

Australian Principals Centre®

AUSTRALIAN PRINCIPALS CENTRE

Monograph Number 14

Australian Principals Centre Ltd
ACN: 071 008 216
The University of Melbourne
Hawthorn Campus
Level 2, 442 Auburn Road
Hawthorn Victoria 3122
Australia

Ph: (03) 9810 3306
Fax: (03) 9810 3137
Email: apc@apcentre.edu.au
Web site: www.apcentre.edu.au

ISBN: 0 9750904 1 0

Editor: Keith Redman
Asst Editor: Jessica Redman

CEO, APC: Nick Thornton



David Jackson
Director of the Networked Learning Group, National College for School Leadership, England

This paper has been developed from themes and material presented by David Jackson in two keynote addresses: the first to the VPPA Annual Conference, on 4 August 2003; and the second to the VASSP Annual Conference, on 11 August 2003. Both conferences were held in Melbourne.

SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: BUILDING A SYSTEM-WIDE VISION by David Jackson

INTRODUCTION

Asking Questions about Educational Leadership

I get a chill when I am introduced at conferences: the people who announce that I'm about to speak make it sound as if I have all the answers. I don't. If we are going to develop a good education system, we need to start by asking good questions, not by giving good answers. So, let me start with a question that I asked at the Principals Conferences in Melbourne: *'Given the stage we are at now, where will the optimism come from, and who will carry the burden of that optimism into the future?'*

In fact, when I asked this question of the Principals in the audience, the answer was right in front of me. There was about 6000 years of teaching experience in the room, and about 3000 years of leadership experience.

I was a school Principal myself, for fifteen years. That is really where my self-identity remains in many ways. Although I have now been out of the school for two and a half years, I still think of myself as a school leader. In the last couple of years, working in a different context, I have realised two things about that role – and how I feel about it.

- 1 One of the things I miss most about being a Principal is how I got to start every day with a smile. Nowadays I work in a public service building, which doesn't seem quite such a smiley place.
- 2 In fifteen years as a school Principal I never once went home to my wife and said, 'Boy, was I a fantastic leader today!'

Leading schools and developing systems is a complex, chaotic and intuitive business. There isn't much clarity on a day-to-day basis, and you don't often drive home after work thinking that you've been running a successful business.

SOME KEY CONCEPTS

Ideas about Increasing Capital in Schooling

David Hargreaves, a personal educational guru for me, just finished a new publication called *Educational Epidemic*. In it, he draws on the work he has done over the last two or three years regarding school development, system development and network-based forms. David argues that the only way in which we will improve learning for children is to increase the intellectual capital in our schools. He uses the concepts of three forms of capital, which I will discuss briefly.

1 Intellectual capital

Intellectual capital is about developing our knowledge base and developing our people. It is about knowledge creation and knowledge management. Within that category we would address things like innovation, learning, and knowledge creation.

2 Social capital

We can't develop intellectual capital until we increase social capital, because people don't share with people they don't trust. So this second concept focuses on the need to increase social capital within and between schools. This term incorporates issues like collaboration, trust and networking.

3 Organisational capital

For David Hargreaves, organisational capital provides the capacity to make our organisations and systems such that they will increase social and intellectual capital. This encompasses communities of practice and organisational learning.

APC Monograph Number 14

Sustainable School Improvement—David Jackson

In addition to Hargreaves' three forms of capital, I have six of my own key terms that I would like you to consider.

1 Lateral strategies

We cannot rail at our school leaders against Delivery and Accountability regimes and say, *'That's not how we want it to be'*, without developing sustainable alternatives. The sustainable alternative to 'top-down' – or even to 'top-down/bottom-up' – is lateral thinking. We should be talking about how to improve lateral modes of engagement.

2 Inside-out solutions

The second term I would like you to think about is the concept of 'inside-out' (rather than 'outside-in') solutions. One of the things that we know from periods of national reform is that educational change gets weaker the closer it gets to the classroom door. I am going to propose an alternative model for building educational change from inside-classrooms-out, in order to make sense of development in terms of student achievement.

3 Co-construction

Co-constructed solutions are co-created, co-engineered and co-designed by the participants who will have to act them out. That is much easier to say than to do, but it is the only way forward if we want to embrace all the partners fully.

4 Context specificity

One of the things we know about top-down solutions is that the people creating them don't know what it's actually like to be in **our** school. What we need is to co-construct solutions that make sense in the place where they will be acted out.

5 Capacity building

How can we move into a phase where development becomes self-regenerative, rather than a constant stream of initiatives? We seem to be at a point where the same ideas come around again and again but the system isn't necessarily getting better. It feels like some kind of *deja vu* experience, rather than a learning model where we are constantly building. We need to design solutions that will build capacity for schools. This

relates back to the question of optimism and empowerment: 'Where does the vision for the system of the future come from? How do we develop the collective optimism to move forward?'

6 Social justice

I shall have more to say later about this concept.

