

Concepts of Teacher Professional Learning Opportunities and Social Justice Practices:
A Literature Review

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Abstract

The purpose of this literature review is to bring together two concepts: teachers' professional learning and development opportunities and their social justice practices. Teachers voluntarily, due to both personal and professional perspectives, seek out learning opportunities, knowledge, and support that go beyond conventional in-service training and dissemination strategies (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992, 1999; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Lieberman & Grolnick, 1996). In particular, teachers committed to social justice develop and seek professional learning outside of the formal education system because social justice teaching has not yet become a priority (Bascia, 2014). The literature reveals that social justice teaching practices are often developed informally. However, much of the literature about what and how teachers learn remains focused on formal arrangements of learning. Recommendations are made to refocus on informal learning arrangements such as teacher-initiated networks.

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to examine teachers' professional learning opportunities and how they can support their social justice practices. Teachers committed to social justice teaching develop and seek professional learning outside of the formal education system, because social justice teaching has not yet become a serious systems priority (Bascia, 2014). Often teachers describe informal and voluntary experiences of learning as being meaningful (Armour & Yelling, 2007; Case & Werner, n.d.; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Efforts by teachers that venture beyond formal learning opportunities often remain invisible and lack legitimacy in educational organizations (Ball, 2003; Bascia, 1996a; Rottmann, 2011). This is because what counts as professional learning and development is traditionally recognized as organized formal learning opportunities for teachers that support formal mandates and reforms (Servage, 2009). Informal learning is often misrecognized, for example, as either mere "story swapping in the staffroom" (Little, 1993) or as verging into the *personal*, and therefore not related to teachers' *professional* role (Casey, 1993; Goodson, 2005). Teacher-initiated learning often remains invisible to researchers. However, when the product of teachers' work is accepted by a formal organization, such as a school board, the social and cultural structure of this kind of learning is revealed.

In reality, teachers do not simply rely on professional development that is offered or mandated to them. In fact, the failure of conventional professional development strategies is well documented, and researchers have described alternative strategies and contexts that better support teacher development and change (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Lieberman, 2000; Lieberman & Grolnick, 1996; Little, 1993; Servage, 2009; Timperley et al., 2013). In particular, educational networks have been highlighted as one site of possibility (Lieberman & Grolnick, 1996). Networks are interesting, not only because of their openness, flexibility, and their ability to provide for individual learning

(Lieberman & Wood, 2000), but because they are often associated with teacher activism and social justice work (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Sachs, 2000).

Research about how teachers develop social justice practices is limited. What we do know about social justice teaching often focuses on the work of teachers' professional collaborations at the school level (see Cochran-Smith, 2004; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Teachers who are involved in promoting social justice in their classrooms are often characterized as relying on organizations and support from outside the school system (for examples of this paradigm see Ayers et al., 2009; Schweinfurth, 2003; Shultz, 2009). To be sure, learning comes in many forms (informal and non formal). This learning can even be situated within school board-supported initiatives, and it can become part of more legitimate programs or courses. *Informal* and *non formal* learning are not simply defined by context, which is important, of course, but these types of learning are also characterized by voluntary participation, respect of teacher knowledge, trust, and the importance of professional and personal relationships (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Lieberman & Grolnick, 1996).

There is limited research on how networks provide professional learning and development (de Lima, 2010; McCormick, Fox, Carmichael, & Procter, 2011), and, therefore, the connection between teachers' involvement in networks and improvements in their classroom practices remain tenuous. Researchers, such as Coburn (2001), Cochran-Smith (2004), de Lima (2007, 2010), Lieberman & Grolnick (1996), Lieberman & Wood (2000), Lieberman (2000), and McCormick et al. (2011), have laid important groundwork about how networks function as sites of professional learning and development. Bringing informal and non formal learning strategies in the pursuit of learning social justice practices and knowledge to the foreground holds promise as an exploration of teachers' professional learning and development and how to improve it. The goal is to make the link between learning and practice more visible.

