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Sustaining a Community of Learners

Volume 8 **Fall 2006**

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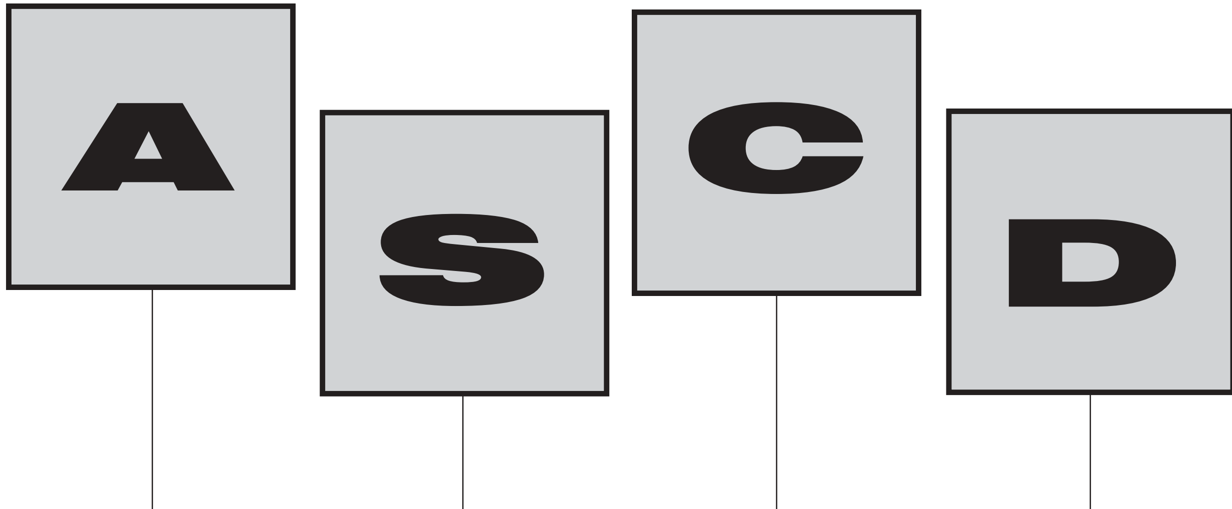

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

Volume 8 **Fall 2006**

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– committed to the mission of enhancing teaching, learning and leadership –

Manitoba ASCD

Manitoba ASCD was established in 1995 as an affiliate of the international ASCD. Its mission statement reads as follows: *"Manitoba ASCD is a community of learners committed to enhancing teaching, learning and leadership by reflecting on current educational research, by engaging in varied forms of professional learning, and by providing a forum for non-partisan dialogue about education."*

Manitoba ASCD is a highly visible and respected educational organization responsive to the needs of its membership. Valued for its non-partisan voice on issues of teaching, learning, and leadership, Manitoba ASCD engages a large, diverse membership in quality professional learning. It is an intricately connected organization providing regular and frequent forums and networking opportunities to support professional growth at all levels of the educational community.

A nine member Board of Directors and three standing committees guide the development of the organization and plan annual programs. The general membership includes teachers, administrators, superintendents and personnel supporting educational initiatives in government, the universities, and in school systems.

ASCD (International)

ASCD is an international, non-profit, nonpartisan education organization committed to the mission of forging covenants in teaching and learning for the success of all learners. The acronym stands for the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Founded in 1943, ASCD provides professional development in curriculum and supervision; initiates and supports activities to provide educational equity for all students; and serves as a world-class leader in educational information. ASCD is one of the largest educational associations in the world, with membership approaching 200,000.

Widely respected among educators for the quality of its award winning publications, ASCD distributes a variety of journals, newsletters, books, audio- and video-tapes each year. Regular publications include *Educational Leadership*, *The Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, and *Education Update.*

Affiliates

ASCD offers services to its members through 69 affiliates, located in each state within the US, in 5 provinces and the NWT in Canada, in the Caribbean, Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Each affiliate has its own governance structure and programs emphasizing local issues. ASCD members may belong to the headquarters organization, their local affiliate, or both.

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The journal is intended to provide a forum for the exchange of current theory, research and classroom practice, as well as the release of news of particular interest to educators at all levels. Topics might include descriptions of curriculum improvement projects, use of computer technology, discussions of trends and issues, views on instructional strategies, or statements of theoretical positions. Authors are encouraged to draw on their own experiences and research as well as their interpretation of professional literature.

Shorter manuscripts such as classroom ideas, letters to the editor, book reviews and graphics will also be considered. All submissions are peer reviewed and the editor reserves the right to edit all copy. The contents do not necessarily reflect or imply endorsement by Manitoba ASCD.

Submissions will be considered on an ongoing basis.

Submission Guidelines:

1. Manuscripts should be 1000-2000 words (4-8 pages) in length, and double spaced on one side of 8½ x 11 inch paper. Articles may be submitted on disc. (Microsoft WORD)
2. A cover page should include the title of the article, a brief (200-word) abstract, the name, position, place of employment, mailing address, phone and fax numbers and a 2-3 sentence description of background and experience for each author. The title of the article should also appear on page 1 of the manuscript itself. Do not include the author's name on the cover page.
3. Pages should be numbered consecutively including the bibliography. (APA style preferred.)
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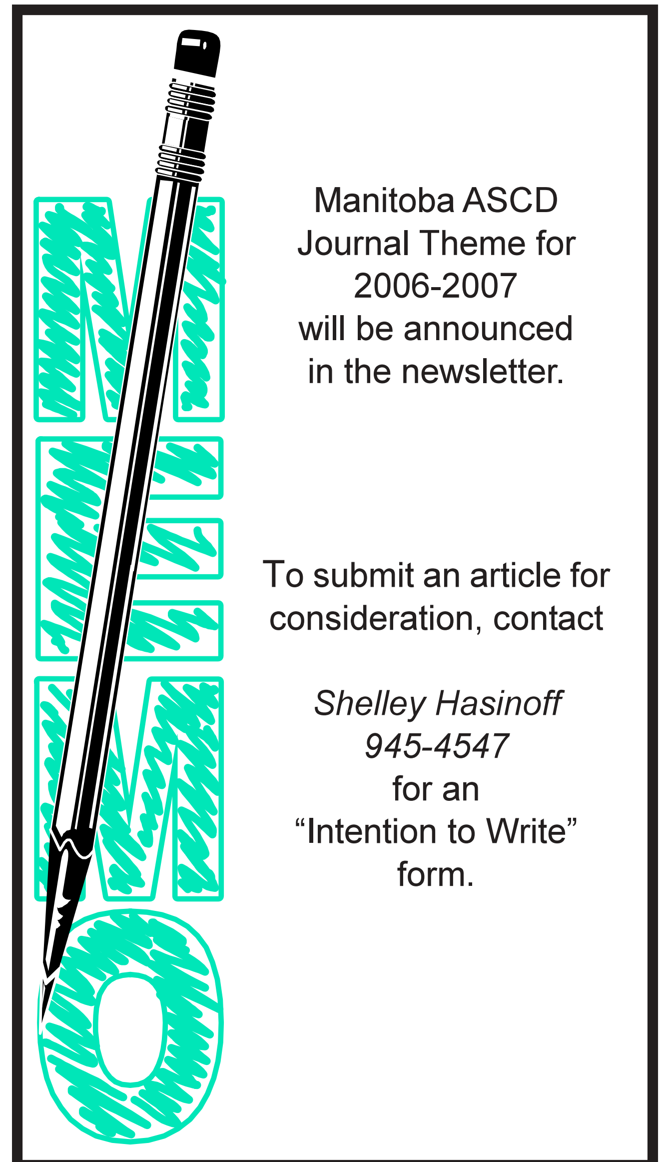
5. Authors are expected to take full responsibility for the accuracy of the content in their articles, including references, quotations, tables, and figures.
6. Articles which are not accepted will be returned if a self-addressed envelope with sufficient postage is provided.
7. Publication decisions are made after a blind review by the Editorial Board.
8. There is no remuneration for articles accepted; however, a complimentary copy of the journal will be sent to all contributors.

Gwen Watson, ***Editor***



A Message from the Editor…

Gwen Watson, *Winnipeg School Division*

Sustaining a Community of Learners

Would you trust your future to a doctor or dentist who neglected to keep up with advancements in his or her field? Or, perhaps, to one who never upgraded his credentials with courses, professional conversations, seminars or workshops?

North American society expects its professionals to employ "cutting edge" knowledge and "best practice" techniques. In speciality sectors such as technology, information becomes obsolete in a matter of weeks. The reality is that knowledge is doubling at an incredible pace. Why then, does change in educational practice impart such a paradox for educators?

Learning should be joyful and meaningful. Learners should feel competent and empowered whether they are seated at desks or leading at the front of classrooms. Research has identified for us what works to improve student learning in schools. Why do research-based improvements frequently wither while out-dated, and, sometimes, damaging practices persist, and even flourish?

In his 2004 article - 'What is a "Professional Learning Community"?' - Rick DuFour, identified three of the "big ideas" associated with professional learning communities.

1. The focus ensures that students learn.
2. The community promotes a culture of collaboration.
3. Success is measured by improved student achievement.

Considering these big ideas and their implications will help those interested in school improvement to forge their initiatives. Manitoba Education has made improving educational opportunities for educators one of its priorities in its latest Education Agenda. Professional learning communities offer one means of achieving this goal.

DuFour's article is just one of many practical resources on the Teacher Leaders Network web page (www.teacherleaders.org) along with excellent links under the subtopic of *Professional Learning Communities*. Another useful resource for educational leaders is *Attributes of Professional Learning Communities* located on the Southwest Regional Educational Laboratory website. (http://www.sedl.org)

The articles contributed to this issue of *Reflections* by Manitoba educators examine issues associated with learning communities through various lenses - from social psychology to classroom pedagogy to systemic initiatives.

Shelley Hasinoff considers the "social capital" of human relations in learning communities while ***Jerome Cranston*** examines research implications for school learning communities. ***Tim Dittrick*** and ***James Kostuchuk*** tell their unique classroom stories about learning communities in action - one elementary and one high school. The potential of technology to enhance on-line learning opportunities is featured in the article by ***Janet Dent***. ***Leon Simard*** argues the need for research communities and ***Nick Verras*** shares his reflections on parental expectations and student success in life. ***Fatima Mota*** and ***Rebecca Decter*** provide some insights into their seven-year journey as part of a school-based professional learning community.

The need for high-quality results-driven professional development has never been greater. Cookie cutter classrooms are passé. Have the research-based strategies and concepts embedded in the Manitoba Education document, *Success for All Learners: A Handbook for Differentiated Instruction,* for example, been widely implemented in our classrooms? If not, why not? Whether we use the umbrella of multiple intelligences, learning styles, differentiation, modalities or learning channels - are we not talking about the need to vary tasks, assignments, assessments and learning experiences to meet the needs of individual learners? Is this notion of teaching and learning universally understood?