THE NATIONAL COLLEGE FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

I joined the National College for School Leadership, in England, when it was launched in November 2001. The overarching goal of the College is embodied in the motto *'Every child in a well-led school, every leader a learner.'*

Initially, I was appointed Director of Research at the College although, as the Principal of a school, my background in research was relatively restricted. I am now Director of the Networked Learning Group. This group is responsible for creating a set of learning principles in four programs, with a total budget of about twelve and a half million pounds. The same principles apply to all of the programs – whether it is a Leadership Development program or a System Development program – but in practice the System Development program has tended to dominate our work.

The idea for the Networked Learning Group arose from some really interesting work at the College. We were trying to connect with operational images of practice, which could begin to inform and develop the system. I became obsessed by the notion that even if I had the Holy Grail – that is, if we found the solution to every child's success – the system wouldn't take hold of it. Why not? Because, when it came down to it, **the system wasn't configured for learning.**

As a result, we set ourselves the challenge of trying to work out what the system might look like if it **was** configured for learning. Out of that we developed the notion of Networked Learning Communities.

We all network. Throughout this paper, however, I will be talking about how we can move from networking to Networked Learning communities and sustainable learning systems. But first I need to provide some background.



One of the things that we know from periods of national reform is that educational change gets weaker the closer it gets to the classroom door.



*... our teachers are tired,
morale is low,
we have difficulties
with recruitment and ...
not all children
are putting their hands up
and saying this school
is the most exciting place
they've ever been*

SETTING THE CONTEXT: THE ENGLISH EDUCATION SYSTEM

We have had a decade of educational reform in England. I would like to share with you some of the dominant policies of the last decade. For example, we have had an **external inspection regime**, as part of which, every school is required to send its inspection report to the local paper. That can be quite an experience! Consider the situation of a small rural primary school with only three teachers – if a report questions the quality of teaching, it's not hard to work out who is being talked about. And it's not so great when the information goes to the newspaper!

What are some of the other elements that have come out of a decade of reform in our system? As examples, England now has:

- testing at every key stage throughout the system, with elite tables of key stage results;
- parental choice;
- funding of schools that is linked to pupil numbers, while schools are set publicly stated targets to achieve;
- performance management for staff, with pay linked to performance management.

You can begin to see how the parts of our accountability systems connect.

At this point, we could have a debate about what this reform has or has not achieved. I could also tell you that our teachers are tired, morale is low, we have difficulties with recruitment and that not all children are putting their hands up and saying this school is the most exciting place they've ever been.

Moving on, however, I should note that a relatively recent government White Paper (DES, 2001) states that we need a system with the following characteristics:

- Transformation
- Innovation
- Diversity
- Inclusion
- Informed professional judgement
- Knowledge creation, transmission and utilisation
- Practice-informed policy

In the meantime, currently England has a 'schizophrenic' system, where the government is attached to an ageing set of delivery reforms, while at the same time being enticed by new, imaginative, creative and quite visionary reforms. At the moment, we have a combination of both – if one accepts the premise that school inspection may lead to innovation.

We need to be clearer about what we **want** to achieve ... and what we **say** we are trying to achieve. Charles Deforges talks about testing and accountabilities, and the ways in which schools, just like children, respond to them. He tells a story of watching a class of infant children, making plasticine models of dinosaurs. One child shapes his plasticine into a ring and gives it to the teacher. Miss says: *'That's absolutely fan-tastic, thank you'*. All around the room kids start smashing their dinosaurs and rolling them out. The logic is clear: *'If that is how you get 'Well done', I'll make a ring! Why didn't you tell us?'*

Figure 1 (below) provides an analysis, developed by Michael Barber, of the way the system has gone in England. Building on Barber's ideas, and acknowledging our search for greater certainty in our directions, I have devised a new quadrant diagram (see Figure 2, below).

Figure 1: System as it has developed

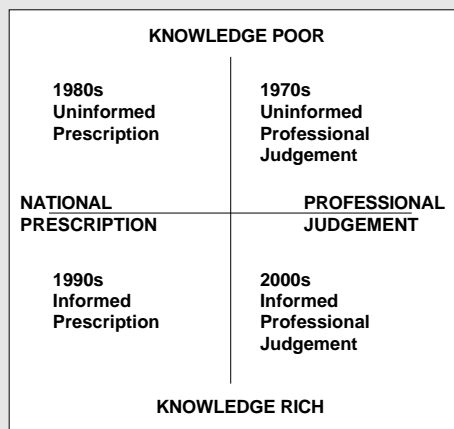
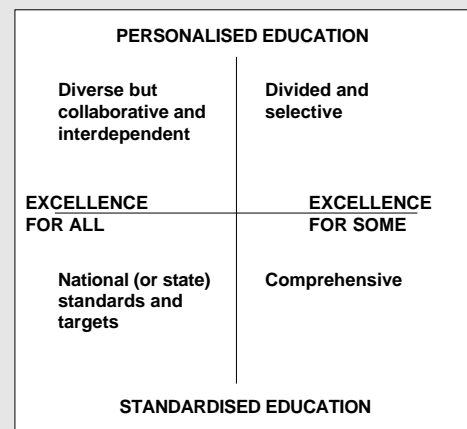


Figure 2: Challenges for 'system-ness'



APC Monograph Number 14

Sustainable School Improvement—David Jackson

The system that we inherited years ago was selective and divided. Then we entered a period of comprehensivisation – or standardisation. It didn't deliver. So our government decided to aim at 'excellence for all', still through the use of standardised approaches. They set national and state standards and targets – for example, the national literacy and numeracy strategy. These targets have delivered a certain amount.

