

The persistence of privacy in teacher professional development online.

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Two cycles of a professional development course were run for teachers in urban and regional areas of New South Wales, Australia. Delivery and communication tools were facilitated through the Internet. The use of collective learning and mutual problem solving was made transparent to participants prior to participation and was a keystone to the design of the professional development course. In an article by Little (1990) entitled Persistence of Privacy: Autonomy and Initiative in Teachers' Professional Relations, the author argues that common forms of 'collegiality' and hence common configurations of teacher-to-teacher discourse may do more to bolster isolation than diminish it. Using transcripts from semi-structured interviews and electronic communications, participants' experiences and actions are used to illuminate the issue of privacy in online teacher communication.

Some researchers argue that educational systems may engender teacher isolation, structurally discouraging teachers from exchanging knowledge and encouraging them to leave decisions affecting more than their specific classrooms to "management". Participating teachers appeared to perpetuate this notion in the online environment despite their lack of confinement by school or system management. The paper concludes with a discussion on the impact such a notion has on the curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation of teacher professional development in online environments.

Introduction and background

The reputation and promise of online learning or the ever growing term, e-learning - is gaining considerable momentum in the educational and popular press. It is said to offer the flexibility that is needed in our busy lives. It promises access to education for the disadvantaged and advantaged alike, leveling the playing field. Policy makers and administrators also see a promise and are viewing e-learning through economic lenses, seeing more "bang for the buck".

Individual professional education for teachers has been recognised as important for the continuing quality development of teachers and teaching as a profession. However, in the context of a geographically dispersed population, if catering for system and school needs is difficult, then individual needs are even more so. Rural and regional citizens feel this difficulty more so than their metropolitan counterparts. It seems, therefore, that professional development of teachers may be particularly suited to the online environment; with the opportunities it presents to participate and communicate anywhere anytime.

Flexibility is the cornerstone of postmodern lifestyles and the promise of education delivered and managed online promises both convenience and time efficiency. It appears to be a win-win situation for employment/registering bodies of professionals

and the professionals themselves. However, do these promises marry with effective experiences for those who participate? Does the transfer of the delivery and communication methods to a virtual environment neutralise, minimise or amplify professional predispositions? This paper attempts to explore the experiences of two teachers who participated in a teacher professional development experience that was delivered online.

Two cycles of a professional development course were run for teachers in urban and regional areas of New South Wales, Australia. The first course was run in 2000, the second in 2001. Delivery and communication tools were facilitated through the Internet. The content for the courses was based around the inclusion of children with special needs in mainstream classrooms in Australia, particularly New South Wales. Since the Australian Federal Government 1993 Anti-Discrimination Act, many students have been progressively integrated into regular schools. The down-side of this educational initiative driven by social justice principles is that the vast majority of teachers in NSW have graduated from their initial teacher education before subjects addressing integration and inclusion were included in course designs. The need for professional development programs in this area have been long recognised by many (McRae, 1996).

The professional development program, that provided the contexts for this study, was offered to teachers in a country school district of a government school system and those in a metropolitan/coastal district of a non-government school system. In 2000 and 2001, twenty-three and seventeen teachers, respectively, responded and started a course, initially attending a face-to-face induction session regarding the course and the communication and information systems to be used. For the remainder of the course, communication was generally via email and electronic forum postings.

The model used for the design of the professional development course was based on a social constructivist philosophy. It aimed to recognise the importance of learner centred needs and the incorporation of both inter and intra personal construction of knowledge. It aimed to draw on the situational knowledge of each participant and the experiences of other participants to solve an individual conundrum: how to effectively 'include' a student with special needs in a mainstream classroom. It was an adaptation of a model previously used with undergraduate teaching students. (See McKinnon, Opfer, & McFadden, (1998) and McKinnon & Nolan (1999) for discussion of the model and its evolution.)