Literature Review

This literature review will focus on two bodies of literature: i) teaching for social justice, and ii) teachers' professional learning and development. I will examine teachers' professional learning and development opportunities through a social justice lens, reframing *how* learning has an important influence on social justice teaching practices. I will provide a brief description comparing traditional and teacher-centred approaches and teachers' professional development. I will also discuss two common ways of organizing teachers learning that are related to their professional practices: Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and Education Networks. I argue that PLCs (in the present policy context) act as supports and strategies to promote formal reforms, innovations, and mandates, and most often these reforms are subject area-based (Literacy, Numeracy, and/or Technology), and they are promoted system wide. What counts as professional learning in this context falls within the boundaries of formal mandates or ministerial objectives. At the same time, teachers pursue learning on a voluntary basis, often to address their local contexts and to address the controversies and conflicts they face in their classrooms. These learning opportunities are often aligned with teacher-driven innovations and change. This kind of professional learning happens outside of the bounds of formal professional development available to most teachers. Education networks are an alternate site of teachers' professional development. It is often necessary for teachers to seek out alternative ideas, knowledge, and expertise, and to build voluntary communities related to their learning, because what is available to them through formal school channels does not always address their professional needs. I will discuss network attributes and what makes them unique and useful sites of learning, specifically for teacher driven social justice practices.

Resources for the promotion and teaching of social justice related areas are limited. The literature reveals that social justice teaching practices are often developed informally, through teachers' activism (individual and collective) and in collaboration with social justice oriented organizations. The literature also reveals that teachers who teach "against the grain" participate in networks (Cochran-Smith, 2004). However, we know very little about how teachers' social justice practices are influenced by their participation in networks.

Teaching for Social Justice

Social justice is a broad term, and it often acts as an umbrella for multiple strategies to address broader goals for destabilizing power and privilege (Apple, 2001; Friere, 1972; Giroux, 1992), combating marginalization and violence (Blaunt, 1993; Said, 1979), and supporting anti-intolerance and equity (Banks, 2001; hooks, 1993). Teachers who participate in social justice education are often referred to as activists. Teachers' social involvement, according to Sachs (2003), makes them activists. She says of activist teaching that it involves "partnerships and practitioner research which in turn involve various processes of advocacy, network facilitation and mobilisation" (p. 87) focused on social justice concerns. Activist teachers "teach against the grain" (Cochran-Smith, 1991), and their teaching is defined as "fundamentally a political activity in which every teacher plays a part by design or by default" (p. 280). Teacher activists can be thought of as teachers who "lead with their lives" (Bascia, 1996b; Bascia & Young, 2001; Casey, 1993; Rottmann, 2011).

Teacher activism is grounded in the personal and professional contexts of teaching. Teachers are encouraged to take up social justice work and become activists in schools by educational leaders, academic partners, and colleagues (Apple, 1988, 1993; Ayers, 2008; Ayers et al., 2009; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Friere, 1972; Giroux, 1989; hooks, 1989; Irvine, 2003; Sachs, 2000). It is not only social justice literature that provides this encouragement, often reform policies at the school, both school board and ministerial level, encourage teachers to infuse their teaching with social justice principles. Teachers receive the message that equity and diversity are important concerns, and they receive this message from a variety of sources. Messages about what it means to teach with respect to social justice principles vary. Often, formal messages about social justice depict teaching as relying on neutral and instrumental activities (Apple, 1988; Friere, 1972; Kincheloe, 2008). Contradictions may emerge between mandated descriptions of what it means to pursue social justice and other sources that describe social justice as activism. Messages are received and reconstructed in multiple ways by the teachers, and they are embedded in conceptions of professional identity and professional practice (Dehli & Fumia, 2008; Servage, 2009; Thomas, 2005). Teachers engage in a process of constructing and reconstructing multiple messages about social justice with colleagues, partners, and students, and are embedded in a number of contexts simultaneously.

Teachers' choices and understandings about these messages are not only socially constructed, but they are political. Accordingly, while schools can be framed as sites of reproduction of inequality (Apple, 1993; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Dei, 1999; Solomon & Portelli, 2005), they are also sites where practices focused on democratic and social justice can be witnessed (Cochran-Smith, 1991, 2004; Casey, 1993; Freire, 1974; hooks, 2003; Sachs, 2000). I am certainly not suggesting that changing schools is the sole responsibility of teachers, nor am I suggesting that teachers' efforts and ideas should be privileged. Teachers' choices about what messages will change their classroom practices are important to understand, if social justice is indeed a goal. Teachers construct, mediate, critique (Clune, 1990), adapt, adopt, combine, and ignore messages and pressures (Coburn, 2001) about equity and social justice (Evans, 2007). These perceptions, understandings, and preferences lead to actions which develop into "culture, social structures, and routines over time" (Porac et al. as cited in Coburn, 2001; Weick, 1995). Some of these actions can lead to curricular, and even systemic, changes over time, and when given the appropriate circumstances.

