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**BUILDING CAPACITY FOR A LEARNING COMMUNITY**

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Since the early days of the 20th century, schools and educators have been subjected to numerous calls for improvement of their performance. A curious aspect of this phenomenon is that school-based educators (teachers and school administrators alike) have usually been positioned as objects to be manipulated and controlled rather than as professional creators of a learning culture. In recent years, however, this position has lost considerable credibility because school-based educators are exactly the people who deal directly with the learning of children. From that standpoint, scholars and change agents have begun to advance the notion of the learning community as a preferred strategy for school improvement.

The metaphor of the learning community assumes, first, that schools are expected to facilitate the learning of all individuals, and, second, that educators are ideally positioned to address fundamental issues and concerns in relation to learning. Within this metaphor, school people are central to questions of educational practice, change, and improvement; they are the ones charged with the tasks of identifying and confronting the problems and mysteries of professional practices. But simply charging them with this responsibility will not necessarily bring about the types of profound improvement that are envisioned within a learning community. Instead, capacity for a learning community needs deliberately and explicitly to be built among educators and within schools and school systems.

In this paper, we present a model that frames our understandings about the ways in which people can construct a learning community. The model consists of three pivotal capacities that we believe need to be built if a school is to function as a learning community: personal capacity, interpersonal capacity, and organizational capacity. In a recently published book (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000), we provided a fuller development of the model and we embedded it in data from several studies and projects that we have undertaken over the past decade. In this paper, we present a summarized version of the model and of our foundational assumptions.

**Underpinnings of the Learning Community**

According to Bohm (1980), Newtonian science has bequeathed a view of the world as a gigantic clockwork with reality being made up of discrete parts, each with its individual structure and function. Understanding this reality entails breaking systems and units into their constituent sub-units and analyzing their distinct elements. Bohm argues that this worldview is inadequate to account for the intricacies and interconnections of complex living and social systems. Instead, he proposes a wholeness model of reality, in which the perceived parts are not at all separate from one another but are unique manifestations and diverse expressions of one complete entity. Understanding this reality entails considering the interconnections, mutual influences, and dynamic relationships that ebb and flow among the elements of a particular system. We believe that most contemporary school systems reflect the Newtonian worldview, but building a learning community requires a shift of perception to the Bohmian view. We also believe, along with others (e.g., O'Sullivan, 1999), that a new educational order is indeed emerging to reflect this shift in perception. One manifestation of this shift is the recent interest in learning communities.

Our interest in this phenomenon arose from the attention in the business and educational sectors to the notion of the learning organization. Over the past decade, our understanding of the concept has moved from thinking about schools as learning organizations to thinking about them as learning communities. The two terms, although similar, are not synonymous. At the risk of sounding somewhat simplistic, we believe that the key difference lies in the definition of ends and means. In a learning organization, the ends of importance are organizational growth, productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness. The means are the people and the learning that they do in support of organizational goals. The goals are established by the gatekeepers of the organization, and learning is a tool to support organizational processes and efficiencies. Sense is meaningful if it contributes to the growth of the organization. By contrast, in a learning community, the ends of importance are the growth and development of the people. The means are the ways in which community members work and learn together. The goals are set through intensive and ongoing negotiation and discourse within the community, and learning is a natural process that is grounded in the realities and perplexities of human lives. Sense is meaningful if it makes sense to the members of the community, and there are likely to be multiple "senses" co-existing peacefully (or not). A key assumption is that the learning community is concerned with the human experience whereas the learning organization is concerned with organizational productivity. From our perspective, the ideas associated with a learning community more closely reflect the kinds of conditions we think are appropriate for schools.

Although there have been some problems with defining a learning community (Beck, 1999), we have noted some points of convergence in the definitional literature. First, communities entail some sort of ëglue' that holds the members together, whether that is shared vision, common understandings, a common goal, or something else. Second, members are in close contact and communication with one another. That is, a community in schools consists at least partially in pervasive values, enduring commitments, a sense of belonging, a sense of togetherness, and caring interactions among and between teachers, staff members, administrators, students, and parents (Beck & Foster, 1999). In a learning community, each individual works with others in a spirit of experimentation and risk taking to improve the educational experience of all individuals in the school. This is the task component. Furthermore, each person deserves the support and care of other school members, and people come together in a spirit of trust and mutual respect. This is the affective component. The conjunction of the cognitive and affective aspects adds heart and passion to the work of teachers and students alike.

