powerful third spaces are becoming an important force for reform in American education.

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when they give money to support networks. Yet, as we have seen, network activity and success must be measured by understanding and tracking the connections between member involvement, learning, and active participation, as well as by observing changes in practice. Since it is always difficult to measure the relationships between cause and effect in school improvement, how can network participation and changed practice be documented to assure funders, politicians, and the public that this investment is "worthwhile"?

If a network is successful, why not make it available and accessible to all those who seek membership? Often what makes networks special to their members are the norms, activities, and relationships that allow people to feel that they have had a significant part in shaping the work. Personal identification with and commitment to the network's purposes, and to one's own professional development, are the defining characteristics of successful networks. Some networks protect what is special about their group with clearly defined socializing experiences for new members (e.g., school-site plans, six-week summer sessions, level-one courses). Others count on slow-growing norms of participation that have a unique staying power (e.g., "the partnership way" and "democratic schools"). How far can these ideas be spread without losing the power of what they mean to their members? How much do people need to experience to feel that they are a part of a network? The larger the network, the more organization-like the problems and the less network-like the participation. Where is the breaking point?

## A NEW LOOK FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

This examination of these sixteen networks has allowed us to look more closely at how networks take shape and develop, and to delineate the issues involved in organizing and maintaining them. Our look across networks helps us to understand their strong contextual nature, their infinite variety of purpose and character, and their similar organizational tensions. Regardless of their individual differences, they appear to have in common the ways in which they bring people together and organize their work; agendas that are more often challenging than perspective; learning that is more indirect than direct; formats for work more collaborative than individualistic; attempts at change more integrated than fragmented; approaches to leadership more facilitative than directive; thinking that incorporates multiple perspectives. They value both context-specific knowledge and generalized knowledge and are structurally and philosophically more movement-like than organization-like. At a time when schools are reinventing themselves to serve a changing society, these problematic yet

## FUNDING

Fifteen of the sixteen networks we studied sought and received external funding. Those with university connections often had to fight to convince the university to pay its share and support the network, even when the network was meeting or exceeding its goals. Some interviewees complained that funders wanted to use the network for purposes that distorted what made the network special to its members (e.g., using schools in the network for a research study not initiated by the network). How does a network maintain its integrity if it has problems pleasing its primary funders? And alternatively, how does a parent organization support a network that does not always follow its direction?

## SINGLE FOCUS/SINGLE ROLE VERSUS SYSTEMIC FOCUS/ MULTIPLE ROLES

Our sample included single-focus networks with participants who were either teachers or principals (Foxfire, Principals' Center, Breadloaf) and networks that embraced larger communities of schools, districts, and other multiple institutions where participants were from all levels of the organization. Single-focus networks seemed easier to mount and run, and even seemed to spread more rapidly. Their strength resides in what their participants learn, sometimes providing transformative experiences, yet, because of their lack of breadth, they may fail to provide adequate support for their membership on their return to their own institutions; even with this support, returning teachers rarely effect change beyond their own classrooms. Networks that are made up of schools, entire districts, or interinstitutional relationships must struggle with how to make the networks powerful not just for one role group, but for many. This makes the agenda, leadership, and focus far more diffuse and complicated. When it works, however, the whole system is involved and moving in the same direction. In stark terms the choice is: Should effort be put into forming a network with a manageable agenda and a doable single, focused idea, or into a network with a complicated systemic agenda—difficult to manage and lead—involving people who play multiple roles, in situations where new learning and authentic change have a greater chance to affect whole institutions? Perhaps single-focus networks can expand their focus and work toward systemic change, or maybe networks can come together deepening their individual and collective work. In a few instances, this is already happening.

## MEASURING THE IMPACT OF NETWORK PARTICIPATION

Are principals more effective, are teachers teaching better, are students learning more? These are the "bottom-line" questions that funders ask

a catalyst encouraging their members to be involved with each other in their own growth and development, even as they bring new energy and ideas to the solutions of common problems.

## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

It is in the nature of exploratory work that new questions emerge as information is gathered and analyzed. Some of these, requiring further study, are briefly discussed here.

### PROMINENT LEADERSHIP

Over half of the leaders we interviewed are well known and of great importance to people concerned with educational practice and improvement. Some networks, although they have an official name, are even known to their members by their leader's name. This suggests more than a casual attachment to the founders, and suggests the difficulty of building structures that will last after they leave. Institutionalizing routines and structures may seem to be the antithesis of what makes networks work, but can a network maintain itself without building some kinds of structures? How can a network keep the core of what makes it special when its founder leaves? Are networks leadership-dependent, even though their purpose is to work toward more egalitarian relationships and shared leadership responsibilities?

### TEMPORARY SYSTEMS OR NEW MODELS FOR PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY?

Are reform networks and partnerships temporary systems that exist only as effective ways to influence change in education, or are they new models of professional communities that can have a life of their own? Some of the networks we studied were over twelve years old and still growing and changing. A number of them were able to take advantage of funding opportunities to deepen their work as they matured. (Bread Loaf and Southern Maine Partnership are involved in the Annenberg Rural Challenge and are recognized as having expertise in organizing rural networks.) Some networks were content to remain a loose coalition of like-minded participants, and others simply languished as their influence diminished over time. Are the professional communities that last somehow better suited to a different paradigm for learning and school reform, as some contemporary scholars suggest (Little, 1993; Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992; McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993)?