Michael Fullan's team evaluated our national strategies. They commented that although we have achieved a degree of improvement in the system for children, we also have low morale among the profession. They also noted that we have not built capacity, because the 'delivery mentality' has led to people expecting things to arrive from elsewhere, rather than taking on responsibility themselves. A further, related conclusion was that there is a lack of creativity in the system.

A social justice issue affecting English education is the widening gap between high-achieving and low-achieving students. The aspects of reform that I mentioned earlier – the issue of national reform, pressure for results, league tables and parental choices – have actually contributed to this problem. Although the mean scores have gone up significantly, the gaps between the highest-achieving and lowest-achieving children have never been wider. At the moment, we do not have a socially just system.

If we want a healthy system, and if we want it to be socially just, then developing learning from diversity is the only way to go. And the road will not be easy. This analysis was being discussed in government buildings just a week before I visited Australia for the Principals Conferences, in August 2003. A new agenda is being developed, which acknowledges that diversity is an inherent characteristic of the system. That is true for both our countries.

In England it took quite some time to see the opportunities provided by multicultural schools. We had to move away from the idea that these schools were something new and complex that we didn't understand, in order to see that they offer something rich and diverse that can generate powerful learning.

Out with the old, in with the new

In the past, management within the the English system was characterised by a combination of national and Local Education Area (LEA) elements (see Figure 3, below).

Currently, we still have national policies, but although the LEAs still have a role, their relationship with schools is much less clear than it used to be. They are much less in control than they used to be.

We have moved towards autonomous schools, but we have also realised that having 25,000 autonomous schools makes no sense. Autonomy is not an effective unit for the schools, for the children, or for the system. We are therefore exploring the possibilities of partnerships in schooling. There is a multiplicity of potential partners for autonomous schools – the business community, external providers, universities, and other consultants.

In order to make sense of such a complex environment, we need to create a more meaningful and sustainable way of thinking about learning than 'the school is a unit of one'.

The model that I propose sees a crucial role for networks of schools. Figure 4, below, shows where these might fit in the new model.

Earlier, I mentioned the need to practise informed policy. One of the things we are



*If we want a healthy system,
and if we want it
to be socially just,
then developing learning
from diversity
is the only way to go.
And the road will not be easy.*

Figure 3: The old way

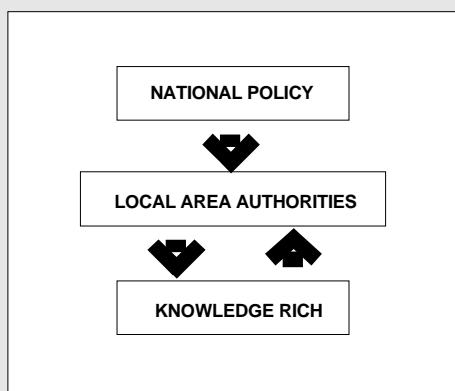
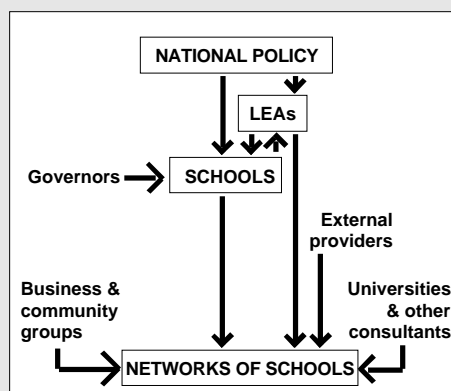


Figure 4: A new way



beginning to realise is that if we want schools that can influence policy, we have to build composite knowledge.

The knowledge of the individual school – for example, the trendy or innovative school that has a charismatic and dynamic leader for five years before s/he goes off to the next promotion – is not the way to build system knowledge. We need to build system knowledge **across** institutions. The problem is that we don't know how to do that.

Recently, I attended an OECD seminar on networks, in Lisbon. Six of the best educational networks from around the world were represented.¹ Together we built some theories and understandings, and it was really positive to discuss aspects of networks that we know work.

However, it will not be easy. Figure 5 (below) identifies some of the challenges/barriers to the development of networks – any one of these is a hurdle to overcome. One way to guarantee that networks won't work is to **tell** schools they are part of a network. You can't **make** people want to work together. However, we have to find ways through such problems. I know it's not easy, but I know it's the way we have to go.

I mentioned earlier the 6000 years of experience in the Melbourne hall where I delivered this paper. It should not be beyond the wit of us if we put our heads together to come up with some informed strategies. But how often do

we put our heads together in creative and optimistic ways, with socially just and inspiring aspirations?

It **can** be done. It **must** be done. Some of the reasons are that:

- 1 learning networks offer a design for school-to-school collaboration and system learning;
- 2 networks are a means to build capacity building and support innovation at school and system level;
- 3 they grow out of theoretical, practical and policy contexts that offer fertile ground; and
- 4 they offer a locally owned learning model.

