

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING NETWORKS

EMERALD PROFESSIONAL LEARNING NETWORK SERIES

Series Editors: Chris Brown, University of Portsmouth, UK
and Cindy Poortman, University of Twente, The Netherlands

In the current international policy environment, teachers are viewed as learning-oriented adaptive experts. Required to be able to teach increasingly diverse sets of learners, teachers must be competent in complex academic content, skilful in the craft of teaching and able to respond to fast changing economic and policy imperatives. The knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for this complex profession requires teachers to engage in collaborative and networked career-long learning. The types of learning networks emerging to meet this need comprise a variety of collaborative arrangements including inter-school engagement, as well as collaborations with learning partners, such as universities or policy-makers. More understanding is required, however, on how learning networks can deliver maximum benefit for both teachers and students.

Emerald Professional Learning Network Series aims to expand current understanding of professional learning networks and the impact of harnessing effective networked collaboration.

Published in this series:

Formalise, Prioritise and Mobilise: How School Leaders
Secure the Benefits of Professional Learning Networks

Chris Brown and Jane Flood

School Improvement Networks and Collaborative Inquiry:
Fostering Systemic Change in Challenging Contexts

*Mauricio Pino Yancovic, Alvaro González Torres and Luis
Ahumada Figueroa*

Forthcoming:

Professional Learning Networks in Design-based Research
Interventions

Mei Kuin Lai and Stuart McNaughton

The Emergence of Professional Learning Networks: Exploring
the Challenges of Leading Collective Action

Cecilia Azorín

This page intentionally left blank

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING NETWORKS

Facilitating Transformation
in Diverse Contexts with
Equity-seeking Communities

Edited by

LEYTON SCHNELLETT

University of British Columbia, Canada



United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India
Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2020

Editorial matter and selection © Leyton Schnellert,
chapters © their respective authors.

Reprints and permissions service

Contact: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without either the prior written permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying issued in the UK by The Copyright Licensing Agency and in the USA by The Copyright Clearance Center. Any opinions expressed in the chapters are those of the authors. Whilst Emerald makes every effort to ensure the quality and accuracy of its content, Emerald makes no representation implied or otherwise, as to the chapters' suitability and application and disclaims any warranties, express or implied, to their use.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-78769-894-9 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-78769-891-8 (Online)

ISBN: 978-1-78769-893-2 (Epub)



ISOQAR certified
Management System,
awarded to Emerald
for adherence to
Environmental
standard
ISO 14001:2004.

Certificate Number 1985
ISO 14001



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

CONTENTS

<i>About the Contributors</i>	ix
1. Exploring the Potential of Professional Learning Networks <i>Leyton Schnellert</i>	1
2. Collaborative Professionalism Across Cultures and Contexts: Cases of Professional Learning Networks Enhancing Teaching and Learning in Canada and Colombia <i>Shaneé A. Washington and Michael T. O'Connor</i>	17
3. Professional Learning Networks Among District Leaders: Advancing Collective Expertise and Leadership for Learning <i>Catherine McGregor, Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser</i>	49
4. Tracing Cycles of Teachers' Self- and Co-regulated Practice Within a Professional Learning Network <i>Deborah L. Butler and Leyton Schnellert</i>	73
5. How Rural Educators Improve Professional Capital in a Blended Professional Learning Network <i>Min Jung Kim and Karen Martin</i>	107

6. Growing the Top: Examining a Mentor–Coach Professional Learning Network <i>Trista Hollweck</i>	141
7. Shifting Our Gaze: Relational Space in Professional Learning Network Research <i>Joelle Rodway and Elizabeth N. Farley-Ripple</i>	171
<i>Index</i>	193

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Deborah L. Butler's research has contributed to understanding and fostering inclusive education, metacognition and self-regulation in learning, and collaborative inquiry processes for educational innovation.

Elizabeth Farley-Ripple is an Associate Professor of education. Her research work focuses on evidence use for improvement in schools and systems.

Judy Halbert, University of British Columbia, leads the Transformative Educational Leadership Program (telp.educ.ubc.ca) and the Network of Inquiry and Indigenous Education (noiie.ca), and co-authored *The Spiral Playbook* (2017) and, with Helen Timperley, *A Framework for Transforming Learning in Schools: Innovation and the Spiral of Inquiry* (2014).

