345).

- National Reading Panel (2000). *Teaching children to read – summary report of the NRP* [On-line]. Available: <http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org>.
- Naylor, C. (2007). Collaborative teacher inquiry as professional development: Concepts, contexts, and directions.
- Nonaka, I. (1994). A dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation. *Organizational Science*, 5(1), 14-37.
- Ogawa, R., & Malen, B. (1991). Toward rigor in reviews of multivocal literatures: Applying the exploratory case study method. *Review of Educational Research*, 61(3), 265-286.
- O’Neil, J. (1995). On schools as learning organizations: A conversation with Peter Senge. *Educational Leadership*, April, 20-23.
- Orum, A.M., Feagin, J.R., & Sjoberg, G. (1991). Introduction: The nature of the case study. In J.R. Feagin, A.M. Orum, & G. Sjoberg (Eds.), *A case for the case study* (pp. 1-26). Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Ortenblad, A. (2002). A Typology of the idea of learning organization. *Management Learning*, 33, 213-230.
- Osbourne, D., & Gaebler, T. (1992). *Reinventing government*. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books.
- O’Sullivan, F. (1997). Learning organizations – Reengineering schools for life long learning. *School Leadership & Management*, 17(2), 217-229.
- Owenby, P. (2002). Organizational learning communities and the dark side of the learning organization. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 95, 51-60.
- Pajak, E., & Glickman, C. (1989). Dimensions of school district improvement. *Educational Leadership*, 46(8), 61-64.
- Palmer, P. (1998). *The courage to teach*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation methods* (2nd edition). Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage.
- Putnam, R. (2004). *Social capital: What is it?* [On-line]. Available: <http://www.bowlingalone.com/socialcapital.php3>.
- Ragin, C., Becker, H. (1992). *What is a case? Exploring the foundations of social inquiry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Randi, J., & Zeichner, K. (2004). New visions of teacher professional development. *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, Blackwell Synergy.

- Reeves, D. B. (2004). *Accountability for learning*. Virginia: ASCD Publications.
- Reynolds, D., Creemers, B., Stringfield, S., Teddlie, C., & Schaffer, G. (2002). *World class schools*. New York: Routledge Farmer.
- Rhode, G., Jenson, H., & Reaves, K. (1993). *The tough kid book*. Boston : Sage Publications.
- Russell, B. (1930). *The Conquest of happiness*. NewYork: Liveright Publishing Company.
- Sackney, L. (2001). *Creating the organizational culture*. University of Saskatchewan: Saskatchewan Educational Leadership Unit.
- Sarason, J. (1990). *The Predictable failure of educational reform*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Schein, E. (1996). Culture: The missing concept in organizational studies. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 41(2), 229-240.
- Schein, E. (2004). *Kurt Lewin's change theory in the field and in the classroom: Notes toward a model of managed change* [On-line]. Available: <http://www.solonline.org/staic/research/workingpapers/10006.html>.
- Scheurich, J.J. (1994). Policy archaeology. A new policy studies methodology. *Journal of Educational Policy*, 9(4), 297-316.
- Schon, Donald. (1983). *The reflective practitioner*. New York: Basic Books Inc.
- Schon, Donald. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Schmoker, M. (1999). *Results: The key to continuous school improvement*. Virginia: ASCD Publications.
- Schmuck, P. (1992). Educating the new generation of superintendents. *Educational Leadership*, 49(5), 66-71.
- Schweitzer, T. (1995). *The state of education in Canada* [On-line]. Available: <http://www.schoolchoices.org/roo.canada.htm>
- Sefa Dei, G. (2000). Local knowledge and educational reforms in Ghana. *Canadian and international education*, 29(1), 37-71.
- Senge, P. (1990). *The Fifth discipline*. New York: Doubleday.
- Senge, P., Cambron-McCabe, N., Luca, T., Smith, B., Dutton, J. & Kleiner, A. (2000). *Schools that learn: A Fifth discipline fieldbook for educators, parents, and everyone who cares about education*. Toronto: Doubleday.

- Senge, P., Kleiner, A., Roberts, C., Ross, R., Roth, G., & Smith, B. (1994). *The Dance of Change*. New York: Doubleday.
- Sergiovanni, T. (1990). *Value added leadership: How to get extraordinary performance in schools*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Silins, H., Mulford, W., & Zarins, S. (2002). Organizational learning and school change. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 38(5), 613-642.
- Simons, H. (1996). The paradox of case study. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 26(2), 225-241.
- Sirianni, C., & Friedland, L. (2004). *Social capital* [On-line]. Available: <http://www.cpn.org/tools/dictionary/capital.html>.
- Sliwka, A. (2003). Networking for educational innovation: A comparative analysis. In Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (Ed.) *Networks of innovation: Towards new models for managing schools and systems*. Paris: OECD Publications.
- Smith, M. K. (2001). *The learning organization* [On-line]. Available: www.infed.org/biblio/learning-organization.htm.
- Snow, D.A., & L. Anderson, I. (1991). Researching the homeless: The characteristic features and virtues of the case study. In J.R. Feagin, A.M. Orum, & G. Sjoberg (Eds.). *A case for the case study* (pp.143-173). Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Spillane, J. (2006). *Distributed leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Stodgill, R.M. (1974). *Handbook of leadership: A survey of theory and research*. New York: The Free Press.
- Stone, D. (2002). Introduction: Global knowledge and advocacy networks. *Global Networks*, 2(1), 1-11.
- Thorpe, M., & Kubiak, C. (2005). Working at community boundaries: A Micro-analysis of the activist's role in participatory learning networks. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 37(2), 151-165.
- Tsai, W., & Ghoshal, S. (1998). Social capital and value creation. *Academy of Management Journal* 41, 464-476.
- Tsang, E. (1997). Organizational learning and the learning organization: A dichotomy between descriptive and prescriptive research. *Human Relations*, 50, 73-89.
- Useem, J. (2005). Decisions, decisions. *Fortune*, June, 55-56.

- Uzzi, B. (1997). Social structure and competition in interfirm networks. *Administrative Sciences Quarterly* 42, 35-67.
- Walker, R. (1983). Three good reasons for not doing case studies in curriculum research. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 15(2), 155-165.
- Walter, J. (1980). Evidence of the validity of situational leadership theory. *Educational Leadership*, May, 618-621.
- Wiens, J., & Coulter, D. (2005). What is an educated Canadian? *Education Canada*, 45(1), 21-23.
- Wheatley, M. J. (1999). *Leadership and the new science: Discovering order in a chaotic world*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Wood, J. (1995). Restructuring education: Designing tomorrow's workplace. In S. Chawla, & J. Rensch (Eds.), *Learning organizations: Developing cultures for tomorrow's workplace* (pp.403-416). Portland, OR: Productivity Press.
- World Bank. (2004). *Social Capital and Education* [On-line]. Available: <http://www1.worldbank.org/prem/poverty/scapital/topic/edu1.htm>.
- Yin, R. K. (1981). The case study crisis: Some answers. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 26(1), 58-65.
- Yin, Robert. (1984). *Case study research design and methods*. London: Sage Publications.
- Yin, Robert. (2003). *Case study research design and methods* (3rd ed.). London: Sage Publications.