The next struggle for change may well be over issues connected to assessment, evaluation and grading. A system based on percents and, sometimes, ranking

prevails, as if learning can be quantified and described in a single number. In high school, percentages are frequently calculated (to the second decimal point) by averaging everything a student does to determine a grade for the class. The following comment made by a high school math teacher during a parent teacher meeting illustrates the assessment quandary in secondary schools:

> "I know she knows the work; she completes her homework and does all the additional questions and extra assignments perfectly. She comes in for extra math classes in the mornings and the reviews at lunch, but she just bombs on the tests and makes silly mistakes! So her mark is 78."

This teacher had ample evidence of student learning and mastery which he neglected to use in his evaluation or judgment. The well known meta-analysis of assessment research conducted almost ten years ago by Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam, "Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards through Classroom Assessment", proved that formative assessment such as descriptive feedback does more to improve student learning than any grade, mark or percentage. Yet, percentage grades persist.

The enduring influence of the status quo dooms viable improvements if the local driving force behind them or leadership in front of them changes. As one of the "brain educators", Pat Wolfe, notes, "Under stress, you regress." Is resistance to change a by-product of a system where educators feel bombarded from all sides by conflicting demands? The obligation to educate other stakeholders about the types of changes necessitated by the knowledge revolution is pressing. Building stronger communities in schools and nurturing and supporting those who want to improve learning and student achievement are just two suggestions for sustaining a community of learners, a community that includes teachers and school leaders as life-long learners.

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Manitoba ASCD Complimentary Memberships

Complimentary memberships are bestowed by the Board of Directors of Manitoba ASCD to Manitoba educators in recognition of their leadership and contributions to education in our province.

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A Message from the President…

Sandra Herbst-Ludteke, *River East Transcona School Division*

Over the past decade, the term 'learning community' has been used in multiple places and in multiple ways. The term can actually be traced to the 1992 publication of Thomas Sergiovanni's *Moral leadership: Getting to the heart of school improvement*. Since that time, many definitions have emerged. Nevertheless, recent writing is suggesting that it is more common to find teachers and administrators who say that they participate in one or more learning communities than it is to actually find one in action.

Regardless of the definition that resonates best with you, a learning community causes professionals to come together to focus on student learning through collective and collaborative inquiry. The group defines not only its purpose, or vision, but it also pays attention to participant behaviours and mutual commitments.

Though the specific work and participants of a learning community may vary over time, the one hallmark that must remain constant is relationships built on trust and rapport. As Gardner (1991) writes, "Community is concerned with the deep-structural fabric of interpersonal relations." In fact, others have gone on to argue that it is respect, concern, caring, reliability and commitment that will sustain communities of learners. Blankstein (2004) refers to this as relational trust.

Communities of learners, therefore, need to pay attention consciously to building and maintaining trust. Research conducted by Bryk and Schneider (2002) provide us with four areas to consider

1. respect for the role that a person plays and his/her viewpoints
2. competence to act on that role and on what has been agreed to
3. personal regard for others through caring and kindness and
4. integrity demonstrated by ethically and morally "walking the talk."

Much of what has been written uses learning communities consisting of professionals as the context or lens. The learning community that you are currently thinking about and are engaged in may include students, parents, community members, business leaders, social services personnel and/or trustees. However, relational trust and the ways in which we build and nurture it do not change.

If relational trust strongly connects to sustaining communities of learners, what might that practically mean for each of us? I suggest we reflect on the following aspects of group membership:

- Seek to understand before being understood.
- Practice using the tools of paraphrasing, probing and pausing.
- Get to know one another on a personal level.
- Be truthful and honest.
- Follow through on your promises.
- Assume a stance of positive intent.
- Work to ask questions and explore possibilities.
- Plan, reflect and solve problems together.

Implementing the 'technical' aspects of a learning community is relatively easy. It is this delicate characteristic, though, that adds complexity. Without it, the structure and learning inherent in these communities cannot be sustained. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) remind us that renewal is essential to sustainability and that the power of renewal can be observed in the source of human ingenuity called trust.

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Professional Learning Groups: Not Just for Learning!

Shelley Hasinoff, *Manitoba Education Citizenship and Youth*

Who you know makes a difference to how you see yourself as an educator.

This conclusion from recent research I conducted with David Mandzuk on the development of social capital in university cohort groups has implications for other professional learning groups (Hasinoff & Mandzuk, 2005; Mandzuk, Hasinoff, and Seifert, 2003).

Professional learning groups may be tightly or loosely coupled (Granovetter, 1985). In schools, they often take the form of professional learning communities or communities of practice. Generally speaking, professional learning communities (Dufour & Berkey, 1995) are more tightly structured and organized to meet regularly over time whereas communities of practice tend to be less formal, coalescing around particular concerns or practices and then disbanding (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Professional groups outside of schools, such as Manitoba ASCD and professional working groups, like those set up by Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth to develop curricula or to mark provincial standards tests tend to be loosely coupled, meet less regularly, and stay together for shorter periods. Nevertheless, social capital can develop in any of these professional learning groups, no matter how cohesive or informal, when these groups are characterized by shared goals, shared language, and shared experiences.

> ***"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."***
> ***Margaret Mead***

What is social capital?

According to Putnam (2000), the core idea of social capital is that social networks have value. Specifically, social capital refers to the assets available to individuals by virtue of their membership in groups (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). It differs from other kinds of capital, such as financial or physical capital, in that it is neither tangible nor transferable. Rather, social capital is located in the relationships that develop among people and is characterized by the strength of obligations and expectations, the presence of norms and sanctions, and the openness of information exchange (Coleman, 1988).

In practice, this may mean that you cover my class when I get some distressing family news and I offer to do one of your recess duties so you can make an important phone call. I share my resources on literature circles and you invite my class to a presentation by Jenny's father, who is a judge. You share insider knowledge about a position in which you know I am interested and I give you a character reference for a volunteer group in which you want to participate. Both specific and general reciprocities, such as these, abound when social capital is generated in groups.

How is social capital fostered?

Coleman (1988) has identified four related properties of social structures that increase the likelihood that social capital will develop - *closure, stability, shared ideologies*, and *interdependence*.

The first property, *closure,* means that relationships are highly interconnected within a particular group. In practice, closure means that all group members have access to one another with limited intervention from outsiders. Closure, according to Coleman (1988), is important for fostering a sense of

trustworthiness in social environments.

Professional learning communities and communities of practice in schools are examples of social structures in which trustworthiness is likely to develop as a consequence of dense, overlapping, professional and social relationships.

The second property, *stability*, means that membership within a group changes relatively slowly over time. The stability of school faculties that experience few changes in group membership fosters the development of effective group norms that "monitor and guide behaviour" (Coleman, 1988, p.107). It seems likely that the more stable the staff, the stronger the cultural norms to which any new member will be expected to conform. Examples of positive norms that develop in stable groups include ensuring that every voice is heard and agreeing upon ways to reach consensus.

The third property, *shared ideology,* means that group members have a common vision providing them with a joint sense of purpose. Teachers in school learning communities and communities of practice are collectively exposed to the same language, ideas, and philosophies of teaching. In addition, they are expected to embrace the collective vision that drives their school plans and mission statements. Outside of schools, educators are attracted to associations or working groups that represent their interests, beliefs and values.

"The kind of sharing that goes on in educational networks often has the effect of dignifying and giving shape to the process of educators' experiences, the daily-ness of their work, which is often invisible to outsiders yet binds insiders together."
Ann Lieberman (1999)

The final property, *interdependence,* means that group members who work together come to rely on each other to achieve their purposes. In schools, the property of interdependence is evident in academic and extra-curricular teams, school committees, and in professional collaborations. Interdependence characterizes effective learning communities, providing teachers with opportunities to learn together and to share their highly demanding workload (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Hargreaves, 2003).

Professional associations and working groups in which the importance of each person's contribution is recognized are likely to develop high degrees of interdependence and trust.

Bonding and Bridging Social Capital

These four properties may suggest that social capital is exclusively positive in nature but, as Portes and Landoldt (1996) point out, social capital developed in groups is not always beneficial for individual members. Indeed, it is hard to ignore recent headlines about tightly knit groups in which closure, stability, shared ideology, and interdependence mean that individuals are not allowed to express themselves, their movement is restricted, or they are prevented from meeting or speaking with others. At its extreme, social capital contributes to the success of gangs and terrorists in achieving their frightening purposes. Arguably, it may be said that such groups develop too much of what researchers identify as *bonding social capital* and not enough of what is referred to as *bridging social capital* (Woolcock, 2001).

Bonding social capital refers to deep inward-looking relationships, characteristic of primary social groups such as families, which reinforce alliances among similar types of people. Bonding social capital describes the "super-glue" of strong interpersonal relationships that teachers come to value so highly in school learning communities because of the social, emotional, and academic support that such groups afford (Putnam, 2002).

In professional learning communities and communities of practice in schools in which the properties of closure, stability, shared ideology, and interdependence are easily identified, there are many opportunities for teachers to generate and benefit from bonding social capital.

Bridging social capital, on the other hand, refers to the "WD-40" of broad, outward-looking relationships, such as those found among acquaintances that create diverse alliances among different kinds of people (Putnam, 2002). The social capital developed by bridging exposes classroom teachers to a diversity of opinions not necessarily represented in a single staffroom. Such connections are appealing to teachers who want to reach beyond their more inward-looking learning school community and to participate in the wider community of professional educators. Clearly, the properties of closure and stability are less evident in loosely coupled groups, but shared ideology and dependence in professional associations and working groups helps to develop bridging social capital.

Local Examples of Bridging

Manitoba ASCD and Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth (MECY), two professional groups with which I am associated, are highly effective in creating and sustaining bridging social capital. The properties of shared ideologies and dependence are developed by these organizations through clear expectations, shared norms, information exchange and the sharing of expert knowledge.

As a professional association, Manitoba ASCD has adopted a number of strategies that foster bridging social capital and which also contribute to the sustainability of the organization. As a group, Manitoba ASCD

- purposely recruits as diverse a group as possible to serve on its Board and on its committees
- articulates and agrees upon a strategic plan for each committee
- sets norms of collaboration and revisits them as needed
- includes the sharing of professional learning as a recurring agenda item
- provides members with opportunities to attend international meetings
- sets high expectations in order to provide quality professional learning events
- publishes information in newsletters, journal, and most recently on their website, and
- facilitates access to international ASCD resources.

Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth establishes various working groups to develop curricula and standards tests as well as to mark provincial pilot tests and feedback samples. Each of these groups is a powerful source of bridging social capital.

In the process of creating documents or sharing problematic test papers, educators often develop strong professional relationships. As an assessment consultant, I could tell by the quantity of candy and treats that appeared on the marking tables to what degree each group of markers was developing social capital. In addition to these concrete signs, there were many other less tangible indications that markers were forming networks that would extend beyond the marking sessions. I observed e-mail addresses being exchanged, resources and teaching tips being shared, and important insider information about jobs being traded. I was even told of teachers who met their future spouses at marking sessions!