Trista Hollweck is the Director of the ARC Education Project. Her scholarship focuses on teacher induction, mentoring and coaching; professional learning; restorative justice; and teacher evaluation.

Linda Kaser, University of British Columbia, leads the Transformative Educational Leadership Program (telp.educ.ubc.ca) and the Network of Inquiry and Indigenous Education (noiie.ca), and co-authored *The Spiral Playbook* (2017) and, with Helen Timperley, *A Framework for Transforming Learning in Schools: Innovation and the Spiral of Inquiry* (2014).

Min Jung Kim is a Doctoral Student at the Lynch School of Education and Human Development, Boston College. Her research interests include teacher collaboration, professional learning networks, and education technology.

Karen Martin is a Doctoral Student at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and an instructional coach in rural Alaska. Her research interests are teacher agency and teacher collaboration.

Catherine McGregor, University of Victoria, is an Associate Professor. Publications include *Lifting All Learners: The AESN Network* (2013) and *AESN Inquiry Research: Spiralling Deeper in Professional Learning* (2018).

Michael T. O'Connor is the Director of the Providence Alliance for Catholic Teachers (PACT) program at Providence College. His research interests include educational collaboration across international contexts.

Joelle Rodway, an Assistant Professor in educational leadership, researches social networks and professional learning in the context of whole system change.

Leyton Schnellert collaborates with educators and equity-seeking communities to develop professional learning networks that draw upon their funds of knowledge to build participatory, place-conscious, and culturally responsive practices.

Shanéé A. Washington is an Assistant Professor of Education at the University of Washington. Her research focuses on family-school-community engagement in Indigenous contexts.

EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING NETWORKS

Leyton Schnellert

ABSTRACT

In a time of rapid policy and curriculum change, teachers must be knowledge workers who continue to develop professionally. Professional learning networks (PLNs) offer teachers the opportunity to develop professionally by positioning them as inquirers into their own practice and authors and agents of situated innovation. Six examples of PLNs are introduced in this book to illustrate key attributes of PLNs that build educators' ownership, practice, and expertise. Also highlighted is the potential of PLNs to address questions of equity, both for educators working in remote and rural communities who have limited access to professional development and other resources, and diverse learners and equity-seeking communities (e.g., Indigenous communities,

non-dominant cultural groups). Scholar, practitioner, and policy audiences can benefit greatly from the PLNs described here and draw from these case studies to inform equity-oriented PLNs centering the importance of teachers, students, engagement, collaboration, and rural place in educational transformation efforts.

Keywords: Professional learning networks; educational change; equity; rural education; professional development; collaborative professionalism

INTRODUCTION

“Change in education is easy to propose, hard to implement, and extraordinarily difficult to sustain” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006, p. 1). An overarching problem is that most educational change and professional development opportunities fail to engage educators in generating and mobilizing knowledge about and for practice. Such efforts are still primarily didactic experiences designed for, rather than with, teachers and school leaders. When a school or district moves on to a new goal, the implementation of an innovative approach often becomes shallow or even abandoned due to a lack of investment and ownership on the part of teachers and school leaders. In contrast, collaborative, inquiry-oriented approaches to professional development, such as professional learning networks (PLNs), show potential to build expertise within educators because they hold responsibility for advancing their own knowledge and practice. PLNs are defined as any group who engage in collaborative learning with others outside of their everyday community of practice with the ultimate aim of improving outcomes for children and youth (Brown & Poortman, 2018). PLNs, where educators voluntarily work

and learn together, hold the potential to support educators, at scale, to rethink their own practice, create situated evidence-informed innovations, and share their emerging practice and learning with others outside of their daily work context.

PLNs engage teachers and school leaders as collaborative inquirers into their practice, and authors and agents of situated innovations (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Pennington, 2007; Schnellert, Kozak, & Moore, 2015). Emerging research suggests that teachers engaged in collaborative inquiry are more likely to sustain attention to goals, try new ideas, and persist in efforts at innovation (Luna et al., 2004; Morrell, 2004; Schnellert, Fisher, & Sanford, 2018; Timperley, Kaser, & Halbert, 2014). This book offers examples where educators' co-construction of practice and engagement in knowledge generation and mobilization are built into six existing PLNs.