Within a learning community, the learning of the teachers is as important as the learning of the children. Professional learning, however, is not an easy beast to tame, and the paradoxical and complex nature of education endows professional development with both promise and peril (Bredeson, 1999). The complexity is evident, for example, in Gherardi's (1999) distinction between learning in pursuit of problem solving and learning in the face of mystery. The first is more instrumental and cognitive, the second more natural and intuitive. In her words, "Problem-driven learning was propelled by the aesthetic of the rational, while mystery-driven learning is sustained by the aesthetic of the relational" (p. 117). Gherardi claims that, when professional learning is linked exclusively to problem solving and is pushed by institutional expectations, it loses its connection with the lives of the professionals and runs the risk of being unnatural and ineffective. By contrast, when learning is linked to the mysteries and perplexities faced by the professionals, it is embedded in the day-to-day context of the people and is more natural, effective, and durable. Gherardi's (1999) point is that professional learning happens all the time, but whether that learning leads to improved practice will depend a great deal on the extent to which the learning has taken place in the face of mystery. Although we agree with this point, we contend that the problems of practice cannot be ignored. We assume, therefore, that a learning community consists in a group of people who take an active, reflective, collaborative, learning-oriented, and growth-promoting approach toward both the mysteries and the problems of teaching and learning.

Whether or not this kind of learning leads to knowledge that benefits other professionals in the school depends a great deal on what kind of professional community has been established within the walls of the school. This notion highlights the social aspect of professional learning, a phenomenon that has only recently entered the educational discourse. Stamps (1998), for example, indicates that one of the greatest surprises of recent years for human resource officers has been the notion of "informal workplace learning as a social phenomenon: the idea that humans learn within work-based groups called communities of practice" (p. 36, emphasis in the original). The importance of the community of practice has found its way into several recent works, including Wenger (1998) and Sergiovanni (2000). In fact, Sergiovanni positions the community of practice as the critical element in school development. He contends that "developing a community of practice may be the single most important way to improve a school" (p. 139). This notion implies that, just as students learn from and with one another, so too teachers construct their knowledge not only upon the exemplars that they discover in their own practice but also upon those that they cull from their colleagues' practices.

The "how"of building a community of practice is, of course, one of the great mysteries of the entire discourse. One reason for the persistence of this mystery is that, when speaking about learning communities, scholars often speak about building capacity without explicating what kind of capacity or capacity for what. That is, there has been insufficient attention to what Starratt (1999) calls a "curriculum of community" and what we might call a curriculum of capacity. The model we introduce in this paper constitutes our initial foray into establishing such a curriculum, which we have constructed around building three pivotal capacities: personal, interpersonal, and organizational. Building personal capacity entails a deepand critical deconstruction and reconstruction of one's own professional knowledge. Interpersonal capacity addresses the development of collegial relations and collective practices whereby ongoing professional learning becomes a sacred norm within the group. Organizational capacity means building organizational structures and systems that support and value personal learning and that facilitate and encouragecollective learning. We explore each of these capacities in more detail in the next section of this paper.

**Building Capacity for a Learning Community**

Stamps (1998) argues that the growth and development associated with a learning community reflects an ecological metaphor where the system is self-regulating and self-sustaining. He warns, however, that ecosystems are fragile and that certain conditions can damage the system's ability to thrive or to survive (p. 34). These conditions have only recently begun to receive some focused attention. For example, Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, Roth, and Smith (1999) argue that learning and growth are organic outcomes of both reinforcing and limiting processes. The authors suggest that the limiting and reinforcing processes dance through cycles, with growth ebbing and flowing, depending on which process is ascendant at a particular time. From our standpoint, this ebb and flow moves through three spheres: the personal, the interpersonal, and the organizational. That is, the development of a learning community comes about through the interplay among personal abilities, interpersonal relationships, and organizational structures. Growth occurs as personal, interpersonal, and organizational capacities increase; it is limited as they decrease.