When teachers examine student work together, they are not the only ones to benefit. Students also benefit, not only from having more than one teacher review

their work, but also because they may learn from their teacher's experience how enriching it can be to open one's work to the scrutiny of others.

Social Capital and School Reforms

An important, but, perhaps less obvious, benefit of generating social capital is that it is linked to the successful implementation of school reforms. Groups that establish shared goals, expectations and obligations, and open channels of communication are more likely have the skills needed to "translate proposals for change into realities of practice" (Lieberman, 1990). Cushman (1996) underscores this point by stating,

> As much as school change depends on coordination and support at all levels, though, it rests on individual people making authentic personal relationships based on interests, needs, and growing trust.

Summary

When educators choose to become involved in professional learning groups inside their schools or in the wider educational community, they gain far more than professional knowledge. Educational networks also provide important sources of professional, social, and emotional support.

The following comments are typical of those written on exit slips by teachers who participated in Senior 4 English Language Arts marking sessions:

> *I find the whole experience very valuable to me. It makes me go back to the classroom more confident in what I am doing and loaded with new ideas.*
>
> *You don't feel as isolated as you would doing this on your own and the sharing is incredible in terms of ideas and materials.*

Given the high dropout rate from teaching in the first five years, participating in educational networks may mean the difference between barely surviving the induction years to becoming firmly committed to teaching as a life-long profession. Schools, school divisions, and educational institutions would do well to consider ways to create opportunities for educators to develop social capital. The benefits are many; new teachers are retained and veterans continue to "discover how they create their reality and how they can change it, and continuously expand their capacity to create their future" (Senge, 1990).

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A Question for Educational Leaders: Do Professional Learning Communities Matter?

Jerome Cranston, *Archdiocese of Winnipeg Catholic Schools*

In many countries, including Canada, the last twenty-five years have been characterized by large-scale reforms of public education systems (Young & Levin, 1999; Louis, Toole & Hargreaves, 1999; Fullan, 2001).

> ***"...the PLC is specifically designed to develop the collective capacity of a staff to work together to achieve the fundamental purpose of the school: high levels of learning for all students."***
>
> ***DuFour, Eaker & DuFour, 2005***

While these reforms have not been identical in each country, or uniform across jurisdictions, it appears that powerful political, social, and economic shifts — in the environment in which schools are nested, in the ways we understand learning, organize and manage school organizations, and relate to clients — favour the exploration of new conceptualizations for the profession of educational leadership (Murphy, 2002).
Major educational reform surges generated a renewed interest in fostering professional learning communities as a means to counter teacher isolation, build a common vision for schooling, foster collective action around reform, and improve practice and student learning (Achinstein, 2002).

Professional learning communities are purported to provide the organizational conditions to facilitate significant and lasting school changes (Louis, Toole & Hargreaves, 1999). Research studies appear to demonstrate that schools with strong professional learning communities produce important outcomes for students and school professionals (Crow, Hausman & Scribner, 2002).

Toole and Louis (2002) suggest that cross-cultural research findings indicate that professional learning communities generally lead to improved school functioning in most settings. The professional learning community, as an organizational arrangement for schools, is seen as a powerful staff development approach and a potent strategy for school change and improvement (Hord, 1997a).

Do professional learning communities matter?
In response to this question, Toole and Louis (2002) respond that professional learning communities are a form of school culture that can provide a critical context for school improvement.

Viewing schools as professional learning communities

A problem facing research on professional learning communities has been a conceptual one. (Toole & Louis, 2002).

While there are claims (Morrissey, 2000) that the term professional learning community defines itself, oversimplifications offer very little to a meaningful conceptual understanding. Although perhaps obvious to some, the concept of a professional learning has proven difficult to capture.

As a reminder of this oversimplification, Grossman, Wineberg, and Woolworth (2000) note that the mere gathering of a professional staff is far from a community. Hord (1997b) notes that there is no universal definition of a professional learning community. DuFour (2004) comments that people use the term "professional learning community" to describe every imaginable combination of individuals with an interest in education, while Plank (1997) offers that there are as many definitions as there are authors who write about it.

Even without a precise definition of a professional learning community, an understanding of the human relations that might possibly exist in schools is

significant (Spillane & Louis, 2002).

Professional community, however defined, is nothing more or less than a shorthand term for the kinds of adult relationships in schools that can support individual change in classrooms (Spillane & Louis).

Hord (1997a) conceptualizes the interaction in a professional learning community as a place where the teachers in a school along with the principal continuously seek and share meaning and act on their learning. It is suggested that a school as professional learning community be viewed as a group of people across a school who are engaged in common work; share to a certain degree a set of values, norms, and orientations towards teaching, students, and schooling; and operate collaboratively with structures that foster interdependence (Achinstein, 2002; Carpenter & Matters, 2003).

> ***"The nature of relationships among the adults within a school has a greater influence on the character and quality of that school and on student accomplishment than anything else."***
>
> ***R.S. Barth, 2006***

Crow et al. (2002), in reviewing the literature on schools as professional communities, conclude that a body of literature has conceptualized professional communities in terms of three concentric circles – *see Figure 1*. They argue that within the concept of a professional learning community, there is an innermost circle which is the community that exists between teachers and children – where learning occurs. The outermost ring represents the nature of relationships between school personnel and the community at large. Mediating between these two rings, the middle ring represents relations among the professional staff within a school, including faculty and their principal (Crow et al.). This middle ring - between the outside world and the inner workings of the classroom - provides an entry into an exploration of the relationship between teachers and principals.

In a school that is a community of learners, the principal occupies a central place (Barth, 1990). More than ever before, school reform efforts require that principals and teachers at the school level work collaboratively to solve educational problems through the development of the school as a powerful community of learners willing to take responsibility for successes (Blase & Blase, 2003).

Shields (2003) suggests that among many other professional responsibilities, principals are expected to develop learning communities and to build the professional capacity of teachers. Conceptions of a professional learning community that do not take into account the conditions and circumstances in which teachers and principals are situated provide limited insight and understanding of what occurs inside and across schools (Sirotnik, 2004).

Toole and Louis (2002) claim the term, professional learning community, integrates three mutually influencing concepts —
• a school culture that emphasizes professionalism is client oriented and knowledge based;
• one that emphasizes learning places high value on teacher inquiry and reflection; and,
• one that is communitarian emphasizes personal connections.

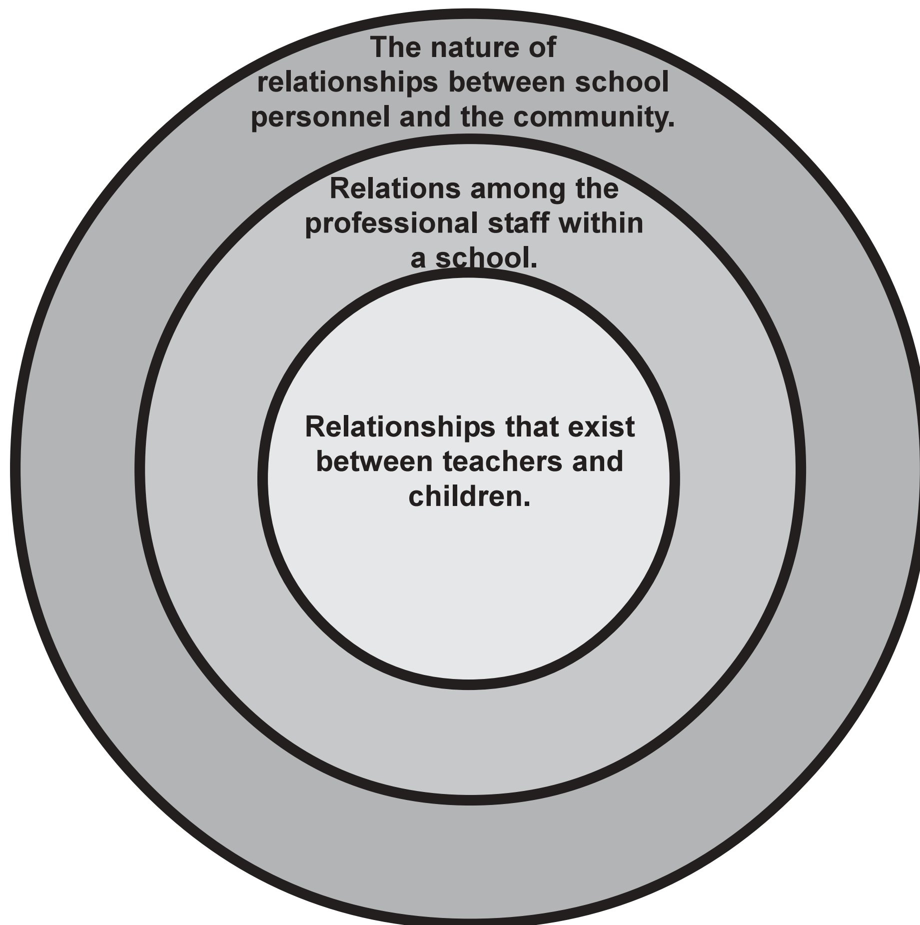
In expanding what they term "the rings of influence" surrounding the innermost circle of teacher-student interaction, Toole and Louis (2002) contend

> "Like the Russian dolls that fit inside each other, the teacher's instructional program exists within conscious and unconscious rings of influence by parents, principals and headmasters, unions, school cultures, national culture, organizational structures, micro-politics, professional networks, community educational values, and district, regional and national policies (p. 250)."

Toole and Louis's conceptualization, which identifies the interaction of the human relationships, including those between teachers and the principal, provides a more developed understanding of interactions and influences within a professional learning community.

R.S. Barth provides an entry point into the complex nature of the relationships of schools as professional learning communities describing the "non-discussables" – important matters that, as a

Figure 1.



Three concentric circles of school as professional learning community (adapted from Crow, et al., 2002).

profession, we seldom openly discuss. These issues include the leadership of the principal, issues of race, the under performing teacher, and our personal visions for a good school.

Re-viewing schools as professional learning communities

It is within the human relationships and interactions in each of the Toole and Louis's (2002) three mutually influencing spheres - professional, learning and community - that the challenge to understand schools as professional learning communities provides the greatest test.

By gaining an understanding of the complexity of the relationships which exist between the adults in a school, a more robust and fertile conception of school as a professional learning community may be found. One can begin to see the density of the adult relationships in schools by exploring beneath the surface level understanding of what is meant in each of the three mutually influencing concepts of professional learning communities – profession, learning and community.

Ingersoll (2003) argues that typically in education a professional is "someone who is personally dedicated to children and who is committed to the needs of individual students,"(p.171) but what is truly revealing about this understanding is that the role of teacher emphasizes individual rather than organizational responsibilities.