Learning to teach for social justice requires more than simply presenting content to teachers and expecting that it will be enough to support their work. Teaching for social justice requires not only knowledge transmission, but a living curriculum (Portelli & Vibert, 2010). Professional learning that can support teachers should support activism, engage teachers in making sense of social justice messages, and in decision-making. It should also provide for their individual learning needs (Timperley et al., 2013). Passy (2003) describes networks as having three functions: a socialization function (identity-building and political consciousness); a structural function (opportunities); and a decision making function. I argue that teacher-initiated networks create a powerful opportunity for teachers to gain support, knowledge, and deep understanding in support of social justice practices.

Professional Development

Traditional professional development strategies for teachers have been described as static models (Hargreaves, 1994) where teachers are perceived as passive consumers of "pre-packaged knowledge" (Lieberman & Wood, 2002). Even in the best case scenarios, where teachers themselves are positioned as researchers and where they have decision-making power, teachers are supposed to be compliant collaborators of expert research and reform efforts

(Ben-Peretz, 1987; Clandinin & Connelly, 1998; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; Little, 1993). Making teachers and their learning the focus in relation to reforms in curriculum, assessment and other teaching-related activities can make a difference in teachers' professional development. Darling-Hammond (1993) and Little (1992) argue that if teachers direct their own learning and participate in research where their "inside" knowledge is valued, reforms can be successful. Success often means that teachers develop norms of professionalism that include collaboration and inquiry. It also means that teachers are expected to take up innovations often theorized in university settings or mandated changes to curriculum for example. This approach acknowledges the salience of local contexts of reforms and also understands that teachers are knowledge makers (Ben-Peretz, 1987; Clandinin & Connelly, 1998). However, it does little to address teacher initiated changes and reforms in their classrooms and schools, or to establish what is meant by *improved professional practice*.

Researchers with professional development expertise argue that efforts should be made to encourage teachers to form professional communities (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992; Darling-Hammond, 1993; Little, 1993). Successful professional learning communities emphasize the deprivatization of teachers' work, where teachers' culture of autonomy, privacy, and conservatism (Lortie, 1975) can give way to shared responsibility, collaboration, and problem solving. Little (1990), for example, describes teachers work as varying in degrees of true collaboration as a spectrum that span from sharing stories to taking part in joint work.

Professional Learning Communities

Collaboration and collegiality will improve teaching is the argument that sums up the theory of action of the professional learning community movement. Alternative discussions of teachers' roles in educational change. New ways of looking at the effects of teacher collaboration in teachers' unions and other associations (Bascia, 2009; Bascia & Hargreaves, 2001; Goodson, 2005; Hilferty, 2007; 2008; Rottmann, 2011) and discussions of where and how teachers' professional identity is constructed (Hilferty, 2007; 2008; 2011; Servage, 2009; Thomas, 2005) are also present. This literature (conventional and alternative) makes powerful and useful suggestions. For example, teachers rarely really work alone/ Even though they are often the only adult in the classroom, they rely others to support their curriculum work. Even those who characterize teachers as autonomous "bricoleurs" note that teachers seek out others with useful expertise to support and augment their practice (Huberman, 1990). The construction of lone heroes roaming the educational landscape, making things right one classroom at a time, is problematic not only because it is unrealistic, but also because it provides a simplistic explanation of teacher agency.

PLCs have received a lot of attention in the school reform literature, particularly in the United States and also in Great Britain. Stoll et al. (2006) provide the following definition of a PLC: "A PLC is one in which the teachers in a school and its administrators continuously seek and share learning, and act on their learning. The goal of their action is to enhance their effectiveness as professionals for the student's benefit" (p. 223). The characteristics that make PLCs effective, according to Stoll et al. (2006), are shared values, vision, collective responsibility, reflective professional inquiry, collaboration, and the promotion of the group as well as individual learning (as cited in McCormick et al., 2011). Researchers who study school change suggest that professional learning communities are the key to improving schools and for the implementation of system-wide reforms (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992; Hargreaves, 1994; Roy & Hord, 2006)

Limitations of PLCs

Servage (2009) points out that "neo-liberal policies and rhetoric are successfully persuading many teachers, administrators and school reformers that the learning that takes place in a PLC is professional only to the extent that it reinforces education as managed, measurable, and objective performance on the part of teachers and students alike" (p. 166). In fact, teachers' collaboration or collective work is not a guarantee of learning or change (Little, 1993, 2002). Nor is it a guarantee that teachers actually have decision making power to effect content and curriculum (Hargreaves, 1994; Placier, Foster & Walker, 2002).