**Building Personal Capacity**

From the perspective of schools, personal capacity is an amalgam of all the embedded values, assumptions, beliefs, and practical knowledge that teachers carry with them and of the professional networks and knowledge bases with which they connect. Building personal capacity entails a confrontation with these explicit and implicit structures in such a way that teachers come to grips with the personal narratives that shape and constrain their professional practice and learning. This confrontation is necessary because new learning always accretes onto prior layers of knowledge and existing belief systems. If these embedded structures operate out of conscious awareness, then their influence on professional renewal is not open to scrutiny, and their tacit operation could undermine professional learning opportunities. Deconstructing the embedded layers frees teachers to reconstruct their professional narrative in the face of deep mysteries or difficult problems.

The deconstruction process begins with a search for the components of one's professional narrative. This entails both an internal search (a comprehensive description of one's professional knowledge, beliefs, practices, assumptions, and values) and an external search (a description of one's professional networks). The internal search highlights what is already in the educator's professional repertoire, and the external search indicates the degree to which the individual has access to new or different professional ideas. With the deconstruction of the elements of the professional narrative in place, building personal capacity moves to a deep analysis of the degree of congruence between what Argyris and Schon (1978) call the espoused theory (what we say we believe or do) and the theory-in-use (what we actually do). This analysis entails a critical reflection on the relationships among embedded beliefs, actual practices, and effects of practice. In general, when unintended effects prevail, there is cause to wonder if the espoused theory is out of alignment with the theory-in-use. Furthermore, if the unintended effects are causing problems for one's students, one's colleagues, or one's own learning, this is an indication that the learning community is in some sort of jeopardy.

This kind of analysis signals what parts of the professional narrative are valid and effective and what parts are in need of reconstruction. That is, deconstruction is a reflective process that leads naturally to the active phase of reconstruction. The action heats up when a particular aspect of the professional narrative appears to be in need of some attention and a focused learning episode kicks in. This can take the form of planned formal learning, embedded facilitation, action research, unplanned informal learning, or any other sort of intervention that leads the individual to new practices, new assumptions, new understandings, or new ways of confronting teaching and learning. In a learning community, the reconstruction process emanates from a capacity-building view of professional learning rather than from a deficit model. Whereas the deficit model sees knowledge gaps as personal flaws or weaknesses, the capacity-building model sees them as natural and desirable aspects of a living professional narrative. This model gives educators voice and visibility in the process of reconstructing their professional knowledge base. They are the ones who determine the changes that should or could be made, and they are the ones who direct their own learning process.

Personal capacity consists not just in personal qualities and knowledge bases but also in the available sources of new knowledge and information. Building personal capacity consequently entails searching one's professional networks to identify new and different ideas. Network theory is helpful in this regard. It assumes that individuals' thoughts and behaviours are at least partly dependent on the ties they establish with other folk in their social or professional community (Mitchell & Hyle, 1999; Smylie & Hart, 1999). Strong ties are likely to be forged when individuals spend considerable time together, when they participate in emotional or deeply engaging activities, when they share common knowledge, and when they receive mutual rewards. Weak ties, of course, emerge from the opposite conditions. Network theory suggests that strong ties and homogeneous networks limit the amount of new information or different ideas to which the members are exposed. For educators, strong ties are likely to develop between members with similar professional practices or teaching assignments and in close proximity to one anther. Weak ties, by contrast, are likely to develop among educators from diverse educational backgrounds or of diverse professional practices or teaching assignments. Such networks provide a rich source of new ideas and new possibilities and a foundation for experiments in practice. While strong ties are necessary for emotional support, weak ties hold the greatest potential for profound improvement. Taken together, the strong and weak ties of individuals' networks constitute the contexts within which people develop and extend their professional narratives.