Ingersoll asserts that one of the most pervasive aspects of the culture of teaching is an ethos of individual responsibility and accountability to the exclusion of a culture of collective responsibility and collective accountability – the hallmarks of professions. Simplistic understandings of teaching as profession,

such as the one Ingersoll suggests, limit considerations of what is required by peers in professional learning communities.

Choo (1996) proposes that *knowing organizations* – the epitome of the learning organization – are ones that integrate sense making, knowledge creation and decision-making. *Knowing organizations* require individuals to move from knowledge residing in the minds of individual teachers - personal knowledge - to knowledge that can be shared and transformed into school-wide improved professional practice (Choo).

Over thirty years ago, Lortie (1975) identified that teachers' practice and learning environments are typically isolated and private i.e. each teacher's classroom and her/his practice is sacrosanct. The institutional space of schools and the normative culture of teaching not only promotes, but privileges individual learning rather than encouraging teachers and principals to view themselves as part of a network of a knowing organization.

Finally, Etzioni (2000) challenges naïve concepts of community by insisting that community is the combination of two critical elements -

a) a web of affect laden relationships among a group of individuals, relationships that often crisscross and strengthen one another rather than being merely one-on-one or chainlike individual relationships; and
b) a measure of commitment to a set of shared values and meaning, and a shared history and identity – in short a deep-seated commitment to a particular culture.

Yet, Furman and Starratt (2002) contend that the dominant experience of community in schools is one that is transitory and pragmatic, "often created and improvised by people on the move with other people who share only one narrow interest." (p. 108)

Applying Etzioni's concept of community to schools proves to be problematic in so far as teachers remain isolated and limited in their ability to develop a commitment to school-wide improvement beyond the few moments of contact with their colleagues (Hord, 1995).

Implications for Schools

Let us revisit the question posed by Toole and Louis (2002). Do professional learning communities matter?

Mapping backwards from what Newmann, King and Youngs (2001) refer to as *instructional capacity* — the interaction and mutual influence of curriculum, assessment and instruction – to *school capacity*, where school capacity is understood to be a combination of five interactive and mutually influencing factors: teachers' knowledge, skills and dispositions; professional community; program coherence; technical resources; and principal leadership (Newmann, et al., 2001), the answer is yes.

As educational leaders, school principals are challenged to respond to tensions created by moving from the metaphor of school as organization to that of school as professional learning community (Senge, 1990).

As part of this educational framework, principals face a multi-dimensional role, being asked

- to build and nurture the collegial and collaborative relationships required in professional learning communities (Wise, Darling-Hammond, McLaughlin & Bernstein, 1984), while simultaneously evaluating teachers to improve student achievement (Elmore, 2000; Danielson & McGreal, 2000).
- to create and to sustain professional learning communities, by securing ties and connectedness of caring and stable communities while sustaining the constructive controversy of a learning community (Achinstein, 2002).
- to establish the kind of collegial relationships that put aside notions of rank so that teachers can continually improve their students' chances of succeeding in a high stakes world (Marshall, 2005).

What is required by researchers and practitioners is not merely simplistic conceptions of schools as professional learning communities but a framework which captures the creative tension and energy contained in the dynamics of adult relationships occurring within schools.

If creating and nurturing schools as professional learning communities are factors of greatest import for school improvement, then it is critical to develop a better understanding of the interactions that occur between teachers and principals so as to improve school-wide student accomplishment.

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The Impact of the Accelerative Integrated Method on a Community of Learners — A review of Wendy Maxwell's *Histories en Action*

Tim Dittrick, *Independent Schools*

After using the Accelerative Integrated Method in my Basic French classroom only a few days, I was convinced that I was onto something unique and revolutionary! Last fall, when I started the French as an Additional Language methodology known as AIM, created by Wendy Maxwell, I knew I was embarking upon a journey. But what I did not realize is how fascinating this journey would be nor how far-reaching its impact.

What was truly astonishing was not the transformation of my own teaching, but the impact on the community existing outside my classroom walls. Shortly after implementing the AIM program, French was heard spoken in the hallways, on the playground, and, reportedly, even in the homes of students. Motivated and engaged by the techniques embedded in the AIM approach, this community of learners continues to be sustained by the joy of learning.

AIM seeks to convey understanding through actions or gestures; teachers do not need to speak English when teaching French (or any other language for that matter). The importance of this is significant. Since gestures enable students to understand, even at initial stages, learner frustration that typically accompanies language learning is alleviated. Students immediately feel more confident and secure. Because of the use of gestures, the panic reaction that some students experience when they do not understand vanishes; they discover they actually do understand. I have found that the method results in students being more open towards learning an additional language; they have more patience for it.

The use of gestures to aid communication permits the class to be conducted completely *en français*!

Although this is the ultimate goal of all language teachers, far too often it is not achieved simply because students cannot understand. English is invariably used, if only to lessen the frustration students' experience. Of course, using the first language to teach the second is counterproductive and does not optimize the valuable and limited time resources of the Additional Language classroom.

> ***"Excellent way to learn the French Language. Much more interesting than just memorizing words."***
> ***Parent of grade 5 student***

Using gestures enables comprehension to be directly associated with the vocabulary and syntax of the target language (French) independent of the instructing language (English). Students begin to understand French intuitively, allowing a more natural oral production of language as students skip the need to translate. Eventually, teacher input is eliminated all together in favor of students' output. In fact, as soon as students know the gestures, the teacher stops speaking! Thus, language production begins right from the moment the students enter the classroom and continues almost non-stop until they leave. Instruction time is maximized.

This intense language production gives students the required practice as well as the confidence to speak spontaneously on their own. Imagine a Basic French class (not an immersion class) where students speak to each other completely in French! In fact, early results of research into the effectiveness of the AIM program indicate students can attain similar levels of fluency until now thought possible only by French Immersion students.

"The actions certainly seem to aid in the retention of the vocabulary, as well as the understanding of it! I love the concept."
Parent of grade 6 student

Another element that makes AIM so successful is the teaching of high frequency vocabulary. Unlike the thematic approach — teaching vocabulary words associated with specific themes like weather, sports, or food — AIM teaches the functional vocabulary that students actually need to communicate their ideas in full sentences. Approximately 700 words are needed to communicate basic rudimentary needs in any language. AIM starts with these 700 words. The emphasis is placed on verbs, not nouns.

"I have noticed a HUGE change in Morgan's French skills since starting this new program."
Parent of grade 6 student

This approach makes complete sense. If our goal is to have students communicating in another language, they need to be taught the most useful vocabulary. Also, AIM allows each student to progress at his or her own individual pace. Every class begins with a review of previously taught vocabulary in context. All teaching activities in AIM are sequential and build upon previous knowledge and experience. Students continually move through the program, gaining competency in their language abilities. The frequent review is as beneficial for students who have been absent as it is to the regular attendees.

The results from implementing this method have been nothing short of amazing. After only a few weeks, I observed students speaking among themselves using the French they knew in authentic situations between peers and adults. When students wanted to communicate something they did not know how to say, I saw them thinking intensely, rephrasing their statements or asking *en français*, "*Comment on dit*...?"

After only a few months, students began writing their first story in their own words, a retelling of *Les Trois Petits Cochons*. The smooth transition from oral to written activities was surprising, but I now realize that this was actually a small step for students to take because of the intentional scaffolding that had been provided before the written component.

Furthermore, at every stage of the program the needs of students are met though the use of active learning and multiple intelligences, ensuring that achievement is possible for all learners. I have noted how the strengths of the program affects students for whom learning French may otherwise be unattainable; this type of success has inspired the community of learners in my classroom.

Verbal-linguistic learners' needs are being met using French only vocabulary spoken in context in full sentences. Words are not taught in isolation, but are embedded using the syntax and structure of the language. This process enables students to hear and internalize grammar much in the same manner that a first language learner would encounter.

The Bodily-kinesthetic learner benefits from each word having a unique action or gesture. It is fascinating to see these learners constructing sentences to reflect their own meaning. Often students

can be seen drawing on gestures as they attempt to communicate new and spontaneous thoughts in their second language.

The program also benefits the Spatial learner. Gestures are used in correct syntax which helps students visualize grammatical elements as the teacher identifies gender.

Students who might have been considered "weak" before the AIM program was introduced are seeing success. The impact of multi-modalities in learning, effective scaffolding, and kinesthetic instruction has been positive for all learners, but most dramatically so for those students who had given up on themselves as learners.

Since implementing AIM in my classes, over 20 visitors from outside our immediate learning community have come to observe this exciting program. University professors, consultants from Manitoba Education, administrators, parents and teachers have all been impressed with the caliber of language students are producing after only a short time.

Based on my 15 years of teaching Basic French, using a variety of methodologies and programs, I consider AIM revolutionary. I am convinced we will be hearing more about the Accelerative Integrated Method. I can see great potential for teaching of English as an Additional Language in the pedagogy included as part of AIM.