Another limitation is the elusive meaning of *professional*. What counts as professional can vary according to local contexts (Servage, 2009). Teachers' professionalism and the dimensions of teaching also vary in the professional development literature (see Bailey, 2000; Bascia & Hargreaves, 2001; Hilferty, 2007, 2008; Thomas, 2005; Zeichner, 1987). Servage (2009) explains that concepts of professionalism are created according to the desired outcomes of professional development (in this case within a PLC). She says "the professional qualifier in a PLC

may be seen not as describing the learning that is taking place, but as legitimating it” (p. 165). Professional development is not only significant for teachers to learn new skills and practices, but also as a vehicle for the development of norms of professionalism. Changes to the ways that teachers’ professional development opportunities are configured (teacher collaboration, joint work, etc.) are not enough to make it meaningful or useful to teachers. The purpose of the learning community makes a difference to teachers.

Servage (2009) describes four ways of conceptualizing of the idea of professionalism: the professional teacher as *scientist*, *caregiver*, *learning manager*, and *social justice advocate*. Servage (2009) holds out the most hope for the teacher professional as social justice advocate concept of professionalism. The social justice advocate teacher in her estimation balances an *ethic of care* with an *ethic of critique* and an *ethic of justice* (Starratt, 1994 as cited in Servage, 2009). While Servage (2009) believes that potentially professional learning communities could become a space for critical pedagogy, other researchers see the potential in networks (for example, see Oakes & Lipton, 2010). I believe networks are a better fit for two reasons. PLCs in their current usage have become part of the apparatus of the state, where learning and professional development goals are largely pre-determined by mandates and policy. Teachers are encouraged to be self-regulating in deference to institutional missions, goals, and assessed bodies of knowledge (Ball, 2003). Secondly, teachers and other advocates for social justice are already creating communities of learners and learning in their informal networks. I believe that this work should be made visible, rather than being replaced.

Increasingly, curriculum innovation and policy change is driven by system-wide assessment and evaluation movements (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), and this puts limits on how teachers’ ideas and initiatives can be prioritized in schools (Ball, 2003). More importantly though, it also puts a limit on how social justice initiatives and reforms can be realistically embodied in school and classroom practices. Often what is treasured can be measured, and this makes social justice and equity innovations at the curricular and school level in a losing position in terms of where teachers and schools can put resources and time. It is easy for innovations that have originated in unconventional locations, such as teachers’ professional associations and those that result from their involvement with social movements and networks, for instance, to be ignored and lack priority (Basica, 1996). In addition, messages about social justice can vary and may even be contradictory (Henely & Young, 2001; Lipman, 2006; Popewitz, 1998). While practices related to social justice and equity are considered important, they are in direct competition with other mandates and curricular reforms (Ayers, 2006; Kincheloe, 2001, Lipman, 2006; Portelli & Vibert, 2001). Little (2001) notes that teachers are often involved in multiple reforms and innovations at one time. Teachers’ social justice work inside and outside of their schools is not always connected to formal curriculum and policy initiatives. In fact, teachers’ attempts at change may run counter to the expectation and demands of formal policy (Basica, 2011). PLCs’ reliance on shared objectives and activities may be a problematic model given this reality.

Alternatives

This particular shortcoming of PLCs is raised by Lieberman & Wood (2002) who suggest, in their discussion of networks as professional communities, that networks allow for a variety of individuals to learn different things in different ways. So, rather than necessitating shared visions, values, and activities, networks provide for the dynamic and changing needs and wants of individuals. Lieberman & Wood (2002) explain that:

Networks, in contrast, involve their members in a variety of activities that reflect the purposes and changing needs of their participants. They attract teachers because they mount agendas that give teachers opportunities to create as well as receive knowledge. Teachers become members of a community where they are valued as partners and colleagues, participants in an ongoing effort to better the learning process for themselves and their students. (p. 226)

For instance, Case and Werner (n.d.) speak about the perils of forcing change, and suggest teacher networks as an alternative “non-mandated instructional renewal.” Ideas that are “compelling” to teachers are proposed to encourage the building of networks (Case & Werner n.d.). Most interesting and perhaps what differentiates this is the importance placed on the perspectives of teachers. As Basica (1996a) succinctly points out, reform success is contextual and based on a variety of factors. In particular, Basica (1996a) addresses the social and knowledge capital of teachers and the effects of context on partnership and shared leadership reforms.