They could do this formally—as site coordinators, regional directors, partnership associates, and network coordinators, or informally—as teacher scholars, proposal writers, organizers, and experts in newly acquired knowledge. Where leadership roles are possible for many network members regardless of their status, different norms and roles emerge that serve to strengthen the commitment of members to the network, broaden their vision of its roles and possibilities, and enlarge the scope of their personal and professional associations.

*Fifth*, networks provide numerous examples of collaboration among their members. Learning to work across role groups has never been easy. Schools, as they are currently organized, do not give people many opportunities to work collaboratively; networks, almost always, expect participants to collaborate. Indeed, expectations and opportunities to learn how to work together may be the reason many of these networks become so compelling to their members (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993). They provide authentic examples of professional community built around shared work, shared interest, and shared struggle. The League of Professional Schools requires that member schools form a school-site planning committee made up of teachers, administrators, and parents. Bread Loaf expects teachers to share their work and learn from one another. The Principals' Centers expect principals to frame problems, share strategies, and learn from one another as a result of their network participation. Such communities legitimate a search for alternative solutions to complex educational problems that have no simple or universally agreed upon answers (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Lieberman, 1995; Little, 1993).

*Sixth*, when networks, coalitions, and partnerships last long enough to create ongoing learning communities, cultures based on mutual knowledge, learning, and collaboration replace the transmission of knowledge from one institution to another. These cultures, focused on critical issues of school reform, place educational practice at their center, providing the kind of social and professional nourishment that leads many members to invest time, effort, and commitment far beyond what they give to the usual professional development opportunities. Networks encourage large visions, and their flexibility, reliance on more egalitarian relationships, and norms of collaboration can make them seem more like movements than mere organizations. At a time when schools are not well supported, while under tremendous pressures to do more and do it better, these collaborative cultures offer their members social support, the sharing of knowledge, and the mobilization of collective resources (Rosenbaum, 1977).

Networks that link two cultures (school and university, union and school districts, teachers and administrators, or schools with each other) become

their formation and development (Goodlad, 1977; Miles, 1978; Parker, 1977; Peterson, 1977; Rosenbaum, 1977). Our interviewees, in reconstructing many years of experience, spoke not only of their successes but, with great candor, about the fragility of their networks and the problems that were a part of the process of creating and sustaining them. However, despite acknowledging the problems, they stressed their perception of the powerful effects these networks have on their members.

*First,* teachers and administrators are given opportunities to label, articulate, and share the tacit knowledge that they have developed through their work. Networks encourage the sharing of this knowledge, which gives members greater access to "just-in-time learning"—learning that is tied to the actual work educators do. This also has the effect of dignifying and giving shape to the substance of what teachers share—the dailiness of work that, while often invisible to outsiders, binds insiders together. Networks are particularly good at helping school-based educators reveal and work on current problems, even as they are learning new ideas and building new relationships.

*Second,* networks have the flexibility to organize activities first, letting the structures needed to support those activities follow, instead of the other way around. This does not mean that networks are necessarily loose or structureless, but rather that they are not locked into permanent mechanisms. Several of our interviewees spoke about how they had originally organized conversations, task forces, or study groups that were very popular for awhile and then ceased to be of interest to their members. They were dropped, often to reappear a year or so later in a new iteration. This kind of responsiveness to the network participants provides for a more developmental approach to member learning, empowers its members to voice their approval or disapproval (giving them the feeling that the network is responsive to their perspective), and encourages a more personal and professional connection to their own learning.

*Third,* we found that these networks were attempting to shift the meaning of adult learning away from prescription toward challenging involvement and problem solving. They tried to achieve goals of participant learning and professional competence by modeling different modes of inquiry, supporting the formation of teams to create and write school-based plans for change, finding mechanisms to encourage cross-role groups to work together, focusing deeply on particular topics, and inviting the participants to help shape the agenda in their own terms. This shift is significant in many ways, not least because it gives voice to those who have usually been the recipients of the agendas of others.

*Fourth,* although each of the networks we studied had a formal leader, there were numerous opportunities for members to take leadership roles.

Each network must decide how, when, and/or if it will bring in new members. These decisions lead to dealing with the problem of how to socialize new members into the network. Some provide specific activities for new members (e.g., League of Professional Schools, Bread Loaf) that help to define membership, while others provide activities that are always open to new members (e.g., Southern Maine Partnership, Consortium for Educational Change). Regional networks often reach a point where size becomes a problem; sometimes instead of growing larger, they encourage the formation of new networks that share their vision and purpose, thereby gaining new organizational partners. This happened in southern Maine, where a group of districts created a new network in northern Maine, learning from their southern partners.