To support us in our endeavours, we should remember the positive aspects of the context in which we are operating.

- There is an environment that is stimulating.
- We have a theory base and knowledge base already established.
- In terms of policy, we are being exhorted to do this work. The policy framework might not necessarily be as facilitative as we might like, but it will become more so if we can make clear to policy makers what it is that we need.



*One way to guarantee that networks won't work is to **tell** schools they are part of a network. You can't **make** people want to work together.*

Figure 5: Development of School Networks – Some of the challenges

- Poor collaborative histories
- Divisions within systems and organisations
- Traditionalists, resisters and cynics
- Dependency cultures
- Communication barriers
- Isolationism
- Lack of early clarity about the model
- Avoiding 'mateship'

A MODEL FOR LEARNING

At the start of this paper, I talked about learning. We need a system that is configured for learning. We need to understand what learning means. We need a model of learning so that we can see it. Like you, I get weary of learning ‘organisational stuff’. I want to know what it feels and looks like rather than just listen to the rhetoric of it. Networks offer a tangible, locally owned learning model. That concept has driven the work of the Networked Learning Group at the National College for School Leadership.

The Networked Learning Group model of learning

Once the Group had built a learning model, we wanted to apply it to all of our work. We want the networks of schools we work with to fulfil this learning model. Any event that occurs, any process that a school designs, the way the people function together – all these things must fulfil the model in order to develop a learning system.

The Networked Learning Group model of learning has three components or fields of knowledge:

1 The first of the fields of knowledge is **what we bring to the table** – the knowledge that we have; the 6000 years of experience that lives in a Melbourne conference hall; or the 1000 years of teaching experience that you might have in your school. We need to start by paying homage to what people know, and then build from that knowledge. There is a knowledge base out there – the knowledge of theory, the knowledge of research, and the knowledge of practice elsewhere.

2 When we started to build network communities we visited fourteen locations around the world. We wanted to **connect with the best that is known** and build from there. There’s a knowledge base out there about what works, and there’s an even richer knowledge base about what doesn’t work. It’s really important to know the places **not** to start.

3 The third component, and in some ways the most important, is the new knowledge we can **create together through collaborative practice**. If you have a system made up of people who value and share what they know, who create new knowledge together from the publicly available knowledge base, then you have a learning system

that is about building capacity, and which will deliver for students.

Building capacity

Linking to what I’ve just said, there seems to be an axis between delivery and learning – if it’s delivery, it won’t work; if it’s learning, it might. If it’s learning and there are delivery strategies to facilitate that learning, I guess it probably would work – that would be my encapsulation.

When I talk about ‘capacity-building models’, I am meaning things that are sustainable, that are particular to context and that make sense when they have to be acted out. Leadership, for example, is one of those things that is context-specific. Capacity-building is about collaboration and inter-dependence. Capacity-building is about having an enquiry orientation. It is about formulating our own knowledge so that we are clear about it and can share it with others.

Collaborative professional enquiry is central to creating the conditions for deep learning and the professional learning community. When we’re talking about networks, we need to think laterally. We need teachers to talk about pedagogy instead of subjects, to start showing what they know about teaching children to learn, instead of segmenting into separate units. We need to network within our schools, and create collaborative communities of practice.

Education still has a long way to go in the field of knowledge management. Networked Learning models create scope for coherence and context specificity – for schools within a network, collectively for a network of schools within networks, and for the system, through networks of networks. In this way we can begin to move knowledge around both locally and on a system-wide basis. Professional learning communities are about having a culture of collaborative practice – sharing knowledge about the things we do.

As a Headteacher, I was very conscious that if every teacher in our school could acquire the knowledge that was held by the best teachers on particular topics, we could improve our practice in powerful ways. For example, at the beginning of the school year, if all teachers knew what the best teachers do about developing rapport with new teaching groups – or if all tutors could develop the skills of the best tutors in establishing relationships with new tutor groups – then we could make a much more powerfully effective start to the year than would be the case otherwise.



*... there seems to be
an axis between
delivery and learning
– if it’s delivery,
it won’t work;
if it’s learning,
it might.
If it’s learning and
there are delivery
strategies to facilitate
that learning,
I guess it probably
would work.*



The school as a learning community – collaborating to connect with and reinterpret practice from outside, and to reinvent practice within the school – can be contrasted with an internally collaborative community, which risks the continuous re-cycling of traditional or low level practice. Schools that recycle their knowledge internally, never extend beyond the parameters or the vistas of their own thinking. In the Learning Communities model, the other group of schools collaborates around connecting with practice from elsewhere. As a Head, I often used to say to our staff,

‘There isn’t one thing we do in our school that someone isn’t doing better. Our responsibility is to find the better way, bring it back, customise it and advance our practice.’

Re-interpret it, re-invent it inside our own organisations – that is what networks do as a mode of being. Networked learning communities build capacity. They create synergies, stimulate innovation within a supportive context and make schools more flexible and adaptable to change – and they manage that change together. As a side comment, networks are often better able to capitalise upon a range of opportunities in the external environment – for example, where groups of schools work together to bid for funds that are available for research into best practice.