Networks are deemed to be voluntary, they are concerned with non-mandated learning, they provide for multiple needs and contexts, and they are potentially powerful sites for teacher learning. But they can often be viewed by researchers in instrumental ways. Often, research about educational networks is focused on how reforms and innovations in various subject areas can be supported by network participation located within and between schools (see, for example, Coburn, 2001; Lieberman, 2000; Lieberman & Wood, 2002; Spillane, 2002). The emphasis here is on how teachers make sense of innovations or curriculum (Coburn, 2001; Spillane, 2002), and how they are influenced by new ideas. What teachers learn about in these networks may not be in line with some system-wide mandates. Lieberman (2000) describes the experience of participants of the *National Writing Network Project* feeling the mismatch between the writing practices that they had learned and the “No Child Left Behind” legislation that is implemented in their schools. Lieberman (2000) describes the advantages of networks as being “organized around the interests and needs of their participants, building agendas sensitive to their individual and collective development as educators” (p. 221). In terms of their flexibility and dynamic nature, networks are superior for innovation and change (de Lima, 2007; Lieberman, 2000).

Education Networks: A Description

While research about networks may have limitations, networks themselves are sites that are rich in possibilities. There is ample evidence that teachers and others who are committed to social justice create and participate in social justice oriented networks (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Hargreaves, 1994, 2004; Sachs, 2000). In this next section, I will describe some of the features of networks that are important to understanding why they are important sites of learning, but also why they result in multilayered and multidimensional understandings and practice.

First, a network can act as a site of identity construction. The network view takes into account the web of relationships in which actors are embedded that both constrain and provide opportunities (McCormick et al., 2011). The focus is on the environment, people, and the relationships between them, and, in particular, how organizational characteristics and relationships influence the sharing and creation of knowledge. How an individual’s agency is understood within a network structure is important to how we understand what they get out of it. There are a number perspectives to take on networks and individual agency: A *structural determinism* perspective, where actor’s beliefs, values and normative commitments are ignored (Wellman, 1988 as cited in McCormick et al., 2011); a *structural instrumentalism* perspective, where actors do have agency, but this is seen through limited instrumental dimensions (money, power or status, see Burt, 1992); and a *structural constructivism* perspective, where agency is conceptualized as a process of identity change (for network and social movement examples, see Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994; Emirbayer & Mishe, 1998; Passy, 2003); action is thus an expression of identity (McCormick et al., 2011; also Coburn, 2001; Spillane, 2002). Emirbayer & Goodwin (1994) contend that culture, agency, and process are important theoretical conceptions that should be incorporated into understandings of networks. The focus remains on the individual as an actor embedded in social, cultural, and temporal structures.

Second, a network is a structure where meaning making happens. Passy (2003) describes actors within a network constructing meaning from the interactions within, and most importantly the network becomes a source for expression and action. Actors vary in their use of networks and how proactively they use the support and knowledge therein (McCormick et al., 2011). However, what lies at the heart of this is the idea and understanding that networks are not instrumental (White, 1992 as cited in Passy, 2003), and nor are the social ties and interactions within. Individuals make sense of and interpret their interactions, social ties, and the social knowledge that comes from networks and networking. According to Passy (2003), social networks are “islands of meaning,” and they “shape the individual preferences and perceptions that form the basis for the ultimate decision to participate. Thus, networks shape both stable aspects such as values and identities and more volatile aspects such as perceptions and preferences” (p. 8).

Limitations of Educational Networks

One limitation of the education network literature is that networks are often conflated with professional learning communities (McCormick et al., 2011). Research about teaching foregrounds how teachers can and should learn in the contexts of their schools. How they create and use knowledge (Lieberman & Wood, 2002), and how it moves beyond local use is often missing. How teachers’ knowledge is disseminated and its influence is rarely, if ever, discussed (McCormick et al., 2011). In a professional learning community, the focus is on “strong ties” (Granovetter, 1975) and making “tacit knowledge” (McCormick et al., 2011) understandable. This most often

requires face-to-face interactions and aligned goals and objectives. It seems that the dynamic and differentiated attributes of networks are lost in some of what is described as a network. In particular, how knowledge is disseminated and how individuals understand it in multiple ways is not clearly explained. There are examples where contextual factors are acknowledged (for example, the policy context in Lieberman, 2000) and the importance of “outside” influences are acknowledged (Coburn, 2001; Spillane, 2002).