Personal capacity and professional narratives frame the context of learning, and reconstructing the professional narrative enables educators to enhance teaching and learning for themselves and for their students. Teaching and learning are thus closely interconnected, and we agree with Wineburg and Grossman (1998) that "schools cannot become exciting places for children until they first become exciting places for adults" (p. 350). This excitement is what brings heart, passion, and emotion into schools and classrooms. People get passionate about their own ideas, about what they hold near and dear to themselves. The trick of reconstructing knowledge is to find areas of passion and then to move deeper into those areas. This means that building personal capacity is a profoundly personal and potentially transforming phenomenon. As educators come to grips with the narratives that shape their practice, they gain some sense of mastery over what they do know and what they need to know. This knowledge empowers them to search for new knowledge, to reconstruct their professional narrative, and to bring passion back into education. Without passion, life and learning are routine and sterile; with passion, they are exciting and meaningful, and knowledge is not simply accumulated but also transformed.

**Building Interpersonal Capacity**

Building interpersonal capacity shifts the focus from the individual to the group. At the core of this component lie collegial relations and collective practice. As Stamps (1998) points out, "Relationships, more than information, they determine how problems get solved or opportunities exploited" (p. 37). What this signifies is that the construction of professional knowledge is no longer the solitary pursuit of one individual. Instead, it is a heavily contested process of negotiation among different people with different knowledge bases, different histories, different hopes and aspirations, different personal styles and emotions, and different desires and needs. Under these conditions, the climate within which people work becomes a concern of deep importance because, over time, educators (and others) internalize the expectations and norms that have developed within the school. The process of internalization leads to routinized behaviours as educators come to accept the familiar as the correct way of behaving. Continuous professional learning will be one of the ëcorrect ways' in a school that is functioning as a learning community.

In a learning community, where individual and collective learning are deeply embedded in one another, contradictions and paradoxes (Swieringa & Wierdsma, 1992) are welcome. Conflict is seen as a challenge to be met rather than as a condition to be avoided. What is important is not so much the solution to any given problem but consensus about how the problem should be solved. The learning arises from solving the problem, and different solutions to the same problem can be found in different contexts and with different group members. The process of learning also includes an element of unlearning. This too is a difficult process because so much emotional energy is tied up with what is known and valued. The contested and emotional nature of learning, then, implies that attention needs to be paid to the affective and cognitive conditions operating within the school culture.

Building an affective climate entails valuing the contributions of colleagues (affirmation) and inviting them to be participants (invitation). The first element, affirmation, does not imply agreement. People can disagree radically on a host of issues, but affirmation means that, even in the face of deep disagreement, they still acknowledge the values of others' opinions, ideas, or contributions. When teachers' ideas are given consideration, it affirms them as professionals and it encourages them to participate in school life. The second element, invitation, happens when people are explicitly asked to participate. From our standpoint, invitation is the responsibility of the formal and informal leaders in a school because they are usually the ones who are the key opinion leaders and they are the ones to whom others defer. The process of invitation not only brings all people into participation but it also serves to introduce points of difference that tend to be screened out of the conversation simply because they stand outside the commonly accepted perspectives. It follows, of course, that affirmation and invitation rely on a certain degree of trust and that they contribute to the development of trust among individuals in a learning community.

The affective climate provides the foundation upon which to build a cognitive climate that supports and encourages individual and collective learning. In a learning community, the cognitive climate is grounded on social constructivist notions of learning, which position learning as a process of negotiation among the individuals in a learning community (a school, a staff, or any other group of people who engage together in a learning enterprise). From this standpoint, individual learning is rooted in the culture within which the individual learns, and it is deeply influenced by the dominant metaphors and implicit understandings that are shared by members of the community. Concepts and ideas must pass both an individual and a social test (Prawat & Peterson, 1999). Whereas the individual test occurs during the process of deconstructing the professional narrative, the social test occurs as group members reflect together on and talk critically about the concepts and ideas. The processes of collective reflection and professional conversation engage educators in critical dialogue about the actions, behaviours, craft, and art of professional practice. According to Isaacs (1999), dialogue includes the skills of listening, respecting, suspending, and voicing. These skills provide the necessary safety for the deep disclosure and critical talk that characterize a learning community.