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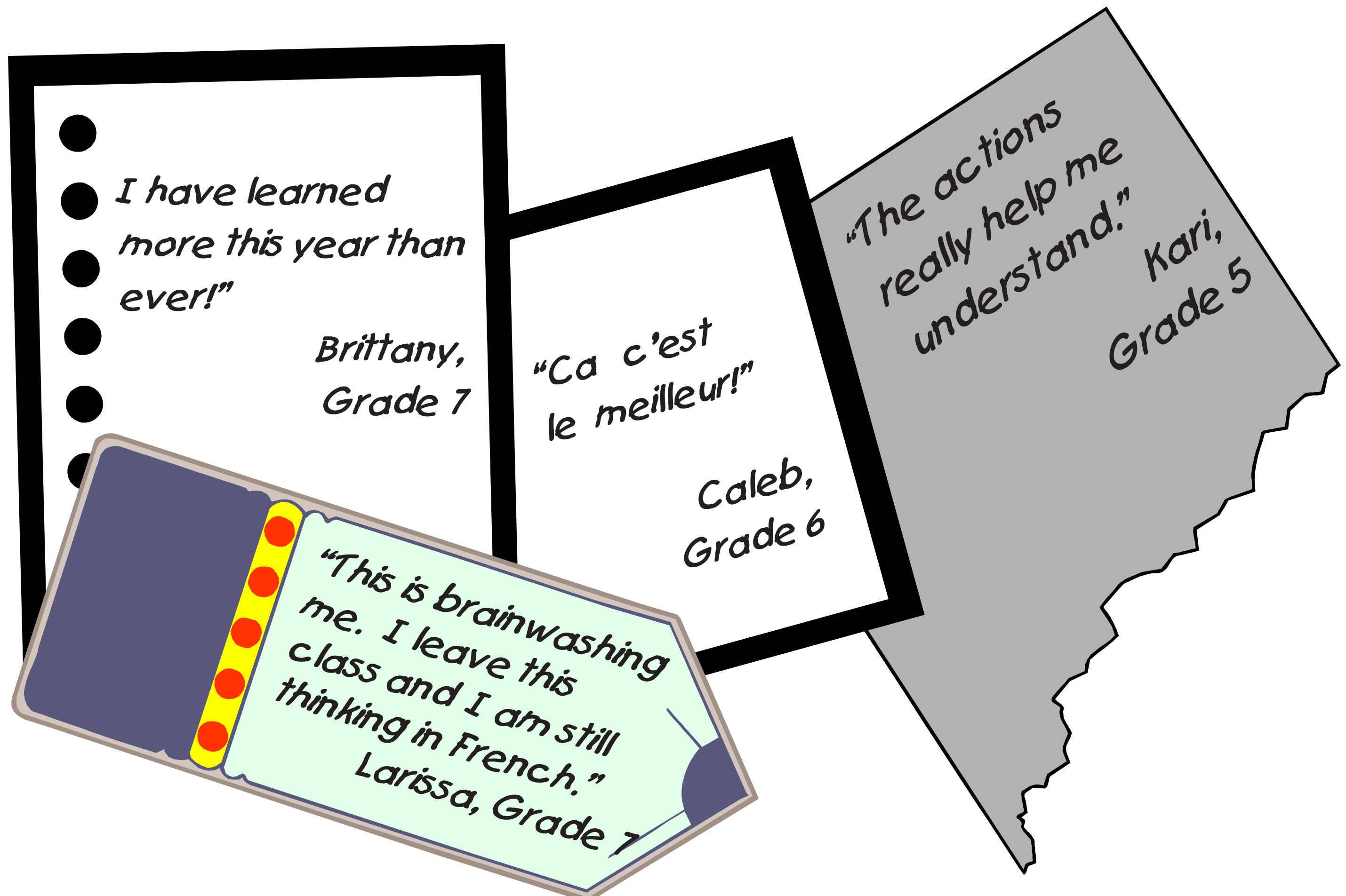

School Archives: Sustaining a Community of Learners

James Kostuchuk, *Portage la Prairie School Division*

Students at Portage Collegiate Institute in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, have the option to earn high school credits in archiving. The program has attracted a variety of learners, from life skills to advanced placement, owing to the diverse skills that students must possess to succeed. A school archive strengthens ties to the community and generates real interest in community history. Archive projects get noticed and people get involved.

The Portage Collegiate Institute Archive - A Brief History

Portage Collegiate Institute (PCI) opened a school archive in 2001. The project originated from an idea forwarded to the administration of the school as a Millennium Project in 1999. The PCI Archive was created to preserve the collective memory of Collegiate students - past and present.

Portage Collegiate is the oldest established high school in the province, created in 1882. Despite this lengthy history there was very little by way of a historical record kept at the school. The Principal's office served as a storage area for old yearbooks, and the hallways of the office stored a few pictures.

There are a few reasons why the school lacked a lot of its history. The first Collegiate closed when the town when bankrupt in 1886 and did not re-open for another 8 years. In 1904 the first dedicated collegiate building opened but it burned down in 1954. Further problems establishing a collection of artifacts included a lack of physical space to house materials and the lack of a system to collect and to conserve materials.

The first obstacle to overcome in establishing a school archive was space. PCI had no extra rooms available. However, a storage space in the basement was converted from paper storage to an archive room. The room was most satisfactory due to a relatively consistent temperature - one of the technical requirements of a "real" archive. The room was also equipped with a lot of shelving. The shelving was wooden - a big no-no in the archive realm - but we sealed the wood with paint to prevent contamination, a cost effective measure.

Once the room was established, we set about generating our Archive policies. These policies insure the proper care of donations and provide for long-term success of the archive. Archive students created legal forms for donations and loans and set up a database to store donation records. Most importantly, the Portage la Prairie School Division agreed to be our governing body. The School Board acts as trustees for the archive, and this better guarantees the long term care of our collection in the event that the school archive should close.

Once the physical space was organized and policies established we started the actual "business" of archiving. Initially, students worked on a volunteer basis, but we were able to make limited headway processing the volume of donations that poured in. At this point we decided to create a Student Initiated Course (SIC). PCI students are now able to earn up to two full high school credits in archiving. With at least 15 students per year in the program, we are guaranteed over 1500 hours of service.

School Archives: A How-To Guide

As a starting point, you need a place to put stuff. Do not let a lack of space stop you. The PCI archive started as a closet in the Principal's office. This semi-official repository was for things deemed important enough to keep by the school's officials .

Draw up a list of items that should be kept on a yearly basis - documents, yearbooks, photographs. Place these items in your storage area. At the very least,

Success Stories

Archive student, ***Kimmie Halwas***, discovered twenty thousand old photo negatives at the local museum. The museum did not have the personnel time or funds to conserve the collection properly. The negatives were affected with vinegar syndrome, a decaying process that would lead to the loss of all the images. The PCI Archive raised $10 000 to purchase equipment to scan the negatives and to freeze them, preserving the images for future generations.

The negatives represented the life work of local photographer Yosh Tashiro. Kimmie completed an essay on his life, and, subsequently was awarded the highest honour of the Manitoba Historical Society for student research, the Dr. Shaw Medal. The essay was published in the society's journal in 2006.

With her work with the archive forming part of her entrance application, Kimmie received a significant scholarship to the University of Winnipeg.

The Tashiro collection is now a significant community collection and will be a featured art exhibit at the William Glesby Centre in 2007. Art students at Portage Collegiate Institute will be creating picture frames and multi-media art works to accompany the exhibit.

Interest in this collection has allowed for many community connections. Images from the collection have already been featured in the locally produced histories of Portage Collegiate Institute and Arthur Meighen High School. Dr. Gordon Goldsborough of the University of Manitoba is working with a student on obtaining images of Delta Field Station for publication. Every month there are requests from the public for pictures.

Lisa Pao, another archive student, was assigned the task of composing a history of PCI for the Collegiate Reunion in 2006. As an archive student, she was aware of the limitations for research, owing to a lack of primary source material.

Six archive students were assigned the task of interviewing 240 former students. Videography students were asked to assist by videotaping some of the interviews, including the oldest graduate from the class of 1925. These interviews formed the basis for Lisa's writing.

Lisa also had access to yearbooks dating back to 1938, and school newspapers as early as 1921. Her 200 page book, *Ante Nos Scientia*, was completed in time for the reunion. The book, containing hundreds of illustrations, all from the PCI Archive and the Yosh Tashiro collection, has been nominated for the premier historical writing award in Manitoba, the Margaret McWhirter Award, established in 1955.

Lisa received a full scholarship to Harvard University her work with the school archive forming part of her application.

every school should have a storage room for important historical materials.

Once you have a collection you need to do something with it. This is the point when you may want to set up a school archive committee. Items collecting dust are not very useful, and are likely to be damaged by moisture, UV rays, insects or the occasional rodent.

Archive Personnel

By trial-and-error, PCI has found that there are six jobs essential to the operation of a small school archive. Each job requires different skills; so you have a great opportunity to hand pick suitable volunteers. The jobs are ***archivist, data clerk, website manager, image scanner, public relations person*** and ***interviewer***.

Archivists look after accessioning materials and conserving them. Accessioning consists of accepting donations and filling out the appropriate documentation. Once the item has been accepted it is assigned a collection number and prepared for long term storage. The most common conservation practice at PCI is the encapsulation of photos within archival grade film. This job requires excellent penmanship, spelling and attention to detail as every accessioning record includes key words that are entered on a database. The key words allow the archivists to find materials later. As PCI archivists also care for the collection, they must have a sound knowledge of basic conservation techniques. Archivists tend to be second year students.

Data clerks enter accession records onto the database. This job requires excellent typing skills and attention to detail. Computer skills are an asset as these students maintain the database.

The ***web manager*** maintains the school archive website. This is a technically demanding job and has been a difficult one to fill on a consistent basis. However, the goal for any archive is to make its material available to the public, and having a website is the best way to make the collection accessible. For 2005-2006, the PCI Archive has a computer teacher on staff to assist with placing the archive database on-line.

Image scanners digitize photographs and photographic negatives. This is an important job. We have found that most archive requests are for photographs. The significance of keeping photo records was driven home recently when we were asked to provide a photo of a student who was killed in a tragic accident. The family did not have a current picture and turned to the school archive.

Chad Faurschou and Dylan Wiebe work on the PCI archive. Part of Chad's program includes scanning photographs for the archive department. Dylan is Chad's educational assistant.

Photos, negatives and video have to be conserved properly as original items are very prone to self-destruction. (It is interesting to note that old black and white photos are very stable and will last for centuries. Colour photos have a shorter life, losing their colour within decades.) Old negatives are very self-destructive. The organic emulsion decays and may become chemically volatile and susceptible to combustion.

Archive students also convert VHS and moving picture film to DVD. The life span of a VHS tape is only around 10 years, whereas DVD is estimated to keep its visual integrity for at least 50 years. (So, if you have a wedding video kicking around somewhere you had better convert it to DVD straight away before the particles fall off the tape and it erases itself!)

The PCI Archive has one student who handles ***public relations*** issues. This job entails sending thank you cards, preparing public presentations and clipping the newspaper for collegiate news items. In the past year, the archive has been involved in six major public forums including the school's information night and the Manitoba Association of School Trustees AGM. These presentations have led to many new donations, both monetary and material.

Archive Resources

The Archives Association of British Columbia offers a superb on-line resource for small archives at **http://aabc.bc.ca/aabc/toolkit.html.** In addition to offering useful links, the site also provides a downloadable version of *A Manual for Small Archives*. This book is the guidebook for the PCI Archive and is frequently consulted.

If PCI were to give credit to a group for getting our archive off the ground it would be to the Association of Manitoba Archives - **www.mbarchives.mb.ca**. In addition to providing in-service training for students and teachers, the AMA is always willing to answer particular questions regarding archive operations.

As a school archive grows, issues arise. PCI has had legal concerns over the ownership of donations and the correct way to authorize a video taped interview. The AMA has provided professional service and advice. In one instance, the AMA was able to arrange for a photo conservation expert to assist with a particular conservation concern on-site.

Archive Supplies

There are many archive supply companies. PCI often deals with Brodart. The following is a basic supply list:

- pencils
- encapsulation material (archival grade film used to protect photographs)
- encapsulation tape
- white cotton gloves
- archival grade envelopes
- archival grade storage boxes in a variety of sizes.

In addition to these basic items, an archive should also have an emergency kit. The contents of this kit are simple to obtain but allow an archive to deal with a variety of disasters from water damage to fire. The AABC Manual details the specific contents.

Archive Hardware

The PCI Archive has several computers used for word processing and scanning. Since photographs and negatives form the biggest portion of our collection, we have three scanners. Picking the right scanner is important. Your typical scanner does a great job with photos, but negatives are a different issue. PCI has around 10 000 negatives on file and we are converting them to digital files.