Collectively, the PLNs introduced in this book embrace educational change as an opportunity to better meet the needs of the learners in their care. Taking up a situated approach, these PLNs and their members inquire into how their students, communities, and contexts offer unique opportunities to recast teaching and learning as responsive pedagogy and develop and grow local innovations. Dumont, Istance, and Benevides (2010) call for learning environment transformation to foster critical skills and competencies of twenty-first century citizens. We need to enable *all* students to succeed in a world with far reaching technological change and profound transformation from industrial to knowledge economies that require self-directed, lifelong learning. Yet, professional development related to diverse learners often frames children from deficit-based perspectives (Harrower, 1999; Pugach & Warger, 2001; Schnellert et al., 2015). The PLNs in this book counter this narrative by offering examples of educators working to develop responsive practice through embracing their diverse

contexts and the equity-seeking students and communities who live and learn there.

So, inquiry-based networks can foster teachers' professional learning and practice change, and correspondingly, gains for students (Butler, Schnellert, & Cartier, 2013), but where does an organization and/or a leader begin? Because PLNs are a relatively new field of study (Daly & Stoll, 2018), educational leaders do not have multiple examples at their fingertips to reference as they design their own PLNs. This book offers six examples of PLNs that illustrate key attributes of PLNs that are sustainable over time and build educators' ownership, practice, and expertise in diverse contexts with diverse learners. These case studies highlight the potential of PLNs to address questions of equity – both for educators (i.e., teachers working in remote and rural communities who have limited access to professional development and other resources) and equity-seeking communities (e.g., Indigenous communities, non-dominant cultural groups).

EQUITY-ORIENTED PLNS

PLN studies have tended to focus on developing shared practices that often unintentionally continue to value dominant ways of knowing and being that almost entirely exclude equity-seeking communities as knowledgeable collaborators in curriculum change efforts (Davidson & Schnellert, 2020; Schnellert et al., 2015); this is problematic. Many educators continue to struggle in their attempts to integrate relational and culturally responsive pedagogies into their teaching, despite countless professional development initiatives to help them develop, change, and evolve their pedagogy. Specifically, research is urgently needed into how to better support educators to decenter dominant ways of knowing and reconceptualize

teaching and student success. To achieve this, we must collaborate with equity-seeking community partners within PLNs to support pedagogical transformation, and ultimately redefine student success. However, questions about how PLNs can best support teacher professional development that takes up non-dominant perspectives and decolonizing pedagogies remain. Research in this area has yet to focus on the generative potential of PLNs in supporting educators to work with Indigenous and other equity-seeking community partners and researchers to generate practices that draw from local ways of knowing and being. In Chapter 2, Washington and O'Connor contribute to this conversation by investigating whether and how PLNs can spur pedagogical innovation, particularly for educators in rural communities seeking to take up culturally responsive practices.

Washington and O'Connor illustrate how educators at multiple levels are committed to serving all children, and especially those who are marginalized, by providing them with an excellent and more holistic education. They explain how collaborative professionalism is one way to pursue this work, emphasizing collective responsibility and student and teacher empowerment through PLNs to work for change. The collaborative professionalism model incorporates elements of culture and context, as well, to ensure that collaboration is responsive to the community it is intended to partner with and serve (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018). One PLN they studied works to address student well-being and learning, particularly for Indigenous students who have been historically marginalized. These educators use student identity and interest to connect elements like students' Indigenous backgrounds and cultural practices and their love for outdoor learning to enhance the curriculum and student engagement to improve schools and the overall district school board. This chapter offers examples for how collaboration and PLNs can

be utilized to enhance teaching and learning for all teachers and students across cultures and contexts.