Building interpersonal capacity also involves building a well-functioning team of people who work and learn together. The development of a collaborative team is supported by a particular kind of communication that blends advocacy and inquiry. The distinctions and overlaps between advocacy (the advancement of one's opinion or belief) and inquiry (the exploration of a colleague's opinion or belief) form a pattern of communication that is characterized by questions as often as by statements. This pattern allows individuals to contribute freely without fear of recrimination or reprisal and opens spaces for consideration of sensitive issues, problems of purpose, and unarticulated dreams or dreads. This kind of communication allows individuals to engage in collective inquiry and to develop shared understandings about purposes, values, and commitments and to generate new directions for professional practice within the school.

Shared understandings and new practices do not emerge immediately or easily. Instead, they develop through a series of phases that typify team development in many settings. The first phase, which Isaacs (cited in Senge et al., 1999, p. 362) calls the "crisis of collective suspension" and which we have labelled "naming and framing" (Mitchell & Sackney, 1998), affords individuals the time and space to define the context and the working parameters of some particular issue. In this phase, members ask, "What is the meaning of this?" They listen not only to others but also to themselves because it is as important for them to confront their own thoughts as to discover the thoughts of others. Once the team members develop personal and shared understandings, they enter what Isaacs calls the "crisis of collective pain" (p. 363), which we have labelled "analyzing and integrating." Here individuals confront old habits, engage in genuine dialogue, and deconstruct their individual and group narratives. In the final phase, individuals see themselves as part of a collective whole and begin to reconstruct professional practice. We have called this phase "experimenting and applying" because it is here that members find new and creative solutions to the problems and mysteries that they face.

All of this implies that a learning community asks individuals to build the capacity to work well with one another. Interpersonal capacity is as much about how people relate to one another as it is about the dominant normative culture in the school. It is our contention that a collaborative culture that fosters professional learning is enhanced when certain affective conditions are in place, when certain cognitive processes occur, and when certain phases are supported. Our experience with school people suggests that the conditions are foundational; if they are not in place, the processes are less likely to be successful. The conditions consequently gain ascendance when there is a need for group maintenance. The processes gain ascendance when team members focus on a task. The phases gain ascendance when issues of sustainability emerge. In effect, the recognition that group processes (as well as group development and group learning) will move cyclically through these phases lessens the likelihood that people will become discouraged when, for example, they discover a need to return to the naming and framing phase. Interpersonal capacity generates a learning power that can lead to increased empowerment and expanded capacity to improve teaching and learning among all members.

**Building Organizational Capacity**

Organizational capacity begins with the awareness that structural arrangements can open doors for teachers and break down walls between them or they can slam doors shut and keep people away from one another. That is, personal and interpersonal capacity is deeply affected by the kinds of organizations within which the individuals work. From an educational perspective, a learning community requires a different kind of organizational structure than has been the case in most schools. Traditional structures have typically been characterized by separation of individual administrators, teachers, and students; by uniform standards, procedures, and expectations; by control of the students' work by teachers and of the teachers' work by administrators; and by dominance of decision-making by a few elite individuals. These conditions have served to isolate teachers and students, to minimize contact among educators, to reduce flexibility and professional discretion, and to engender defensiveness and resistance among the professional staff (and among students). Such conditions are not conducive to the creation of a learning community, nor are they likely to generate profound improvement in teaching and learning.

From a structural standpoint, perhaps the first walls to be breached are those that exist in the minds of the people. The norms of privacy and individualism, although deeply entrenched in most schools (Firestone, 1996), do not advance professional learning nor do they promote profound improvement. For these norms to be overcome, structural arrangements need to bring individual educators into close professional contact with one another and to bring the tacit socio-cultural conditions into view. One way to confront the socio-cultural norms is to place typical interaction patterns at the top of the agenda for a staff meeting. This arrangement gives members the opportunity to talk openly about how they perceive and experience the working conditions in the school. If sufficient trust and critical reflection have developed in the school, the dialogue can open people's eyes to implicit intentions and unintended consequences, and it can reduce or remove the conditions that have a negative impact on professional teaching and learning.