The course aimed to bring together 'virtually' a geographically and systemically distributed group of teachers who had similar problems to solve (and hence a common purpose). In doing so, it attempted to create an environment for collaboration and community for teachers. Activities to promote this included interaction through a focus on joint reading (construction of common language and terms of reference), provision of resources based on individual participant requirements (a needs-based pedagogy), and having participants observe, design, intervene and reflect on individual settings (action research). Teachers were asked to compare their reflections with those of other participants through communication in a closed electronic forum and discuss similarities and differences. The model assumed that through all these methods (common language; needs-based pedagogy, action research and a common purpose) an environment

conducive for collaboration and community would emerge. The facilitators openly explained the model, the course and process to the participants. Particular emphasis was placed on the role that communication and collaboration, and hence collegiality, would play in the use of such a model.

In the article “Persistence of Privacy: Autonomy and Initiative in Teachers' Professional Relations” (Little, 1990), the author argues that there is no consistent definition of collegiality in teaching environments and illustrates that what most definitions have in common is teacher-to-teacher discourse. Through a meta-analysis of literature and case-studies, she differentiates between various forms of collegiality, from those that maintain independence such as telling stories, sharing and asking/giving advice to those that require interdependence of participants. The latter, she argues, requires work on behalf of all participants to produce a joint product. She continues that tasks such as sharing, storytelling and aid and assistance, while giving the illusion of collegial relations, in fact maintain teacher autonomy. Teachers partaking in truly collegial activities require initiative to be part of interdependency, with the amplified risks and rewards that group work can engender. The substance for the literature and cases for Little’s analysis are based on face-to-face environments. The question this paper seeks to explore is how this might manifest in a virtual environment? Does taking the learner (the teacher) out of the micro-political environment of a school change notions of teacher privacy, autonomy and initiative?

This paper uses two cases to explore how the behaviour and actions of two teachers and relates it to Little’s notions of privacy, autonomy and initiative. In the following pages I will elaborate the ways in which information has been gathered to create these case-studies, my role as researcher and facilitator, and the story of the cases themselves. In concluding, I will explore how teachers’ notions of privacy, autonomy and initiative need to be considered when discussing online pedagogy and subsequently, curriculum and evaluation of online teacher professional development.

Methodology

This paper uses case-studies of two participants each from a different cycle of the same teacher professional development course explained above. A wider study of the contexts and experiences of all involved is the basis for an ongoing doctoral dissertation. As a form of research, case-study is defined by interest in individual cases and not by the method of inquiry (Stake, 2000). In this paper I explore the experiences of two key informants on the topic of privacy. Garrick and Lynne are pseudonyms for the participants in question here. Both were fully aware that documentation and data was being collected for research, and gave formal informed consent to participate.

It is important to clearly articulate the author’s role in this professional development course as it was more than just observer. The author was assistant facilitator in the first cycle of the course, under the supervision and mentorship of a senior academic. In the second cycle, the author was sole facilitator, with arms-length supervision by the same person. The role of the facilitator in both courses was to pose focus questions to guide participants through curriculum content, moderate discussion, examine and provide feedback on assigned tasks, and general administrative duties that are required in cohort management. Given these tasks and duties, it is important to note that the author was

firmly a participant observer in the overall structure of both courses, and accordingly needs to be recognised as such in both case-studies.

The cases of Garrick and Lynne are worthy of study due to their similarities *and* differences. They are both of roughly the same age and socio-economic group, primary teachers, and both offered an opportunity to learn about different perspectives on the notion of privacy. They differ on other levels, including gender, length of teaching experience, geographic location and participation in different course cycles. Lynne participated in 2000 and Garrick in 2001. The differences are as important as the similarities. Both cases were explicitly chosen, as Lynne and Garrick articulated perspectives of privacy in an online environment. Similar sentiments were echoed by other participants; however they were not as articulate as these two cases.

Neither Lynne's nor Garrick's experience could be the same as any other participant in course, the facilitator's, a researcher or a theorist's. They are unique to Lynne and Garrick. However it is useful to look deeply at both people's words and actions in an endeavour to understand how an individual member of the teaching population selected, participated in and completed an online professional development course that used social constructivism as an element of curriculum and pedagogical design. The stories of Lynne and Garrick are intended as 'thick descriptions' of such experiences.