Figure 6 (below) illustrates some of the results from an OECD study of knowledge management in different sectors. The pressure for knowledge creation and the commissioning of research in education is low. The capacity to mediate and use knowledge ranks low to very low.

Just before the Principals conferences where I was to present this paper, I was talking to an Australian fundraiser, who explained how difficult it is to generate funds in the education sector, as opposed to an area like medicine. The problem, apparently, is that education doesn’t know what it wants to do with the funds it receives. The fundraiser suggested that this is because there is no evidence-based drive for the work, which would indicate the best way to use the money. In other words, education doesn’t understand its own direction of travel.

A statement from Michael Fullan really seems to fit with this. In *Leading in a Culture of Change* he said:

‘It is one of life’s great ironies: schools are in the business of teaching and learning, yet they are terrible at learning from each other. If they ever discover how to do this, their future is assured’.

When I first read this, I thought how true it is. If only we could learn how to learn from that.

Reasons for networking – some unanticipated teacher perspectives

Teachers have suggested that we should network because it helps learners and their learning – both students and teachers – in a variety of ways:

- Through our own learning we can enhance pupil learning.



Schools that recycle their knowledge internally, never extend beyond the parameters or the vistas of their own thinking.

Figure 6: Differences between sectors (CERI/OECD, 2000)

Dimension	High Tech	Medicine	Education
1. Pressure for knowledge-creation, mediation and use	Very high	Medium	Low
2. Structures and resources for knowledge-creation, mediation and use	High	Medium	Low to very low
3. Outcomes of knowledge-creation	Very high to high	High to variable	Low

APC Monograph Number 14

Sustainable School Improvement—David Jackson

- Networking can help us to draw from the knowledge of other schools.
- It can free us from our own contexts.
- Knowing that there is support can help to take away the 'I stand alone' feeling.
- Networking can help us to move from dependence to interdependence.

This list emerged from an unlikely source – a workshop that I ran in South Africa, where the participants were township Principals. All the evidence at the time seemed to suggest that these people were unlikely to be open to learning about networking – they work in an oppressed environment, teaching classes of between 40 and 80 children, with no capacity and no budget.

How could we possibly get them to network? We decided on a straightforward approach, starting by simply putting them in a room and asking them why a school might want to network. The ideas in the list above are what they came up with.

Their very first response was to say,

'Why wouldn't we? Students (learners) will get a better deal if we do'.

Then they said,

'Of course we would want to work together, because we farm in the same field of learning. ... We're all teachers and learners and, as professionals, we need to model both learning and teaching for our students, by working with other teachers and schools.'

Metaphors for networking

To help us develop our understanding of networking a little further, we can use the metaphor of the church. Like a church, a network is made up of a set of members; a set of relationships evolves between those members. Relationships, communication and trust – those are the strands that join us. Both networks and church groups *do* something together. Unless we're doing something when we network, there isn't much point in networking. Unless we're doing dynamic, purposeful things that advance student learning, what's the point?

You can't do those powerful things that advance student learning, however, unless you have the relationships and trust that hold things together. In our model, we have defined Networked Learning in terms of these 'knots', as the points of dynamic engagement. Think of a network literally – as a 'net', made up of strands or threads, knotted together into a single entity (See Figures 7a and 7b, below). This is a powerful metaphor. As we interpret it, the characteristics of the 'net' structure that make it work, are that it:

- is created by, and benefits, its members – it only exists if it provides this benefit. No-one can **make** you participate in a network.
- provides solidarity and tensile strength – the stronger the knot, the more strength there is to the network;
- is dynamic and flexible; and
- has to be 'worked' – networks don't work themselves; you have to facilitate their operations.



We're all teachers and learners and, as professionals, we need to model both learning and teaching for our students

Figure 7a: Threads, knots and nets – A network metaphor

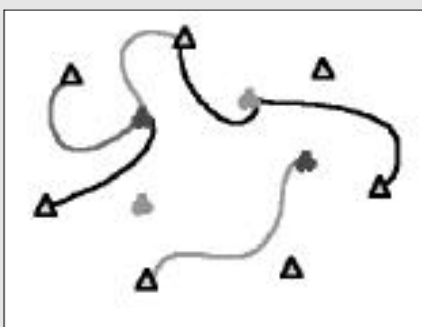
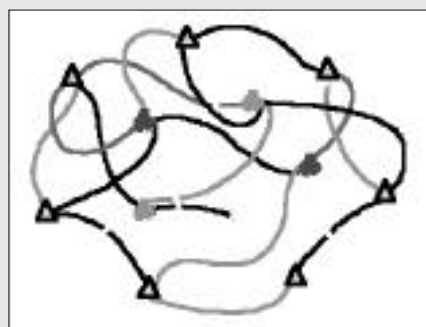


Figure 7b: Net Works – A dynamic for learning



Research has found that people only network when they are united around a compelling, inspiring idea – when they believe in something together. Networks work when:

- there are shared values, aspirations and beliefs – **we have to believe in something together**. If we don't have a common belief, why would we want to network?
- a common practical focus exists – we have to **locate our common beliefs in practice**. It has to be about something real, with our shared purposes acting themselves out in our classrooms;
- there are supportive 'structures' – facilitative norms and arrangements, which ensure that things **happen on the ground**. We need some architecture to make it happen, to build the knots.
- there is a common will, moral purpose and desire. There are always more reasons for things not to work, than there are for them to work. To use a double-negative, you have to exercise a strength of will in order to **not allow it not to work**.