A crucial structural arrangement is that of heavy and persistent investment in professional development. Too often educators and parents have said that classroom time cannot be "sacrificed" for professional development. Too often dollars for professional development have been slashed from educational budgets to "balance the books." Too often educators have refused to participate in professional development opportunities because they didn't want to "waste the time." To our way of thinking, such sentiments and practices are clearly misguided. Time spent in professional learning is not wasted, and professional learning is not a disposable frill. The time spent on professional learning can (and ought to) enhance the time spent in the classroom. It is not a sacrifice of instructional time for the students but is an investment in more effective classroom time. Of course, some "PD days" are a complete waste of time because they have little, if any, relevance or meaning for the teachers. Instead, professional development needs to be directly and explicitly linked to classroom practices and school life, even when the topic is theoretical or philosophical in nature.

Structural arrangements also have to provide opportunities for educators to engage in professional conversations and to build a culture of inquiry. This is not to say that mechanisms can be unilaterally imposed or that they can be rigid, static structures. Well-intentioned collaborative ventures have often failed because there was insufficient preparation, flexibility, or connectivity. When collaboration is mandated, when teachers are forced to attend formal meetings, and when meeting topics are disconnected from classroom life, the collaborative efforts are not authentic, and teachers are likely to resist. What this implies is that, in the case of structures for professional exchange, form must follow function rather than the other way around (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 6). While there needs to be time built into the school day for teachers to meet and to talk, the actual arrangements for structuring the meetings will shift and change depending on the circumstances of the day and the frames of reference of the teachers. Enabling structures include (but are not limited to) collective reflection meetings, problem-solving think tanks, formal opportunities for collaboration, connections to educational research and development, and networking.

One way to keep the collaborative focus on teaching and learning is to institute a database approach to professional discourse (Hannay & Ross, 1997). In this approach, teams collect extensive and intensive data on a multitude of indicators, not the least of which are student retention, student achievement, student interest, and student perception measures. Such data are often collected in formal student assessment measures, in student satisfaction surveys, or in class clinics where educators talk about some of the issues that come up on a day-to-day basis or with individual students. But these are only the more typical sources and measures. Data also can be collected from colleagues, parents, community members, other educators, or anyone else who might have a stake in a particular educational experience; data can be collected in relation to educational, social, financial, and political conditions. The data provide a solid foundation for critical reflection and deep analysis of the relationship between practice and the effects of practice. Without sufficient data, there is a danger of relying on past practices and assumptions that are separated from actual outcomes and that are unsupported by factual evidence.

Probably the most important structural arrangement has to do with power relationships in the educational hierarchy. Typically, administrators have operated from control functions and teachers from service functions. In that arrangement, administrators have made decisions and teachers have implemented them. Furthermore, administrators have been responsible for evaluating teachers' classroom performance and have often written performance appraisals on the basis of very limited information. These conditions have served to disconnect teachers from many of the decisions that have profound implications for classroom practice and to disconnect administrators from the daily world of classroom practice. This is more likely to lead to defensiveness and self-protection than to experimentation with practice or to administrative support for new and unusual pedagogic ideas. Instead, a learning community is better served by horizontal stratification than by vertical. In other words, hierarchical levels are reduced and power is dispersed throughout the school. In that kind of arrangement, administrators serve facilitative functions rather than control functions, and performance appraisal ensues from a developmental perspective rather than an evaluative one. This keeps administrators in touch with daily classroom circumstances and practices, and it keeps teachers in touch with the decisions that affect the ways in which they work with their students. Leadership is also dispersed throughout the school, with different individuals taking on leadership roles in different situations. This kind of ubiquitous power and leadership serves to facilitate work rather than control people.