These case-studies use predominantly qualitative methods of data collection. Both are informed by the use of semi-structured interviews (pre, mid and post participation), online forum, and direct (email) communications with the facilitator(s). Pre and post completion surveys and evaluations enhance the unstructured and semi-structured data. Through all these sources, a picture emerges of Lynne's and Garrick's expectations, actions, articulated views, issues and hindsight.

The cases of Lynne and Garrick...

In the following examination of Garrick and Lynne, including their experiences, opinions and actions, information is given about their teaching history, professional development, and the goals each had in mind when they commenced the course. Scattered through this are excerpts from interviews, information and some analysis from electronic communications to illuminate their participation in the course. Discussion will occur in the section following the last case-study.

A snapshot of Lynne:

Lynne is a female primary school teacher, in her early forties at the time of the course. She had been a teacher for 18 years, having completed her teacher pre-service education immediately after matriculating from High School. She was married to a non-teacher and had three children in their late teens. Lynne had taught predominantly in inner metropolitan areas in non-government schools for a number of years early in her career, leaving the inner city when she and her husband started a family. She took time out of the paid workforce to have her children and then returned to teaching, as a casual teacher, in the same non-government school system, although a different geographic area. While raising young children, she undertook post-graduate study in children's literature through a conveniently located College of Advanced Education. She had

consistently taught at her, then, current school for six years, achieving a permanent position two years prior to commencement of the course.

Course Content:

A young girl with Spina Bifida was a member of the class Lynne was teaching, a group (20) of Year 2 children. The inclusion of this student provided the impetus for Lynne to volunteer for the course. Her class was the only Year 2 class in the school, which was small by metropolitan standards. Lynne expressed happiness and contentment with regard to her workplace and duties; however she expressed some concern about her opportunity to collaborate with colleagues at work explaining that everyone was short of time.

Lynne was hesitant in detailing her experiences with children with special needs, saying that early in her career there had been no such experiences, and that it was something she had only become aware of since being employed at her current school. In our initial interview Lynne maintained she had had few experiences of teaching in inclusive settings. This was changed in later interviews and assignments as she detailed a number of students she had taught, and revealed that her younger brother had suffered severe hearing impairment and wore a large external hearing aid device as a child. She animatedly elaborated that she had championed his cause over the years, as an older sister in the school playground. She was not familiar with history, theory or research in the area of inclusive education.

Lynne's views on inclusion were gathered early in the course. When the course began, the first task participants were asked to do was write a page on their life and professional experiences with people with special needs. This is where the information about Lynne's brother was revealed. All participants were asked to do this to introduce themselves to each other and also give the facilitators some background information on the cohort. It was also a means to have participants analyse their views and experiences to understand why they had the opinions they did about inclusion. Lynne disclosed personal experiences on inclusion and the notion of tolerance, basing these around her experiences with her brother. When transferring these to her professional practice, she saw the child with a special need as one child in a class of children without special needs (Assignment 1). Her concerns appeared to be based on not what the focus child needed, but how she would manage the situation of providing something extra for that child, while continuing to teach the 'mainstream' of the class.

Professional Development:

Lynne's understanding of professional development was articulated as "Updating knowledge, keeping current trends, always developing current knowledge." (Pre Survey). She had been involved in professional development events regularly throughout her teaching career, and most recently within the previous year. She thought the sharing of ideas and practical knowledge between teachers were the most important goals to participating in events, and talked of professional development as organised formal occasions. While she considered informal dialogue with colleagues as a form of professional development, she said, "There isn't enough time to meet with other teachers" (Pre course survey).

Technology:

Lynne was the school's computer co-ordinator. When she said this, she laughed and later explained that while she felt competent, it was still on a much lower level than many would expect for such position. At the induction day she rated herself as competent, as having an existing email address, and as being reasonably familiar with the Internet.