WHAT ARE NETWORKED LEARNING COMMUNITIES?

So far I have given you an outline history of the English education system, and addressed the issue of 'Why networks?' Now I'd like to pose the question 'What are networked learning communities?'

As an example let's explore how the Networked Learning Group got started. First, we sat down and planned. Then we went on the road and put our proposal to group after group – to practitioners, to university personnel, to people who were working with networks and to private sector organisations. We told them we thought we had an idea that would work, and asked them to help us design and co-construct it.'

In that first year we were looking for between four and twelve networks to work with. In fact, we received 150 submissions (which represented about 1500 schools). In the second year we had 176 submissions. That is a massive response – it seems to have become some kind of a national movement.

A core set of beliefs

We decided that if we were going to form networks, it had to be around something we believed in, so we developed a core set of beliefs. These include the following.

- Every child can be intelligent; intelligence is not fixed – it can be grown.
- All children can become successful and energised learners. We believe there is a knowledge base for this to happen.
- Educational professionals and schools can learn together to deliver what it takes. Let's start by sharing what we know – there is enough knowledge to be able to do this successfully, and we can support one another to do it within networks.
- Making what we know visible and transferable (within and between schools) is not a bad place to start, if every child being successful and a socially just system is our aspiration.
- The knowledge exists to do it!

The 'Networked Child' as the unit of change

Secondly, we made the metaphor of the **networked child** the focus of our work. Networked learning communities involve collaborative change, built around what we see as a **unit of one**. That unit is one child, in one classroom, within one school, within a network of schools.

In that context, we explored what a network would need to know, and to do, in order to ensure that every single child can be the most powerful learner that he or she can be. The idea has been to have groups of schools that aim to solve the problems of one child – any child, in any classroom, in any school in the network. We need to make **that** the problem we are going to solve together. To help us address this, we came up with a new terminology that in effect would constitute a theoretical base for saying more about networking. This included three new phrases:

- Networked Learning Communities;
- learning from, learning with and learning on behalf of one another; and
- working smarter together, rather than harder alone.



*The idea has been to have groups of schools that aim to solve the problems of one child – any child, in any classroom, in any school in the network. We need to make **that** the problem we are going to solve together.*

Performing Miracles Every Day

Right now in your schools, teachers are performing miracles with children. How long will it be before other teachers in Sydney know about it? How long will it be before other teachers in Melbourne know about it? How long will it be before the teacher in the classroom next door knows about it?

I think the answer to these questions says something about the way our system is configured. If legal precedent were to be set in a courtroom in Melbourne today, it would be acted out in Sydney within a month. There is no such parallel process in education. We need to move to a more knowledge-based system where we open up our practice and transfer it.

The Networked Learning Group came up with the idea that we have a **destiny of exultation** to share practice. Having said that, I don't actually think that practice *per se* travels very well – it is often context-specific and person-related. I am always much more interested in how a practice was developed, rather than the practice itself. We want to encourage a system where schools engage to learn **process** from one another – how to **develop** good practice.

We already know a lot about learning – we know, for example, that learning is best when it is socially constructed and collaborative. We only have to look at good classrooms to see what valuable systems might look like.

When I was Head of Sixth Form in an English school we would do revision sessions with A-Level students who were worried about whether they would get their university grades or not. One thing I used to say to them was

'Don't worry about your A-levels, don't even think about them. Only concern yourself with your friends' A-levels. Support your friends to be successful. If you do that, we'll have a community of people supporting each other and we'll all be successful. It works.'

The same principle applies with systems of schools, although it may be hard to make that transition, because we have competed for so long.

A MODEL OF LEARNING, IN PRACTICE

We need to learn through collaboration, by creating learning spaces where courageous and ambitious conversations can be held and where powerful things can be done. We need to shift the way we think about practice and move towards a focus on process.

We also need to focus on the issue of moral purpose. There is no point in networking if we don't have moral purpose. Unless we care about the children in other schools, we will never achieve genuine networking. We have to care about education and children – not just our school and the kids in our classrooms.

I talked earlier about the enthusiasm expressed by African teachers as they anticipated the benefits of networking. Regrettably, such a reaction is not universal. One teacher in England mentioned to me that her school was thinking of becoming part of a Networked Learning community. I explained our concept to her and her response was words to the effect of:

'What? Work with teachers in other schools? Why would we want to do that? It would just take the focus away from our school.'

My reply was that we didn't need to finish this conversation. If she didn't understand what we were talking about, there was no point.

Our model is about a belief system. My best example again comes from my work in South Africa. On my first day in a settlement camp, I got completely lost on the way to a primary school. I stopped to ask directions from some young children who were by the roadside. These children were living in the poorest place in the world, they weren't at school when they were supposed to be, and yet they answered me in clear English – their third language – and clearly demonstrated how every child can be intelligent, regardless of the circumstances.