This approach to power and leadership implies the development of a community of leaders. By this, we mean a condition whereby individuals feel a deep sense of empowerment and autonomy and a deep personal commitment to the work of the school. This does not mean that leadership is necessarily shared by all or that there is no place for the school principal. Instead, it means that leadership is enacted throughout the school by a variety of individuals and in a variety of ways. Leadership occurs when individuals (any individuals, including teachers, students, parents, school administrators, system administrators, and others) identify gaps between existing conditions and desired realities and seek effective and desirable ways to close at least some of those gaps. They muster whatever resources they have available to them and they bring into play those people who are affected by the gaps. The community of leaders notion implies that leadership capacity for a learning community is a curious and complex dance between those who hold formal leadership positions and those who take up leadership tasks on an informal or ad hoc basis. It locates leadership and power within an environmental set of systemic, cultural, and political elements, and it positions leadership as a strategy and power as a tool to advance the tasks of influence, direction, and change for educational improvement.

In summary, organizational capacity entails creating a flexible system that is open to all sorts of new ideas, that welcomes the eccentric and unusual as well as the tried and true. It is as much about honouring diversity and embracing novelty as it is about opening doors and breaking down walls. That means, as Hargreaves (1993) warns, that individualism and solitude also need to be embraced, even in the midst of community and collaboration. Organizational capacity is about building a system that invests heavily in professional learning and relationship building (Haskins, Liedtka, & Rosenblum, 1998). At the school level, it means placing "professional development at the core of teacher work to ingrain the value of continuous professional learning throughout teachers' careers" (Scribner, 1999, p. 261). A learning community is supported when organizational structures, power dynamics, and procedural frameworks support professional learning for individuals and for groups.

**Relationships among the Capacities**

We propose a recursive model in which the three categories of capacity mutually influence one another, and growth in each category is built upon prior growth in itself and other categories, which then builds a foundation for subsequent growth. Boundaries between capacities are permeable, and borders are expandable. At times, circumstances will position one kind of capacity ahead of the others, and attention will focus on that category for a while. At other times, the three capacities will nest within one another, and it will be difficult to tell them apart. Growth (and limits) will occur simultaneously in all three. Capacity builds not in a smooth, linear flow but in eddies and swells as well as in dips and depressions when no learning appears to be going on. The dips and depressions are opportunities to understand what individuals are trying to conserve, as this can give insights into why they do or do not embrace particular initiatives. According to Senge et al. (1999), ëWhether or not we value a particular balancing process depends on how much we value what it conserves' (p. 558, emphasis in the original). That is, growing seasons can yield the capacity to illuminate the mysteries of life and learning; non-growing seasons can yield the capacity to consolidate prior learning and to deal gracefully and effectively with difficult circumstances and conserving tendencies.

The interpenetrations among the three pivotal capacities signify that "creating and sustaining educational communities requires attending to many different aspects of life and work in schools" (Beck, 1999, p. 37). That is, one cannot build capacity in one area and expect that to suffice. Rather, there needs to be direct, sustained, focused attention on building capacity in all three areas to allow for synergy to develop as each capacity builds from and extends the others. That is, increased capacity in one category can exert pressure for improvements in the other categories of capacity. Furthermore, Beck argues that "there may be multiple points of entry into [community]" (p. 37). From our standpoint, this suggests that the capacity of first attention is probably context specific. That is, whether one starts to build personal, interpersonal, or organizational capacity will depend on the needs of the people in each site, and an in-depth analysis of the context will probably provide some clues as to where the most leverage will obtain. One word of caution: starting with the least threatening capacity is probably the most enticing entry point but is not necessarily the one that will lead to the greatest improvement. At some point, school people need to tackle all three, even the ones that feel uncomfortable or risky. Any one of the three levels of capacity cannot work alone to bring about the kind of changes we envision. Without extended personal capacity, educators may not be able to deconstruct the implicit elements of their professional narrative or have access to new ideas with which to reconstruct it. Without extended interpersonal capacity, the socio-cultural elements in a school may override any attempt to change the status quo. Without extended organizational capacity, teachers are likely to have little incentive or support to undertake the deep reflection, analysis, and reconstruction that can lead to profound improvement.