Professional Communication/Interaction:

In unstructured conversation, Lynne mentioned many instances of face-to-face professional collaborative activity. She referred to a support teacher who assisted in programming for her student with a special need, talking of other teachers working in the same Stage (although not same year), and also referring to the cluster in which her school was located as being very relaxed and collegial. However when specifically asked about collaborating with colleagues she said, "I really don't have much [of] that in the work situation because we are so small." (Tran 1).

At the face-to-face induction day Lynne was a reasonably extrovert participant. She asked questions and commented on the questions that others asked. She was also asked by the system administrators to 'train' another participant who was unexpectedly unable to make the induction day. This other participant was a teacher whom Lynne had not met previously. It can be reasonably concluded from all this that Lynne appeared to be confident in interacting professionally with colleagues, both in and out of her school environment, at least in face-to-face contexts.

Lynne was eager to read and recognised other participants in the course. Participants were asked to post their introductory task to the course forum, enabling other participating teachers to see them. Lynne made specific mention of this saying, "Well I've tried to read, so I've got through them all." (Tran 2)

She then elaborated about the number of messages there were on the forum saying that she had no idea there were so many experienced people. She talked of a posting from another participant, who was teaching a large class of students and suggested that inclusion would be far easier in smaller classes. Lynne felt that the message was directed to her, as she was currently teaching a smaller class. She then talked about responding to that message by saying:

"I almost got on and said, but I sort of went, oh no, I can't do that...I felt I should [be] responding when I read it and then I thought oh, oh, I just felt that tiny bit of discomfort [nervous laugh]." (Tran 2)

She further elaborated on this notion of discomfort when talking about where she was accessing the Internet from, by saying:

"It's convenient, on the other hand it's also a little bit intimidating that you are, sitting there chatting in your own little area at home, and reading these other people's work, sometimes, at the beginning I felt like I was... like eaves dropping on them. You know, like jumping in on their thoughts." (Tran 2)

Half way through the course there was a task that required analysis of school and system policy on the inclusion of students with special needs. In the mid interview,

Lynne asked permission of the course facilitators to collaborate with another teacher at another school, saying that they had talked on the telephone and thought there would be benefit in doing it together. It turned out to be the teacher that Lynne had ‘trained’ in the use of the technologies that she had learnt at the induction day. Further conversation divulged that they had met in person for a day to go through the technologies, and had had a number of telephone conversations. They successfully collaborated to produce a rigorous analysis of school and system policies, as required for the assignment.

In later interviews Lynne coined this discomfort as feeling like a ‘Peeping Tom’. She maintained this discomfort for the remainder of the course. She never initiated a forum message, only ever communicating directly with the facilitator. She completed all required tasks, emailing them directly to the facilitator however, rather than emailing through the forum system.

Course Evaluation:

Lynne attended a post course focus group interview, wherein she explained her discomfort about communicating online – it was quite ironic that she actually looked people in the face and told them she felt uncomfortable replying to their email messages, and yet there was no perceived discomfort when she did this face-to-face. She again mentioned the image of the ‘peeping tom’ in the group situation.

Both positive and negative comments were written in her private written evaluation. Lynne expressed dissatisfaction with the amount of feedback from her fellow participants, and some slight frustration with the technology, as the only negative factors surrounding participation. In an open-ended question regarding overall evaluation of the course, she positively wrote:

“I would recommend the course to others because of the quality time it gave me to reflect on the special needs child in my class. Through the tasks I was challenged and encouraged to confirm some of my beliefs and practices...the case-study required me to delve into specifics...and the recommendations were then programmed into an individual class program for my student.” (Post course evaluation survey)

It is here also, that we see a movement in Lynne’s views on the inclusion of her focus child. The words “individual class program” are significant. It can be interpreted as the focus child being viewed as an individual within the class, not separate from the main body.