There is no point in networking if we don't have moral purpose. Unless we care about the children in other schools, we will never achieve genuine networking.

When I finally arrived at the school I spoke with the Head Teacher, the Head of Department and the Deputy Head about setting up some networks. The Deputy Head said words to the following effect:

'It's like my co-operative learning groups in the classroom, isn't it? When we have co-operative learning groups, all the children have a learning partner, and they have to ask each other what they had to eat the night before. Then I ask them who they think will learn best – the person who had rice and meat, or the person who just had pulses and always has pulses. Then, for homework, I ask them to visit their partner's house and to bring some lunch for their learning partner the next day.'

I thought that story was a lovely metaphor for Networked Learning. I meet groups of Heads all the time who talk around tables and never pay homage to each other's practice by visiting their schools. Networks become interdependent communities when we engage with each other's environments. That is the community part of Networked Learning communities.

The Durham Board, in Canada, in their publication *A Networked Learning Community*, commented as follows:

If we want to develop young people who are participating members of society, we must model that by being collaborating members of the educational community.

The question is, *'Who is stopping us modelling our belief systems?'*

We have been indoctrinated into a belief that we can only work within our own school. As Heads of schools, while we have been busy managing our local branch of the system, we have lost our sense of professional leadership, and of leading the development of the system.

We need to re-establish these aspects of our role, reflecting the fact that as leaders we can influence learning on at least the five levels of:

- student learning – a pedagogical focus;
- teacher learning – with professional learning communities as the goal;
- leadership learning – at all levels in the school;
- organisational learning;
- school-to-school learning.

The architecture of Networked Learning communities

The architecture of Networked Learning communities is that we invite groups of schools to put together a proposal to become a Networked Learning community, starting with a pedagogic focus. They have to begin with something that will act itself out in classrooms. Then they identify, together, what the professional learning component of that would be, in order to be able to achieve their aspirations. We use the term **'Inside classrooms'** as a metaphor for student learning, but learning doesn't have to remain inside the classroom.

Prospective schools have to make a statement about how the school leaders are going to learn together, collaboratively, to achieve their aspirations for the adults, children and communities that they've already made. They have to ask themselves questions like:

- *'How are we going to create a learning dynamic of leaders who will problem-solve what we're trying to achieve?'* and
- *'How can we support them in order to do that?'*

The organisational learning component focuses on how we can re-shape a school's creative spaces to make it work, as well as on the school-to-school aspects. For example, one of our networks works half an hour longer every day so that it can close for half a day a week in order to learn together. That feels like a really good idea to me. There are many examples like this one, and in a network-based system they are ideas that become visible and usable for every other member of the network.

As Heads of schools, while we have been busy managing our local branch of the system, we have lost our sense of professional leadership, and of leading the development of the system.



Non-negotiable principles

Three elements of Networked Learning we regard as non-negotiable principles:

1 **Moral purpose** - We must care about children in other schools, in order to network.

2 **Shared leadership** – We are looking for new models of leadership that travel laterally, stretching across more than one site. Network facilitation as a shared leadership model involves sharing the resources of more than one school.

3 **Enquiry-based practice** – We must study what we do and learn from what we do. We need to have a community of practice in schools, which fashions its knowledge so it can be shared within and beyond the network.

Making connections and forging partnerships

The Networked Learning Group recently held an annual conference in the UK, with 85 networks attending. The conference focused on sharing practices and each network had to bring along a display to share with everybody else. All the participants had their own business cards and they exchanged them with each other as they moved around the conference. Consistently, I overheard people saying things like: *‘That work is fantastic, give me your card, I’d love to keep in contact with you’*. This is how networks operate.

In terms of architecture, we encourage each network to have a Local Education Authority partner. Each school should define the kind of support it wants within the district context and negotiate it with the LEA. When you become part of a Networked Learning community you are no longer an individual school – you are a political unit. You are just one of six schools (or ten or twelve schools) in the group. Ten schools have a louder voice than one – they can make a difference.

Schools are also encouraged to form a connection with a university. Universities provide support, access to an extensive knowledge base, and can offer accredited programs. Some of our networks are having customised programs designed for their own learning focus.

Networked Learning Communities are about schools working smarter together rather than harder alone

The last point I would like to make is about our concept of working **smarter**. Working smarter doesn’t just mean working together – these are not social units. It means doing things differently. It means doing different things. It means doing things together and it means doing things **on behalf of one another**.

When one school has an interesting experience, they need to bring it back for all the schools to learn from. If a group goes on an international study visit, the participants need to share the experience with all the schools in the network or bring it back to the Networked Learning communities program.

WHAT ARE SOME POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS IN AN AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT?

When I was preparing this paper for presentation to an audience of Australian Heads, I asked myself what I might come up with, say as a set of ten proposals, which might work for a system that I don’t know anything about! What are the bits that might fit together? How could we align the various partners?