Networks activities and relationships are not without tensions and contradictions. Network activities vary, but some characteristic examples are electronic networking, conferences (face-to-face), courses, teacher research teams, informal groups, and study groups (Lieberman & Grolnick, 1996). Network activities and the viability of the network depend on their ability to meet individuals’ needs and the interests of their members. Network participation changes over time (Daly, 2011), and, therefore, networks must be dynamic, not simply to be effective, but to survive. Networks also contend with funding issues. While networks function due to voluntarism and dedication, there are moments in time when this work is supported. The rhythm of financial support does undoubtedly shape the influence and success of networks (Lieberman & Grolnick, 1996). Lieberman & Grolnick (1996) outline five tensions that can make networks fragile: Inclusivity and exclusivity of membership; informality and flexibility to formality and rigidity; centralization/decentralization; inside knowledge/outside knowledge; and emergent purposes/compelling activities. In addition, networks tend to be discussed in educational research as something positive, and it is taken for granted that good things happen there. de Lima (2010) points out that networks also have a “dark side,” and they should be examined and theorized as such.

Recommendations

What Works?

Networks are open, not bounded by familiar structures, and are characterized by crossing boundaries (Engstrom, 1995; Little, 2005 as cited in McCormick et al., 2011). Without overstating their positive aspects, networks can play a role in providing resources, support, and knowledge for teachers in very important ways. The flexibility of networks also allows them to be sensitive to individual needs, and allows for a dynamic and ever-changing array of participation and participants. Participation is typically voluntary and self-selected, and individuals start to participate because their values and beliefs are already a match or where relationships and association are already present in some form. The focus here is not on changing an individual’s mind, rather it is about supporting the individual and supporting the actions and activities of social movements. Tarrow (1994) describes networks as the motor of social movements as he explains that “it is the life within groups that transforms the potential action into social movements” (p. 30). Tarrow describes social movements as involving *collective contentious action*, which can be brief or sustained, humdrum or dramatic, and often takes place within institutions. Tarrow explains that rather than focusing on more extreme versions of the characteristics of social movements (extremism, deprivation, or violence), social movements can be best described as “collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interactions with elites, opponents and authorities” (p. 9). Tarrow goes further to conceptualize social movements as having four empirical purposes: collective challenges, common purposes, sustained interaction, and social solidarity (p. 9). In particular, social movements are involved in the affirmation of new values. Social movements are characterized by an interaction with political opportunity, and the knowledge that opportunities and gains are made for original members and late-comers. For example, in the case of teaching for social justice, we find networks at play in support of varying challenges and changes. Methodologically and practically, this is an entry point into how changes happen and the ability to understand the meaning of networks that support it.

Research about the effects of reforms on teachers have begun to move beyond individual interpretations of policy messages, and towards a focus on how individuals make sense of policy messages in conversations and interactions with colleagues (Coburn, 2001; Evans, 2007; Lieberman, 2000; Spillane, 1999, 2002). These social interactions depict teachers as situated in “broader social, professional, and organizational contexts” (Coburn, 2001, p. 145, citing Lin, 2000; Spillane 1998; Yanow, 1996). However, with some exceptions, the discussion of networks often ends at identifying networks as a feature and resource for teachers who identify as change agents (Cochran-Smith, 1999, 2004; Hargreaves, 2004; Sachs, 2003; etc.), and this identity has become a characteristic, rather than a process. In addition, networks have too often been conceptualized as a tool for reforms and innovations; focused on teacher “buy in” and changing their thinking, rather than on the processes by which teachers make sense of their

experiences, and actually seek out expertise and support (social and otherwise) (Daly, 2010). Rarely have teacher-driven and voluntary innovations and changes been the subject of education network studies and concerns. However, studies like Cochran-Smith's (1991) about the power of *collaborative resonance* in teacher learning confirm that collaboration and resonance provide a far more powerful learning tool than resisting in isolation.

What remains vague is how individuals experience and understand their participation in social networks (de Lima, 2010), and how these experiences shape teachers' practices for social justice. The processes within networks remain unexamined (Little, 2005 as cited in McCormick et al., 2011), and calls for research that can reveal the "fine grain" of networks have been made by researchers in this field (de Lima, 2010; Little, 2005; Passy, 2003). The kind of learning opportunities and strategies that can support teachers' social justice practices will need to reflect social justice principles. Teaching for social justice requires a commitment to equity, to crossing boundaries, and to deep processes. This does not mean that teachers who can do this necessarily have special personal attributes or characteristics. Rather, it is more likely that teachers are influenced by experience (both professional and personal) and can learn to teach for social justice.

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