Based on our experience we highly recommend the Epson 3200 scanner. This scanner has excellent software and adapters to handle negatives up to 5 x 7 inches as well as slides. The computers also handle our database. All donations are filed on paper and backed up on the computer.

The Archive also keeps a digital camera and video camera on-site for interviews and web use. Owing to a large donation, we also have purchased equipment to transfer film and video to DVD.

Final Thoughts

The PCI Archive has provided many opportunities for students to place themselves in the public eye. We have met interesting people and have received special donations to the collection.

These artifacts and stories were recently published in a book about Portage Collegiate called *Ante Nos Scientia.* The book contains hundreds of photos from the archive and was written by a student based on interviews conducted by fellow archive students. The stories are incredible - a pair of shoes that won track prizes in 1925 and 1955, the 3 premiers that attended the school, the reunion party of 1906. These photos and objects allow students to feel a real connection with the history of our school. It makes our school seem special. It was no surprise that 3000 people attended the PCI reunion in the summer of 2006.

There is no better way to honour those who have attended a school than to collect their stories. For this reason I strongly suggest every teacher consider a school archive as a way of improving school spirit and building and sustaining its community of learners.

James Kostuchuk teaches at Portage Collegiate Institute.

What Are You Going To Be When You Grow Up?

Nick Verras, *Prairie Rose School Division*

From an early age children are repeatedly asked by adults, "What are you going to be when you grow up?" The children, of course, are often not allowed to answer because their parents will answer for them. I believe this puts a great deal of pressure on children; many parents want their children to become doctors, lawyers and scientists.

The irony is that most parents do not even have a clear idea what these jobs entail. When I ask parents why they want their children to be doctors or lawyers, their responses are, "I want the best for my son or daughter." When asked what *best* really means they say, "You know - to be making lots of money and be happy." I personally know of numerous students who became doctors and lawyers simply because that was their parents' expectation for them, not because it reflected their own ambitions or passions.

As a career counselor, I try to provide as much information and to expose students to as many career choices as possible. I believe this allows children to make better and more informed choices regarding their future studies. Even in Senior 4, students are still quite unsure about what they should pursue in post secondary education.

Parents often look at the success in education of their child as an extension of what and who the child has become. If the child does not "measure up" to current standards, the parents are often devastated and feel that they are somehow responsible for this perceived deficiency in their child. Whenever a child is labeled - average, below average, or above average - he/she will face expectations according to the label. This, in my view, is the greatest injustice in our education system.

Both schools and parents want what is best for children. According to educational icon, John Dewey, "What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon it destroys our democracy".

Over a hundred years ago, Dewey believed that each child should be treated as an individual. Each child is unique and has much to offer the world. Parents and schools need to remove the blinders that force us to value children differently.

In ***Happiness and Education***, Nell Noddings (2003) expounds, "A bad situation is made worse when we refer to the children in the top track as the good kids...We add insult to injury when we assign the least competent teachers to work with students in the lower class." (p. 87). In what other career would the least qualified professionals be assigned the most difficult task? Not in medicine or law, I am sure.

Teachers often look at teaching students in Pre-Calculus courses as a "reward". When asked why, they respond by saying that these are all students that will go somewhere in life and they will really make a difference in society. When I look confused, they respond by saying that I know what they mean, plus asking who wants to deal with the discipline issues with those Consumer Math kids. So in our province if you want your child to go somewhere in life, make sure that he or she takes Pre-Calculus.

What happens if your child has no interest is Pre-Calculus or Science and ability is not an issue? What do we do if mostly boys are interested in math and science? The answer is that girls are encouraged to enroll in these courses in order to balance out the numbers. Noddings (2003) explains

> Why do we encourage young women to study math and science? Well, because it is the fair thing to do! Equity seems to require it. If equity is the aim, however, why are we not concerned that so few young men become nurses, elementary school teachers, social workers, early childhood teachers, and full-time parents? (p. 89)

When people are talking about equity, they are referring to financial equity. In other words, by enrolling in certain courses you will eventually make more money and, as a result, will be happier. I believe that this misconception causes many problems regarding students' freedom to choose their own paths in life.

When we think deeply about what education really is, people tend to have different views or beliefs. According to Orr, (2001) "education is no guarantee of decency, prudence, or wisdom." I disagree with Orr; in my opinion, the definition of a truly educated person should be a good person who is wise and who respects everyone. I believe that Orr's statement reflects the influence of intelligence rather than the influence of education.

In conclusion, if parents and teachers want children to be happy they must stand back and give children the power and the freedom to choose their own destinies. Parents and teachers should not be the only ones deciding what is best for a child. Vanier (2001) explains, "Aristotle cannot conceive of a man's happiness being dependent on anything other than his own choice, aiming at something greater than himself. The wise man and the magnanimous man are two examples of this independence" (p.138). I believe that it is this freedom and independence that allows someone in a democracy to truly be happy.

All children must be included and valued. Every child is born with different gifts; if these gifts are not allowed to flourish, the sustainability of our democracy is lost. We cannot uphold a community of learners if we choose to include and to value only the "good kids".

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Research with a Pulse

Leon Simard, *Manitoba Education Citizenship and Youth*

Aboriginal education is a complex interaction of political and legislative realities that is compounded by the increasing urbanization of the Aboriginal population.

Although all groups of Aboriginal people - Status Indian, Non-Status Indians Metis and Inuit - are defined together under the *Constitution Act 1982,* they are not so grouped in earlier historic documents and statutes. Legal distinctions have led to diverse forms of status, entitlement, service delivery and orientations resulting in differentiation and inequality, not only between Aboriginal people and the general population, but also among distinct categories and subgroups of Aboriginal people.[1] Although numerous reports dealing with education have been produced over the past thirty years by governments and various Aboriginal groups, the need to act on years of recommendations is critical as the Aboriginal population continues to grow.

The topic of education for Aboriginal people provides one of the most distressing chapters in the history of services in Canada.[2] Currently, twelve federal departments and agencies including Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) offer programs and services for Aboriginal peoples in Canada, including education. Widespread population distribution affects the provision of education, as does the increasing urban population, especially in western Canada.

According to the 2001 Census,[3] just over 1.3 million people or 4.4 % of the Canadian population identified themselves as having *at least* some Aboriginal ancestry. At 10-12%, Manitoba and Saskatchewan have the highest proportion of their populations being Registered Indian. The Métis are located mostly in the Prairie Provinces and the Inuit reside almost exclusively in the Territories, northern Quebec and Labrador.

Aboriginal languages and cultural practices have been lost through the education systems imposed upon the original populations of Canada by European newcomers. In addition, the lack of educational opportunities has resulted in severe economic and social discrepancies that affect all areas of life for Aboriginal peoples.

The following table illustrates how academic failure severely restricts the pool of applicants for post secondary education and for highly skilled and professional employment opportunities.

Manitoba High School Graduation Rates[4]

Age	Non-Aboriginal	Metis	Status Off Reserve	Status On Reserve	All Aboriginal
15-29	62.7	44.7	36.1	25.2	33.7
30-39	77.2	57.4	53.7	40.6	50.9
40-49	73.7	50.7	52.2	41.4	47.1
ALL	**61.2**	**45.7**	**41.6**	**27.9**	**38.2**

The gap separating Aboriginal from non-Aboriginal people in terms of quality of life as defined by the World Health Organization remains stubbornly wide.[5] Since Aboriginal people represent one of the fastest growing segments of the Canadian population and a large segment of the future workforce population, adequate education and training is critical to improve the lives of individuals and communities.

Diverse questions embrace the current situation in Aboriginal education. What intervention strategies are needed at high school to encourage students to consider post secondary training? What kind of relationships must educational institutions develop with other public, private and community agencies to advance educational success among Aboriginal people? Can schooling combine the mandates of education, social welfare and health and justice systems to respond to community needs?

Over the past three decades, Aboriginal organizations have articulated their suggestions for improving educational outcomes. The *Hawthorne Report* (Indian and Northern Affairs, 1967) laid some important groundwork for examining the different world views of Aboriginal people as a collective. One of the key recommendations was that Indian Affairs recognize a responsibility for the success rates and quality of education for First Nations. In 1972, the National Indian Brotherhood published *Indian Control of Indian Education,* which affirmed the right of Aboriginal parents and communities to have control of their children's education. Since that time, "local control" has become a key element in federal educational policy.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), *Gathering Strength, Volume Three* identifies major issues in the educational system serving Aboriginal students. The Commission provides a valuable synopsis of 22 previous reports written between 1920 and 1992. A summary of the recommendations include the following:

- Aboriginal control of education
- school courses in Aboriginal studies including history, language and culture
- training and hiring of Aboriginal teachers
- inclusion of Aboriginal parents, and elders in the education of Aboriginal children
- special support programs for Aboriginal students, for example, counseling, substance abuse education, remedial education and retention programs
- funding of support services for students in post secondary education
- Aboriginal language instruction from pre-school to post-secondary education
- resolution of federal, provincial and territorial jurisdictional conflicts over responsibilities or recognition by the federal government of its funding responsibility for education
- training Aboriginal adults for teaching, para-professional and administrative positions in education, and
- more emphasis on pre-school and kindergarten education.

The final report of the Ministers Working Group on Education (2002) summarized the current situation as follows:

> *First Nations education is in crisis. With some outstanding exceptions, there is no education system, no education accountability, no goals or objectives and First Nations parents, elders and education leaders lack the authority and the means to remedy the crisis as administered by the federal, provincial and territorial governments. First Nations need to be viable and accountable decision makers in the planning and implementation of programs designed for excellence in education.*

Where indigenous people are in educational crisis, indigenous educators and teachers must be trained to be "change agents', to develop transformation of the undesirable circumstances.[6] There are many complex reasons why youth stop attending school: poverty, racism, lack of parental involvement, resentment caused by feeling less successful scholastically than other students, high rates of residential mobility, inability to afford textbooks, sporting equipment and excursion fees, unstable home life or the damaging effects of residential school on Aboriginal peoples, culture and languages.[7] The inclusion of culture and language education has frequently been cited as a means to actively engage students and families in education.

According to First Nations people, the most important factor (72%) for improving education for their children is attracting and keeping qualified teachers, followed by improving school facilities and providing more teaching supplies (69%), dealing with social

problems (68%) and increasing parental and community involvement (68%).[8] The overall statistical picture of the state of Aboriginal education in Canada has been derived from the census because there is no coordinated effort to track Aboriginal education levels over time.[9] While this may be a limited means to measure success, the data that is available has different assumptions and reflects different methodologies. Statistical data on Aboriginal ancestry has only recently been introduced as part of provincial pupil records in the provinces of British Columbia and Manitoba.