Further positive comment was made about technology skills and incidental face-to-face collegiality when Lynne wrote finally:

“I really learnt a lot from the use of the technology - the practical skills of emailing, scanning and attaching documents are invaluable to me now. I have been able to pass on my skills and learning to colleagues at school.” (Post course evaluation survey)

A snapshot of Garrick:

Garrick is a male primary school teacher, in his late thirties, who completed initial teacher education as a mature-age student after a career in an unrelated field. It should

be noted that the field was bound by rules, regulations and rigidity. Garrick completed his initial teacher qualification three years prior to commencing the course. Since graduation, he had worked in local rural and regional schools as a casual classroom teacher for short and long periods. At the time of the course, he was organising and running a special project to cater to the needs of children with behavioural issues, although he had no formal qualifications for this type of role.

Course Content:

The special program Garrick was running was a ‘pull-out’ program to address student behavioural issues and then to return them to the mainstream after a set period of time. He had experience of practice and theory of inclusive education through both direct experience and his recent initial teacher education. Despite this, Garrick felt ill at ease with his knowledge of the workings and integration of special education in mainstream schooling, so much so that when an Administrator from his schooling system informed him of the course, he agreed to participate. In his words, he was motivated and had set himself goals to achieve by participating in the course:

“First of all it would be getting an overall understanding of special education in the broad context. I think understanding why students are being integrated into the mainstream, making myself understand the goals that need to be achieved by a student, understanding that the problems that they are facing the outcomes that they need to achieve. Being aware of the difficulties that they face and understand that there is an area there that you can assist the student. I think another outcome would be to form a close relationship with the parent and the student, sometimes I think that you get caught up with the student and the parents seem to be isolated.” (Tran 1 p 9)

Garrick elaborated on why he chose to participate in the course after completion by saying:

“I’m always looking to improve the next chance. Rather than [be] satisfied with the way it’s going, if I can improve that student, and extend the student rather than going, okay, it’s fine. It’s easy teaching you know. And I just think that every student should be given that opportunity. So... I had to look at, with this particular course I had to look [and] think of the links- how is this course going to help me or how is this course, would this course help me.” (Tran 3)

Professional Development:

Garrick had been involved in relatively recent professional development sessions (within the last year), and believed that personal development of teachers was very important. He also articulated the view that he felt he was open to professional development being delivered in alternative contexts, and that his employer should be exploring alternative forms of professional development delivery.

In the years between graduating and participating in this course, Garrick mainly worked in casual positions and had undertaken professional development at school mandatory staff development days or through regional district mandated ‘in-service’ programs – mainly related to curriculum changes. He found some of the staff development offered ‘short and sometimes long-winded’ (Tran 1).

Technology:

Garrick disclosed that he had some experience in accessing information via the World Wide Web. He rated his technological literacy as adequate, detailing that he used the Internet to seek out information for school and research, personal and work related correspondence, and self-guided professional development. However, at the induction day, when software was being introduced that was integral to the course, it was apparent that Garrick's technological awareness was at the lower end of the spectrum, evidenced through examples such as a lack of an email address. This lack of skill was again evidenced during the course, when participants were asked to do a web-search for resources in special education, review them, annotate them, and post them to the forum. It was to create a meta-list of resources regarding the special needs in focus by participating teachers. While Garrick did complete this task, he did not provide URLs for the resources he had located. In fact, he needed explanation of what a URL was and why it was needed (Tran 2).

Professional Communication/Interaction:

When talking about previous professional development experiences, Garrick mentioned interaction as an element of successful experiences. Yet when this was explored, he did not find it important to interact with fellow participants or relate it to learning at the event. As he said:

"I don't need to interact with the other people that are there, unless you say hello to them. Yeah, unless someone particularly wants to talk to you, they think you're from a particular area or particular field they want to know, or be known, or to be seen to talk to you." (Tran 1)

In the online environment, Garrick participated in discussion in bursts, with heavy weighting at the front end of the course. He joined the discussion on a number of occasions, including threaded discussions at the second or third level (Forum Correspondence 7/8/01; 18/8/01; 19/8/01; 29/8/01). In these, he generally introduced himself as 'From Garrick, Country Primary' at the top of his response, to make it clear who he was, signing off the same way. He personalised messages with opening sentences such as 'Great to hear from Marie' and 'To Elle Black' (Forum postings 19/8/01), trying to emulate face-to-face discussion. His postings were very direct, however, and highly task focussed; they did not convey a sense of comfort in the process, as he indicated:

"I have found emailing people that I can't see a little frustrating, maybe because I'm so used to face-to-face, little questions come up that I need answered that I can't get an instant reply to." (Tran 1 p11)

One of the activities used in the course was an online version of 'think, pair, share'. A common face-to-face collaborative activity to have group members interacting on a one-to-one basis and reporting to the group. This activity was replicated online and participants asked to elaborate their personal experiences in an email message, send it to another nominated participant, comment back to one another, and then combine to post it to the forum. Garrick was extremely hesitant in this activity, saying:

"I haven't asked the question in the email of the person, I just want to know why that was that and why there was a question that, where do I posit my response to, I mean I sort of wanted it answered instantly and that was a little frustrating because I hadn't really, because I hadn't really we're all communicating. I sent her, Cheree [his nominated partner], I sent

her a message and I haven't heard, she sent me something back so, I've ... yeah... Time is a thing for her too I suppose. And it's getting the two lots of information together... whether I'm supposed to send my paragraph and she somehow downloads it and somehow sends it to you [referring to the facilitator of the course]..." (Tran 1 p.11)

And yet, later in that same interview, when exploring whether he felt any hesitancy in pressing the 'send' button on an email, there appeared a contradiction:

"Yeah, the information is going to be sent. I don't have that issue. I'm very confident with what I write. Very confident, so I don't have that issue." (Tran 1 p 12)

When I followed this further in interview, Garrick elaborated, saying:

"... I didn't know whether you could approach the person because you can't see them, you don't know whether you can... it's private information you're going into their private space where you send information, are they going to be offended if they hear from Garrick from Country? Do they even want to know this question from Garrick from Country, private space again!" (Tran 1 p.11)

He continued this line of thought and said, "It's like asking a girl out on a date, she might say no." (Tran 1 p.12)

Course Participation and Completion:

Later postings from Garrick to the online forum became purely functional – answering the focus question posed by the facilitator and giving no regard to other readers in the audience (Forum posting 18/8/01; 29/8/01). The introductions and sign-offs disappeared. The sense of belonging that Garrick initially displayed had evaporated. Toward the end of the course, Garrick's communications were directly to the facilitator, requesting extensions for assignment deadlines or advising that assignments had been sent. This was different to the front end of the course. Initially assignments had been emailed and a copy on disk followed, later assignments were 'snail mailed' with an email sent to advise they had been posted.

Garrick said that he shared information with work colleagues in his physical environment. He elaborated by saying that he printed pieces of information to give them, and was astounded that they weren't aware of some key facts available in the information provided as a resource to participants in the course. He was able to share his knowledge and gain credibility with his work colleagues. He felt the information valuable enough to want permanent records of it for future reference.

Garrick 'successfully completed' the course. He submitted all course requirements—communicating online, answering focus questions geared to knowledge construction, completing assignments that required him to analyse his context at a workplace level, implementing designed interventions to assist his student with special need and evaluating them. In his private written evaluation he was positive and felt the course was successful, as he "learnt from the information provided" and left with a sense of achievement (post course evaluation survey). He was able to share his knowledge and gain credibility with his work colleagues.

Discussion

Through the stories of Lynne and Garrick, we have been privy to explanations of why they chose to participate in the online professional development course. Both saw the course as helping to solve a conundrum in individual contexts, Lynne in her Year 2 class and Garrick in his special program for children with behaviour issues. They both thought professional development was an important part of being a teacher, although differed on their perceptions of their role and that of their colleagues in professional development contexts. Lynne noted the importance of colleagues but regretted the lack of time, while Garrick only saw colleagues pursuing interaction for their own purpose...not his!