In Chapter 3, McGregor, Halbert, and Kaser's Inquiring Districts PLN, uses the *spirals of inquiry* (Halbert & Kaser, 2013) an inquiry- and evidence-based approach to learning and teaching – one that focuses on making the education system more equitable through the provision of high-quality learning opportunities for all young people. A distinctive feature of this approach is a focus on understanding the perspectives and experiences of learners – with an emphasis on deliberately seeking student input to design more powerful learning experiences. Their *spirals of inquiry* include six iterative phases: scanning, focusing, developing a hunch, new learning, taking action, and checking. The authors explain how using this process helped school district employees become increasingly committed to improving the success of their Indigenous learners. After examining graduation rates, school district employees, and the community realized how underserved their Indigenous students were by existing programs and support systems.

Equity-oriented PLNs can help to disrupt education systems that continue to value and promote school success based on colonial and industrial ways of knowing and learning (Schnellert, 2020). Education transformation requires educators, schools, and systems to critique traditional conceptions of and approaches to education, especially those that take up a deficit perspective toward students with cultural, cognitive, and socioeconomic diversity. This deficit orientation to diverse learners fails to recognize their funds of knowledge and does not offer them opportunities to be authors of their own learning and change makers in line with twenty-first century conceptions of teaching and learning. An equity stance invites reflexivity and critical reflection as part of education change network activities (Schnellert et al., 2015). Together PLN members examine their practice and network activities using the places, cultures,

and knowledges of educators, and their students and families. Centering non-dominant perspectives acts as a way to disrupt normative practices and opens up spaces for learning with and from equity-seeking communities.

RURAL PLNS

Undertaking professional collaboration to improve instructional practice and spur and sustain innovation is particularly challenging for teachers in rural schools because of geographical isolation and a shortage of like peers (i.e., content or grade level) (Battelle for Kids, 2016). Hargreaves, Parsley, and Cox (2015) suggest that PLN structures and design empower rural teachers to connect to support student engagement and learning, while addressing obstacles to collaboration. Chapters 2–5 illustrate how network structures hold potential to promote teacher empowerment and student engagement in rural spaces – topics often overlooked in educational research (Azano, 2015; Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999).

In Chapter 5, Kim and Martin illustrate how through intentional design for deeper collaborative work and face-to-face connection, PLN members built relationships that led to increased professional capital and student outcomes. Their chapter describes the work of the Northwest Rural Innovation and Student Engagement (NW RISE) network in the United States. NW RISE brings together rural educators in bi-annual gatherings, helps them to form “job-alike” groups focused on academic subject matter or cross-contextual themes, and provides support for shared curriculum design. NW RISE has countered educator isolation and forged supportive hubs where rural educators have agency to access and take up leading edge ideas and resources to promote student engagement across the network’s schools.

In Chapter 3, McGregor, Halbert, and Kaser's Inquiring Districts PLN spans rural and urban school districts to focus on three central goals: ensuring every learner graduates with dignity, purpose, and options; ensuring every learner leaves educational settings more curious than when they arrive; and, developing in every learner an understanding of and a respect for Indigenous knowledge and culture. One of the Inquiring Districts Network PLN's key features is its emphasis on using inquiry as a means of focusing on student learning experiences. Participants work in teams at the school level using the *spiral of inquiry* (Halbert & Kaser, 2013) to examine their practices and the experiences of their learners. McGregor et al.'s chapter illustrates how rural and urban district leaders have applied the spiral to situate their work and support professional learning and innovation within their jurisdictions, embedded it within the professional routines of their school districts, and how sharing locally developed knowledge throughout the Inquiring Districts PLN has accelerated innovation and change throughout the province.

In Chapter 2, Washington and O'Connor introduce two rural PLNs. In Colombia, where education has been decentralized with rural areas being largely underserved, the *Escuela Nueva* PLN connects rural teachers in multi-grade single classroom schools with one principal supporting several of these rural schools in a cluster. In order to create an innovative and collaborative network of educators to ensure that educators felt empowered and connected, the *Escuela Nueva* came up with three interrelated design features: (1) initial orientation gatherings; (2) micro-centers for pedagogical demonstrations and professional interaction; and (3) networking across and beyond the micro-centers. *Escuela Nueva* provides initial orientation to the active pedagogies that are central to its student-centered model such as cooperative, democratic, and experiential learning. The follow-up collaboration – the