The re-definition of research in Aboriginal terms and conditions has meant that research to improve general conditions also contributes to the vision of self-determination. Education research in Canada is largely done in universities, driven by university culture and reward systems.[10] The documentation and research to bring traditional knowledge to life is an important feature of new processes in research, which are currently being developed through partnerships with universities and Aboriginal organizations.

Aboriginal research is currently a priority area for the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). A dialog process involving over 500 individuals has led to two approaches to Aboriginal research. The first approach envisions a set of measures focused on SSHRC's primary mandate - promotion of the *knowledge opportunities* available through collaborative initiatives such as

- creation of a strong research relationship with Aboriginal communities;
- support for research on Aboriginal systems of knowledge; and
- strategic investment in the research capacity of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers interested in careers in Aboriginal research.[11]

The second approach envisions a set of measures designed to correct the following situations in which positive and full development of the research potential represented by Aboriginal researchers and their respective knowledge systems is impeded:

- lack of career opportunities for Aboriginal scholars;
- lack of respect for Aboriginal peoples and their knowledge traditions;
- lack of research benefits to Aboriginal communities; and
- lack of Aboriginal control over intellectual and cultural property.

There are several types of important research information desired—organized knowledge of Aboriginal communities, both common features and variations, historical and contemporary experience, culture, traditions, languages, ways of learning, needs and aspirations which form the content of Aboriginal philosophy of education, curriculum and pedagogy and, systemic data on student performance, progress, achievement levels and retention in relation to standard norms.[12] Effective solutions can then be based on actual need. In addition, resources can be channeled to areas in a strategic manner.

Enhancing the individual through education is more urgent now than ever before. Statistics from a wide range of studies, despite some encouraging trends, indicate the education gap remains one of the most critical problems facing Aboriginal people in Canada.

Working from the foundational knowledge of Elders, combined with acute analysis of the problems of survival that confront us, and led, but not controlled by, an emerging cadre of Aboriginal scholars, we are researching ourselves back to life. By sharing our understanding of the nature of reality, peoples with differing histories and knowledge can live together in harmony.[13]

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Leon Simard has taught in remote Aboriginal communities as well as at Children of the Earth High School in Winnipeg and currently is employed as a consultant with Manitoba Education Citizenship and Youth in the Aboriginal Education Directorate.

Professional Development

Manitoba ASCD Professional Learning Opportunities for 2006-07

Sept. 28, 2006 — ***Kathy Collins: Growing Readers***. Ms. Collins is a staff developer/reading consultant working in New York City and project leader for the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project at Columbia University.

Feb. 23, 2007 — ***Damien Cooper: Assessment, Evaluation, and Grading Practices that Promote Learning***

May 11, 2007 — ***Distinguished Lecturer Series: Ann Lieberman***, Emeritus Professor from Teachers College, Columbia University; now a senior scholar at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Watch for more information on 2008 presenters.

May 2008 — ***Douglas Reeves***

Oct. 2008 — ***Carol Ann Tomlinson***

"Assessment Sunshine - A song to help us remember"

by Ruth Sutton©

(To the tune of *"You Are My Sunshine"*)
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First thing we need, dear, is clear objectives
So students know what they're trying to learn
Share the criteria, provide great feedback
And success you all will earn.

Our classroom focus is on the learning
Not just the "levels" or the test
We give our students responsibility
And they reward us with their best.

We have techniques, dear, to raise achievement
We ask great questions to find the clues
Then we adjust our next steps in teaching
And reduce those classroom blues.

"What's in it for us?" I hear you asking
"Why should I bother with all this stuff?"
Student involvement makes learning faster
And behaviour's not so rough.

So there we have it, feedback for learning
We know it works, so why not try
"Ten Steps to Heaven" in every classroom
Children's learning hits the sky.

Ruth Sutton, international assessment consultant and former Manitoba ASCD presenter (1997, 2000), taught processes for using formative assessment in the classroom and led a chorus of over 200 educators from Winnipeg School Division in singing "Assessment Sunshine" last May at a professional development day.

Watch for Ruth's latest publication - a series of four books entitled, *Creating Independent Student Learners*, from Portage & Main Press this fall. The series was co-authored by Pauline Clarke and Thompson Owens of Winnipeg.

Sustaining the Momentum: The Sargent Park Experience - Teaching Reading as a Thinking Process

Fatima Mota *and* **Rebecca Decter,** *Winnipeg School Division*

The journey began seven years ago with a focus on literacy.

As part of a Winnipeg School Division initiative during the 2000-2001 school year, a team of staff members from Sargent Park School, a large K to Senior 1 school with a diverse, multicultural student population nestled in the heart of the West End, participated in a four day workshop series, Project Read. This professional development was followed by two workshops led by Darlienne Black, Child Guidance Clinic Reading Clinician, on the teaching of strategies to facilitate students' reading of expository text. Later in the year, the junior high staff attended the workshop, "Teaching Reading as a Thinking Process: Improving Comprehension in the Content Areas", with Mary Ellen Vogt from California State University, which inspired questions on how to further improve students' reading comprehension of non-narrative text forms across the disciplines. Together, these experiences provided a catalyst for the Sargent Park staff, igniting a spark to focus on instruction to improve student achievement that shows no sign of diminishing.

Recognizing the commonality of the issue was a first step for our diverse staff. As a school that includes a Practical Arts/Home Economics section, the issue of decoding expository text was quickly established and accepted as a commitment from all staff to become teachers of reading. From electronics to music to math, all subject teachers realized the necessity of including strategies to improve student comprehension as part of their regular repertoire of teaching strategies.

Of utmost importance to this starting point was the ownership accepted by each teacher to use the different grade level strategies, based on the belief that proficient readers are rarely born, but are developed in classrooms where students are actively taught strategies they can use to decode the meaning from many text types.

From this crucial realization, a natural movement among the staff initiated the process of establishing a continuum of strategies that all teachers would commit to teaching. This dialogue process included more than two years of meetings, in-services, and workshops where each grade and specialist team identified key strategies for each area or level. These strategies were then compiled into a document entitled "The Sargent Park Expository Text Continuum".

After five years, Sargent Park students are still reaping the benefits of this project.

Factors for Success

Many factors contributed to both the initial success of the project and to its sustainability. The expertise of the school's reading clinician, the support of the administration, and the commitment and passion of the staff combined to foster the belief that a learning community can make a difference to student achievement.

Linda Lambert, in her book, *Building Leadership Capacity in Schools*, claims that the "renewal processes include reflection, dialogue, question posing, inquiry, construction of new meaning and knowledge, and action" (18). In applying these principles to the Sargent Park experience, the need for reflection, dialogue, and inquiry have taken several forms.

Teachers individually assess the application of their grade group strategies to their content areas. Grade group teams discuss and reinforce the continuous need

to integrate the strategies and share their experiences. The school Literacy Committee meets regularly and continually assesses the implementation of strategies based on team discussions and on reviews of student exemplars. Dialogue is ongoing at different levels within the school; successes and struggles are shared.

For example, in the Senior 1 science classes, students found success in practicing reading from the text to partners, chiming in to create a whole class reading, and as a whole class choral reading group. In S1 social studies and language arts, paired reading was a winner. This caused students to be closer, more critical readers, not just of the content, but also of structure of the text itself. This method also became a particular favourite for the five integrated EAL students. They felt less intimidated than they had when reading aloud in front of a larger group, and more supported when it came time to understanding the meaning of what they were reading. In another example, the sewing teacher enthusiastically adopted *Squeepers*, a cognitive strategy presented at the workshop by Ms. Vogt. This strategy is used as a preview strategy for unfamiliar text and focuses on having students identify what they think are the most important sections of the text, as well as pulling out vocabulary they do not understand. Consequently, the students have become more accurate and proficient readers.

The step of 'constructing new meaning and knowledge' is a crucial step in the sustainability of any model or project. In addition to the ongoing multifaceted dialogue among existing staff, each year teachers new to Sargent Park receive binders, posters, and training on the use of the strategy continuum. Presentations by school staff, including classroom teachers, to other schools and at conferences and workshops also foster enthusiasm and pride, validate the exemplary work of the staff, and rejuvenate commitment.

Some important components in maintaining the communication loop are the gallery walks and sharing circles at monthly staff meetings. These perpetuate the common beliefs, facilitate powerful interactions for team building and professional growth, and collectively build ownership for the project.

The final step is the 'action'. Besides integration into lesson plans in all subject areas, students are exposed to expository text strategies everywhere. They are posted in classrooms; they are included in their student agendas; they are displayed in the halls as well as on our school's Intranet. These multiple exposures combined with classroom instruction allow students to approach expository text armed and ready.

Reading assignments have a structured format in questions and a final summary that make the follow up from any reading clear. It is an active approach, both for the learners and their teachers, providing an opportunity for teachers to guide their students to locate the most important information in their reading. Students have an opportunity to celebrate their achievements by including exemplars in portfolios or digital portfolios to showcase at our school student-led conferences.

This process of learning, discussion and teamwork, initially sparked by sound research presented by several dynamic speakers, has become a transforming experience and an interesting and rewarding journey for Sargent Park School.

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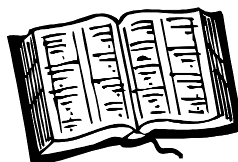
Fatima Mota is Principal and ***Rebecca Decter*** is a Senior 1 English Language Arts/Social Studies teacher at Sargent Park School in Winnipeg.



Book note

by Gwen Watson

If your school team is looking for a book to use for a study group to improve literacy for adolescents at the secondary level, then ***Creating Literacy-Rich Schools for Adolescents*** by Gay Ivey and Douglas Fisher (2006) is a superior choice.

Easy to read, practical and compelling, the book contains a whole school program for improving literacy across subject disciplines with book lists, research-based strategies, checklists and suggestions for meaningful instruction. This 160 page ASCD publication (ASCD stock number: 10514S25) is supported by a Study Guide available on the ASCD website.

To review other new ASCD publications, go to the ASCD home page and follow the links to "New Books" - *Home>Publications>Books>New Books.*

On-line Professional Learning Communities

Janet Dent, *Manitoba Education Citizenship and Youth*

Do any of these situations sound familiar? You decide to integrate technology into your classroom learning experiences. You want to comply with your division's priority on assessment for learning. You will be teaching a new grade and you need to learn the curriculum as well as understand learning behaviours of students in that age group. You are a life-long learner and want to learn something new! As the number of reasons for professional learning increase, educators wish to take advantage of all the opportunities available! On-line learning communities offer educators both flexibility and variety.

face learning is currently a popular venue for professional learning experiences because many educators feel the need to see, hear, and be in close proximity to their colleagues while learning and sharing ideas. As technology becomes more transparent and time becomes less available, on-line learning communities will help to sustain the professional learning process and create easy-to-access networks for learning.