So, when you read the list on the opposite page, in Figure 8, allow for the fact that I devised these proposals after one week in Australia and thirty conversations with taxi drivers! On the other hand, they are obviously framed on the basis of proven experience in other systems.

One of the things that I noticed during my short sojourn in Australia, was that in the education system here, at the moment, the various potential partners are not aligned. What could we do to fix that? There is no point just sitting there and saying, *‘We’re not aligned’*. How is it going to happen, though? We need to ask ourselves some serious questions. I have suggested four, in Figure 9, opposite.

The framework of ideas provided in this paper should be a useful starting point as we explore these questions. The answers are out there.



Working smarter doesn’t just mean working together – these are not social units. It means doing things differently. It means doing different things.



*How is it going to happen ... ?
We need to ask ourselves
some serious questions ...
The answers are out there.*

Figure 8: Ten Proposals

- 1 Align the various partners/agencies around a system vision.
- 2 Build internal commitment across schools.
- 3 Identify 'cultural architects' (CAs) for each school.
- 4 Heads, CAs and staff commit to ongoing learning.
- 5 Generate new communication strategies – value the voice of the stakeholders.
- 6 Create a Network Forum – allow a focus to emerge.
- 7 Agree some compelling shared aspirations.
- 8 Establish cross-school 'study groups'.
- 9 Transform existing time into new 'learning spaces'.
- 10 Celebrate and communicate, intensively.

Figure 9: Four questions

- 1 Who is going to take the lead?
- 2 How can we build commitment within schools?
- 3 Who are the people within the system, in the schools themselves, who could begin to make this happen?
- 4 Given that I believe it has to happen, who are the cultural architects that are going to do the redefining?

Endnote

- ¹ A paper of findings has been published on the OECD web site.

APC Monograph Number 14

Sustainable School Improvement—David Jackson

REFERENCES

- CERI/OECD (2000) *Schooling for Tomorrow: Innovation and Networks*, Portuguese Seminar, Lisbon, 14–15 September 2000, Rapporteur's Report (David Hopkins).
- DES (2001) *Schools Achieving Success*, Government White Paper, Department for Education and Skills, London.
- Durham School Board (2002), *Success in Our Schools*, Ontario, Canada.
- Hargreaves, D (2003) *Education Epidemic: Transforming Secondary Schools through Innovation Networks*, Demos, London.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTED TEXTS

- Allen, K E and Cherrey, C (2000) *Systemic Leadership: Enriching the Meaning of Our Work*, University Press of America, Boston, Maryland
- Lieberman, A and Grolnick, M (1996) 'Networks and reform in American education', *Teachers College Record*, Vol 98, No 1, pp 7–45.
- Lieberman, A and Wood, D (2003) *Inside the National Writing Project: Connecting Network Learning and Classroom Teaching*, Teachers College Press, New York and London.
- NCSL (2002) *Why Networked Learning Communities?*, National College for School Leadership, Nottingham.
- OECD (2003) *Networks of Innovation: Towards New Models for Managing Schools and Systems*, Paris.
- Wenger, E (1998) *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Wohlstetter, P and Smith, A K (2000) 'A Different Approach to Systemic Reform: Network structures in Los Angeles', *Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol 81, No 7, pp 508–515.



APC Monograph Number 14

Sustainable School Improvement—David Jackson

PAPERS IN THE APC MONOGRAPH SERIES

- No.1 *Building Leadership Capacity in Schools*
Linda Lambert
- No.2 *Values in Educational Leadership — Do They Really Matter?*
Paul Begley
- No.3 *Preparing to Face the Challenges of Principalship:
The “PRISM” Model*
Bruce Barnett
- No.4 *Mentoring for Practising and Aspiring School Leaders:
The “SAGE” Model*
Bruce Barnett
- No.5 *Developing Effective Learning Programs for Adults*
Rosemary Caffarella
- No.6 *Contemporary Developments in the Law
Relating to Children and the Children’s Court*
Judge Jennifer Coate
- No.7 *Contemporary Developments in the Law
Relating to Personal Injury, Negligence and Compensation*
Mr Justice Bernard D Bongiorno
- No.8 *Leading and Managing for High Performance*
Professor John West-Burnham
- No.9 *The APC Summer Institute, 2002:
“Reconfiguring Schooling for the 21st Century”*
- No.10 *Education Helping to Build Social Capital:
The British Experience*
Estelle Morris (in press)
- No.11 *The APC Summer Institute, 2003:
A Two-Day Workshop with Professor Paul Bredeson*
- No.12 *Learning Centred Leadership:
The Only Way to Go*
Professor Geoff Southworth
- No.13 *Conversations for School Improvement:
The Value of Relational Learning*
Dr George Otero
- No.14 *Sustainable School Improvement:
Building a System-wide Vision*
David Jackson

Australian Principals
Centre *Monographs*
are developed
from presentations
by leading educators, and
experts in related fields.
Views expressed by the
authors do not
necessarily represent
views of Australian
Principals Centre

© Australian Principals
Centre, 2004

ISBN: 0 9750904 1 0

This paper
was prepared for
Australian
Principals Centre by
Keith Redman and
Jessica Redman,
Keith Redman &
Associates Pty Ltd.