The delivery design model used, the curriculum and pedagogy, and subsequent evaluation has some bearing on the actions of participants. In the first cycle, online communication was optional, while in the second it was compulsory and contributed toward final assessment. However, the design model assumed that providing access to a communication system, such as participants were, along with the freeing of the boundedness of time and space, would engender collegial discussion and collaboration. One could also question the role and skill of the facilitator(s): might there have been more that could have been done to promote discussion? What isn't mentioned in the case-studies is that different approaches were taken on a formative and summative basis, both within and between the cycles. Activities such as social web treasure hunts; small group collaboration reporting to the group as a whole; pairing of participants for support, were all tested; however the results were similar. There remained a lack of congenial, collegial, collaborative discussion. On reflection I consider Lynne and Garrick had similarities and differences that go beyond the limits of facilitator, pedagogy, curriculum and evaluation.

Both Lynne and Garrick saw teacher privacy from different sides of the one fence in structured and unstructured teacher online communication. Little's autonomy and initiative can be seen in both these cases.

Lynne's 'peeping tom' and her subsequent discomfort to respond to the messages of others might be interpreted as a version of online autonomy. If we take autonomy to be the sense of independence from the collective, then Lynne's discomfort and lack of response, are indicators that she perceives she has no right to be eavesdropping, moreover responding to the message sender. It might be likened to the story telling and scanning that occurs in a school staffroom and can be overhead by other teachers. In teacher story telling and scanning, the learner is passive, taking all in without risking conflict by challenge or discussion with the storyteller. The learner picks and chooses the information that is relevant. Lynne did all this online, she read and chose what she wanted, though she remained anonymous and hence autonomous, allowing others to do the same. Little argues that teachers preserve a boundary between offering advice and interfering in unwarranted ways, supplying "advice when asked-and only when asked" (1990 p.514). Lynne didn't respond because she wasn't asked, she then couldn't be challenged, nor did she challenge the message writer. When it came to critiquing, she retreated to safer space; she phoned the colleague she had developed a face-to-face relationship with.

Garrick's elaborations and actions might be aptly categorized by the term initiative when he articulated the discomfort with initiating discussion. Even in specifically paired activities he was extremely hesitant to put a message 'out there' and the subsequent risks that it involved. He talked of invading someone else's space but also of the risk of rejection. The lack of response from others perhaps confirmed his insecurity and he subsequently retreated continuing autonomously. This can be likened to interpretation of face-to-face teacher professional relations where questions asked by one teacher are interpreted by others as requests for help indicating a difficulty in separating discussion and collaborative activity and competence of teachers (Little 1990). Garrick does not have a permanent teaching position and this may well impact on his self-identity as a teacher, but also make him sensitive to the reactions by others. The risk may or may not have been amplified by the virtual environment, Garrick may be hesitant to initiate professional discussion face-to-face, and we do get an indication of that when he talks of his interaction at face-to-face professional development events. In essence, Garrick completed the remainder of the course as an 'independent artisan' as Little would use the term.

In the online professional development model, communication between participants was taken as a key part of the planned learning activities. Lynne and Garrick experienced problems, initiating, reading and responding to the messages of other participants. In both cycles of the course, there were teachers who communicated and responded to each other, and so, in the broader context, neither Lynne nor Garrick were broadly representative of the rest of either cohorts. However in discussions with many participants, privacy in one form or another was raised, with participants giving their versions, whether it was hesitancy pressing the 'send' button because a message couldn't be taken back or a lack of confidence with written communication.

I do not mean to imply that Garrick nor Lynne were deficient in any way in this discussion. They both completed the course and fulfilled requirements. If we look closely at why Garrick and Lynne participated it was purely for the situational context each found themselves in. Neither came to the professional development course for online collegial support style learning, rather they came for a solution and information. The social constructivist pedagogy for them was an added extra that neither really chose to order, instead they constructed their knowledge internally, based on external information.