Consider the scope of possibilities within an on-line learning community; the opportunity to enter into the "continuum" of OLCs is dependent on your needs and technological abilities. An on-line learning community allows you to do the following:

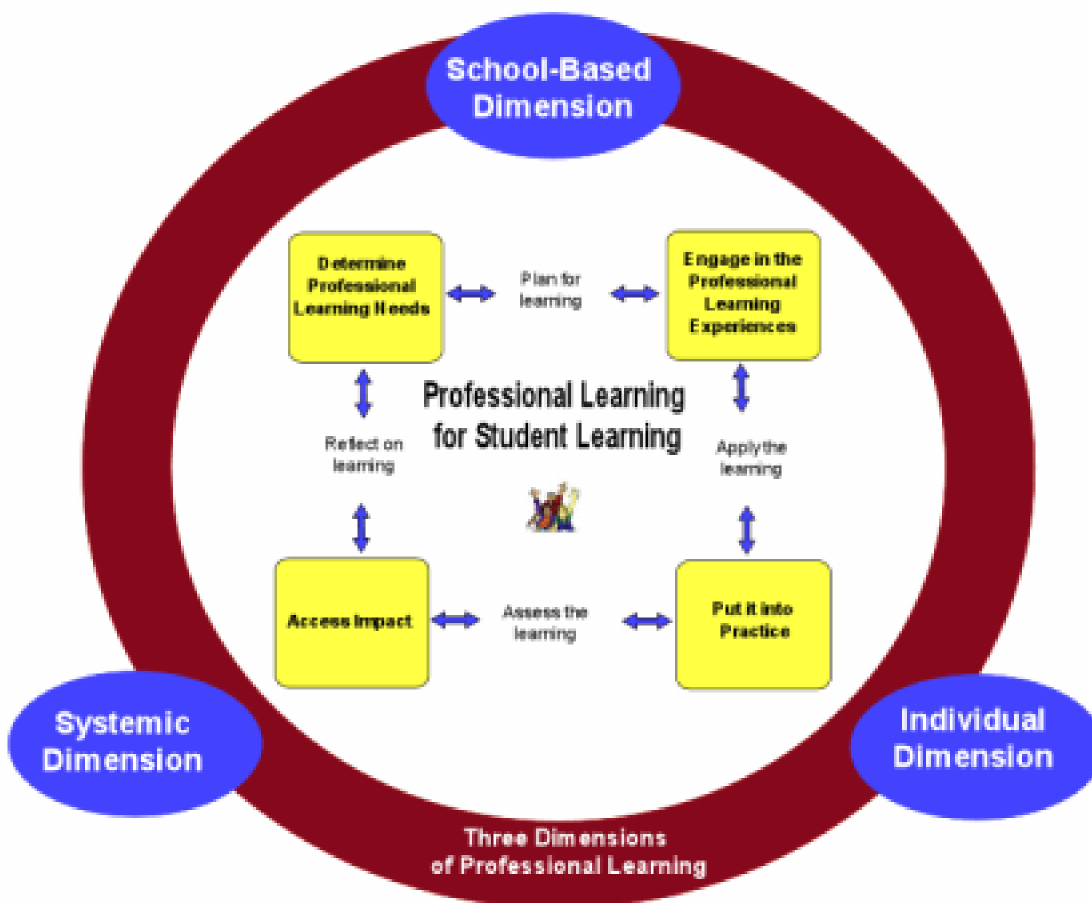
- access/share resources on a website;
- send e-mail messages to a list of like-minded educators;
- participate/organize a listserv;
- share ideas and inquire through a blog;
- collaborate, reflect and share in an on-line discussion;
- skim through a self-guided study in an on-line professional learning experience, and
- register for on-line professional learning experiences that includes posting discussion messages, as well as creating and sharing resources.

Why should we participate in on-line communities?

What happens after the conference, when teachers are exhilarated and ready to make changes to their teaching strategies? Sometimes we will be successful in implementing new learning and "putting it into practice" in our classrooms. However, we occasionally find ourselves in situations where we do not have time to reflect, plan, collaborate, experiment and adapt our new learning as part of our work. And, most often, we do not make the time to "assess the impact" on our learning and to evaluate whether student learning has been enhanced by our newly learned concepts. Time restraints and lack of proximity to a network of like-minded colleagues are several common reasons for this break in the professional learning process.

In Manitoba, where many school divisions are geographically large, time and distance present critical issues when communicating with educators across one division and throughout the province. An OLC used in conjunction with face-to-face meetings allows educators to free up resources and "attend" meetings when it fits their schedules, minimizing the impact of geographical distances and allowing participants unlimited opportunities to interact.

An on-line learning community is accessible whenever you have the time to participate - something OLC participants find most beneficial. The concept of asynchronous learning (not in real time) makes on-line learning a positive experience for those who prefer to select their own time of engagement. Your cohorts may have similar inquiries, and, because the on-line discussions are posted, you will have access to all messages in a public discussion. In addition, you may find your questions already answered when you log in! In other words, you can sit around the discussion table at any time of the day or night and "read" the



conversation asynchronously, rather than being present to "hear" the conversation as it occurs in real time.

Educators may find their teaching responsibilities change, yet specific professional learning experiences are no longer available. Divisional and provincial initiatives are good examples. In an on-line community, materials can be made available for all to access as the need arises. This "need to learn" concept also applies if your learning style preferences require you to mull over materials and reflect on new concepts after face-to-face meetings. You would be able to access materials, to discuss or inquire with others, and then to adapt, practice and assess your practical experiences and applications.

Time to reflect on your learning and share with your colleagues is another reason why on-line learning communities provide a useful tool for sustaining and implementing the professional learning process. For example, you may currently be involved in a study group in your learning community. It may be formal - where you meet on a regular basis - or informal - where you share ideas and expand your learning experiences with a critical friend. These conversations are priceless, and the opportunity to express your thoughts can help you make new connections formulating ideas and strategies. Many educators, however, do not enjoy this luxury - especially if they find themselves the only person of a certain grade level in their schools. Participating in an on-line community enables you to share ideas and support with like-minded colleagues - an opportunity you may otherwise never have.

What is the Manitoba Professional Learning (MPL) Process?

The Manitoba Professional Learning (MPL) Process identifies at the individual, school-based, and systemic dimension, a cyclical process of four phases of the professional learning process:

- Determine professional learning needs by asking questions such as, what do we need to do in order to address student learning needs? What do I need in order to improve professionally? Which professional learning experiences will best meet the learning needs?
- Engage in professional learning experiences as an individual, as a whole school or school group, or as part of a system-wide initiative.
- Put into practice the newly learned strategies or approaches.
- Assess impact, determining whether the original goal has been achieved, whether changes need to be made, or whether a return to the first phase is warranted, in order to determine new professional learning needs, and begin the cycle again.

Teacher learning for student learning can be pursued most meaningfully from an inquiry stance, within the context of a community of learners. The MPL Process provides a rationale and guidelines for establishing communities of learning in which habits of reflection and an inquiry stance are valued, nurtured and celebrated.

Many teachers, schools and school divisions in the province are already engaged in professional learning of this nature on-line. This MPL Process interactive website will

- profile some of the exemplary professional learning practices of educators in our province, and the collaborative structures they have established to support teachers' professional learning and growth.
- provide detailed information and supporting materials for educators embarking on professional learning within the context of a community of learners.

These profiles will be designated by the "Snippet" symbol.

Geographic distances, "just in time" learning, and opportunities to reflect and share are a few of the reasons why OLCs are beneficial in implementing and sustaining the professional learning process.

What is being done in Manitoba?

Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth (MECY) facilitates on-line learning communities in several ways. Educators can access and download resources through the MECY website. Educators can participate in listservs, access on-line materials, and contact MECY consultants to have e-mail conversations. More recently, MECY has made professional learning experiences available on-line.

Educators in Manitoba now have the opportunity to participate in learning experiences at a convenient time for them through the Strategic Technology Assisted Professional Learning Environments

(STAPLE). The first attempt was a pilot of grade 5 and grade 7 teachers who learned about the Interdisciplinary Middle Years Multimedia (IMYM) model of teaching. In the pilot, educators followed a series of learning experiences, participated in classroom practice sessions, and discussed their learnings via the OLC.

This type of on-line learning community, created using WebCT software, has also been used to help teachers work together to develop curriculum-related materials, share promising practices, and virtually bring together educators from across the province who are focused on a particular initiative. Many divisions are using WebCT and creating their own on-line learning communities, using blogs, sharing resources on their websites, and using conferencing software.

What have we learned and what do we need to do to sustain on-line learning communities?

Educators who are excited about using technology are keen to participate in an on-line learning community. They will get on-line as often as possible. But those who are more technically challenged or who already have a face-to-face cohort do not see the need for or the advantage of on-line learning. As the software design becomes even more user-friendly and finding time becomes even more of a challenge, the ease, appeal and increased availability of on-line learning experiences will create a network of like-minded, inquiring educators.

The design of an on-line community needs to be well constructed - straightforward and intuitive so resources can easily be found. MECY has a template used to begin the design conversation; once content is established, the design is adapted and developed. After the initial on-line meeting takes place, technological challenges are answered, and all participants are on-line. Sustaining the participants' interest is accomplished through strategies such as the following:

- giving participants a reason to go on-line. Make sure content is current and discussions are kept up to date.
- sharing the responsibility of moderating a discussion. Many people "around the discussion table" are experts and their expertise can be utilized by sharing the moderating task.
- sending an e-mail message to the group when new content is added or add new content on a regular basis e.g. every Monday or once per month.
- using the on-line learning community to enhance face-to-face meetings and provide participants with an opportunity to reflect on their classroom practice.

How can you become involved in an on-line learning community?

If you participate in e-mail conversations, you already are a part of an on-line learning community. You may choose to go further along the continuum of the OLC strategies by participating in a greater variety of learning opportunities.

1. Use the posted resources on your school division website. Send feedback to the person responsible for posting the resources to let them know how valuable they are or send along some suggestions for more useful resources. (You can usually find a "contact" e-mail link at the bottom of each page in a website.)
2. Use your school and divisional websites to post highlights from a professional learning experience so those not in attendance can share the learning.
3. Create a divisional listserv or e-mail distribution list to sustain professional conversations.
4. Create content that compliments a face-to-face learning experience and invites reflection after the meeting or conference. Post it on your school or divisional website.
5. Watch the MECY website for future on-line learning communities and get involved.

Participating in a learning community—whether on-line or face-to-face—will help you to ensure your professional learning goals are met and, you are, in fact, enhancing student learning. Whatever your reason for professional learning, it is important to consider the entire process and to make the learning meaningful. On-line learning communities provide an innovative method of learning for all educators.

Janet Dent is a Professional Learning Consultant and Project Leader (Manitoba Professional Learning Project and STAPLE Project) employed by Manitoba Education Citizenship and Youth. Contact Janet Dent jdent@gov.mb.ca to create an on-line learning community for your educational organization.

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up-coming

Manitoba ASCD events.