**Positioning the Model**

There is overwhelming agreement that professional learning, although not a magic bullet, is directly and persistently linked to educational improvement and school development (Bredeson & Scribner, 2000; Louis, Toole, & Hargreaves, 1999). If that is the case, then there needs to be direct and persistent attention paid to the ways in which educators build the capacity to engage in professional learning. Saying that it must be so will not necessarily make it so, and sending teachers "out for training" will not necessarily garner professional learning or generate change in educational practices. Instead, capacity needs to be built in relation to personal knowledge and capabilities, interpersonal relations and dynamics, and organizational structures and facilities. But when we talk about building personal, interpersonal, and organizational capacities, we are not talking about simply sharpening the edges of what we already do. We are talking about doing completely different things ? and doing the same things completely differently. We envision a transformation of practice rather than a tinkering with practice. It is, at its best, profound improvement. It is a strategy for overcoming the tendency for educators ëto understand new things in the same old ways' (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 146).

The model we propose highlights the staff role of the teacher. Over the years our work with learning communities in schools has led us to develop a different mind set about teachers, one that places them in direct relationship with their colleagues. Traditionally, teachers have been seen, studied, and discussed in terms of their classroom role--what they need in order to teach children well. The model we present positions teachers in terms of their staff role--what they need in order to live, learn, and work well together (as well as alone). Previous models have looked at teachers as individuals rather than as members of a group, in which the individuals affect the learning and work of each other. Our model sees the teacher's work as a set of complex dynamics and interactions and the interplay of personal, collective, and organizational narratives. Highlighting the staff role of the teacher requires a different ideology based on different belief systems about what teachers can and should do in the school.

Saying that a learning community must be thus and so does not automatically make it so. The creation of a learning community is not an easy endeavour because it entails fundamentally different ways of thinking about teaching and learning and fundamentally different ways of being teachers and administrators. It asks educators to put their professional identities on the line, to admit they do not know everything, to expose their knowledge gaps to themselves and to their colleagues, and to reconstruct both their professional narratives and their professional identities. This is truly an awesome and frightening proposition. But the task is not an impossible one. It is, rather, a developmental process that takes time, care, sustained attention, and commitment to make it so.

Because a learning community is a human system, it moves through cycles of progress and regress. At times people will move forward eagerly, but at other times they will push against the flow of the process. As Senge et al. (1999) point out, whenever something changes in a human system, the system will push back to seek equilibrium and to conserve certain aspects of the former condition. It is especially critical to remember this cyclic aspect during periods of regress. At such times, the benefits that have accrued from previous forward motions may be the only things that will sustain individuals' commitment to the process. Although the underlying raison d'être of a learning community is to enhance students' educational experience, considerable benefits are also in store for the professional staff, and it is just these benefits that can sustain commitment to a decidedly difficult journey.

The notion of the school as a learning community represents a fundamental shift in the ideology that shapes the understanding of schools and of professional practice, one that is grounded in a wholeness worldview and that is associated with a constructivist epistemology and an interpretivist methodology. This worldview positions schools and learning as generative rather than instrumental, inasmuch as learning is an organic aspect of the human condition and schools are structured to facilitate human learning, regardless of the direction that the learning takes. It foregrounds the notion that, through their interaction patterns and organizational structures, people construct dominant organizational narratives that henceforth shape thinking and learning and limit professional practice and discourse. Intepretivist methodologies work to expose and to critique those narratives so that, if necessary, they can be modified to honour the generative nature of learning. These notions lie at the heart of everything that we have talked about in this paper. Even though we have presented our ideas in chunks and pieces, these chunks are not separated from one another in our own minds. Instead, they are all mutually influencing and deeply embedded constructs that, together, constitute the ecosystem of a learning community.

In this paper, we have presented a brief summary of the concepts and issues that we explore in greater depth in a full-length book (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000). In both this paper and the longer text, we do not wish to situate the learning community as yet another recipe with some strategies for tinkering at the margins of what we already do. It is, instead, a way of being and a way of living. Nor are we presenting these ideas to convince the reader that we have the answers or that we want to change everything in all schools. Rather, we present these ideas to encourage readers to reflect on their own contexts. Although they represent the ideas that have made sense for our professional and personal questions, they are not necessarily the answer for other questions that should be posed in other contexts. We share these frameworks and insights in the hope that they might spur some musing and pondering about the tough problems and deep mysteries of teaching and learning, of professional practice, and of profound improvement in educational adventures.

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