At this point it is warranted to unpack the different forms of teacher learning. Beyond initial teacher education, there are a number of different forms of formal learning that can be undertaken, with a confusion of terms that have little meaning unless one is deeply immersed in the language. The terms 'continuing professional education', 'professional development' and 'staff development' are just three of the commonly used terms, and they are used inconsistently. The meanings appear to be dynamic, dependent on the purpose and perspective of the initiator and evaluator. To some, continuing professional education implies further qualification such as a Graduate Certificate or Masters, yet linguistically it can encompass non-award study. Staff development implies that you must be an employee, or a staff member, and can be used to talk of school reform and improvement, but also individual needs. Professional development can imply systemic, school or individual initiative. 'Professional development days' can be

the term used to explain teachers learning about syllabus changes. In the instances of both case-studies, while the teacher participants were members of specific education systems, the curriculum of the course was to meet individual needs, not school, systemic or governmental policy initiatives.

Conclusions

Studies of teacher professional relations in face-to-face contexts identify aspects that impact upon such relations. Hargreaves (1994) cites research by Jennifer Nias, along with other sociologists studying teachers and teaching, pointing to differences between what she called the substantial self which strove to realize its own purposes and the situational self of the teacher which was compromised by the constraints of circumstance. Shedd and Bacharach then unpack those circumstances, saying:

“Teachers are isolated in their individual classrooms, structurally discouraged from exchanging knowledge either of the students they share or the teaching techniques they have discovered...” (1991 p.6)

From the cases of Lynne and Garrick, it would be a reasonable conclusion to say that the physical environment that surrounds and influences many teachers may pervade in the online context. That these circumstances go beyond the physical boundary of the school, and perhaps stretch into boundaries of the professional relations on broader scales than staffrooms and schools. Tyack and Cuban (1995) take this notion further when they talk of the “Grammar of Schooling” – explaining through historical case-studies that the organisation and structure of schooling is much like the grammatical features of language – it can be used and accepted without being understood. They conclude in the same chapter that

“trying to create major change in one part of the system, a classroom, a school within a school or even a whole school or district, proved difficult in a broader interdependent system based on the standard grammar.” (p108).

The persistence of privacy that Little (1990) refers to stretches beyond the classroom, staffroom, school and district. Evidence in this paper suggests that it pervades the profession and how we interact or don't interact, even when the content of the discourse is to answer and enhance the understanding of individual requirements. We, as teachers, are so conditioned to the grammar of schooling, enforced by the rigid structures of bricks and mortar, subjects, timetables, etc., that being freed of such boundedness is foreign and disconcerting. Add the extra complexity of mediated communication that is afforded by ICTs, and teachers may be uncertain, lack confidence, and see amplified risks in letting the guard down and discussing common problems, solutions and ideas.

What impact might these observations have? If we are serious about learner centredness in catering for the individual professional development of teachers, then the impact must be considered in terms of curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation of such facilities and events that enable it. In understanding that teachers will come to professional development opportunities with different social and cultural histories and experiences, we must accept that change will be slow. Lynne and Garrick are examples

that there exists reason to explore the message systems, their relationships and the ways they can be constructed to maximise the learning opportunity for ALL learners in a situation. These include the teachers with a special need not just those learners that have the confidence and can discuss and collaborate, but also those that find it difficult.

In taking teacher professional development to a digital context, we need to be cognisant of the idiosyncratic natures that teachers may present with, as opposed to other student bodies that are written of in the literature on e-learning. Business e-learning; undergraduate e-learning and post-graduate e-learning experiences are different from each other, and are certainly different from teacher professional development e-learning. The stories provided by Garrick and Lynne would suggest that online teacher professional development curriculum needs to encompass communication goals to provide scaffolding not only to reduce the perception of autonomy and the risk of taking initiative in communicating with fellow participants, but to also scaffold interdependent collaboration. This in turn impacts upon the pedagogical framework used to enable participants to learn, which in turn impacts upon evaluation.

To halt the persistence of privacy or rather to promote inclusive collegial online professional development is not just about the individual teachers in dialogue; it must also be about researchers, facilitators and theorists of teacher professional development. As theorists, researchers, providers and facilitators, we need to consider the 'grammar' from which our participants come. Design should be grounded in their experiences and needs, not ours. Further research is needed to elaborate the voices of participants, and their needs, to enable this to happen.

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