*Negotiating the Tension*

Networks face a Hobson's choice when they decide whether to restrict membership. Members who have already committed to the purposes of the organization, or take a course on its fundamental precepts, can usually be counted on to support the work of the network enthusiastically. They may go forth as pioneers and, with the support of the network, make great strides in reforming their own practice. When an entire school joins a network, that change goes beyond the individual classroom and may restructure much of what happens educationally in that building. In most cases, however, the reform tends to remain with those invested members who qualified to join the network in the first place.

For networks with a more open approach to membership, the issues are quite different. While there is the potential to include and convert a much broader membership, open-enrollment networks must struggle to create the investment in purpose of participants that more exclusive networks can often take for granted. When open networks try to establish themselves across a whole district, they tackle even more complex issues. They have to find ways to interest and attract members who perform different roles and functions, members who are struggling to make sense of the purposes of the network, at the same time that they are trying to form new kinds of working relationships with colleagues who are on different rungs of the school system hierarchy.

## WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED: UNDERSTANDINGS AND QUESTIONS

Although each of these networks, partnerships, and coalitions is unique, growing out of the specifics of its context, purpose, and participants, we have seen that they all have to deal with similar themes and tensions in

lar perspective. Is it to provide a way of talking across districts to share resources and improve schools? In such a network efforts would be made to enlist the broadest possible base of participation. Should anyone who wants to join be allowed to become a member? In a network intended to induct the uninitiated into new ways of thinking about education, membership is actively recruited. All networks have to determine who should be included in their membership and how expansive the network feels about recruiting new members.

In the Southern Maine Partnership, the personnel of any school district in the region may attend the activities available by paying a nominal fee for the year. Some district personnel attend meetings and participate in the network for several years without making any changes in practice at the school level; the network is intended to be open and welcoming without demanding accountability. Partnership members themselves, however, hold strong norms for how they work together, and pressure on participants when it comes is a result of those norms. This contrasts with a network that is committed to having an impact on systemic change, such as the DEWEY network, which has limited itself to working with eight school districts. However, within those districts, the network's intent is to engage as many members of the school community as possible.

Different from the open stance of Southern Maine and the somewhat restrictive stance of DEWEY, the League of Professional Schools admits only schools that commit at the outset to develop their own plans for democratic schools. They must agree not only to do the work themselves, but to subsequently share their work with others. Similarly, the National Network for Education Renewal has a membership based on school-university partnerships that commit to the network's postulates for renewal.

The North Dakota Study Group is an example of a network that has actually resisted expansion in order to preserve the informality of its structure. Beginning as a group of 18 people in 1971, the network reached a high of 200 active participants before scaling back to its current number of 110. While only active participants are invited to attend meetings, anyone can be on the mailing list, which now includes 400 names. Foxfire, Breadloaf, and the Elementary Teachers' Network are other examples of networks that limit their membership, in these cases to teachers who have participated in some common induction experience—either a particular course or a summer institute. In the Breadloaf Network, for example, about 75–100 teachers go in and out of the network as they connect and reconnect after participation in the summer institute. Every year the network brings in 30 new teachers through this process. The institute "gate" is not intended to keep people out, or numbers down, but simply to assure that participants share an essential common experience in the teaching of writing and literacy.

works provide this "step outside" is to bring people together in smaller, more informal and personalized ways that invite participation. Teachers and principals count this opportunity, to work directly with colleagues who share their interests and their work, as one of the main reasons they are drawn to such networks.

Since they are addressing problems that they believe are "system deep" and nationwide, most networks implicitly or explicitly aspire to grow in membership and influence. To engage teachers in one district on the subject of restructuring schools is very positive. To include administrators, parents, students, and community and board members suggests the real possibility of change. A writing project that affects the students in several districts is powerful. One that spreads nationwide is that much better. Unfortunately, as noted above, there are ways in which the growth of an education reform network threatens the informality and flexibility that make it effective.

As the network expands, it moves beyond the core of "true believers" who helped shape its alternative culture, its "way." New recruits may find it more difficult to make the transition to professional development activities that are not run in the tidy, answer-oriented way to which they have become accustomed. In addition, sheer numbers challenge the intimacy and the informality of the original network. The transition from an informal and flexible organizational culture that is invitational toward its members to one that is more formal, more rigid, and less inviting is common to growing organizations. It is a critical issue for reform networks, however, because their institutional culture is central to who they are and what they do.

Some network leaders with whom we spoke said that they tried to address this issue by decentralizing leadership, communication, organization, and activity planning; even large assemblages were often built around opportunities for members to work face to face, rather than to listen side by side. Many spoke simply about being aware of the problem of becoming too big, or too bureaucratized, of becoming more like the system from which their members were drawn. The consensus was that ideally, despite the pressures to expand, a network had to measure its success in the quality—not just the quantity—of its person-to-person connections.

## INCLUSIVITY/EXCLUSIVITY OF MEMBERSHIP

At different times in a network's life, criteria are established for membership that are—explicitly or implicitly—shaped by the purposes of the network. Is the central purpose of a network to bring together like-minded people who will develop and expand each other's knowledge? Such a group might restrict membership to educators who already share a particu-

## FROM INFORMALITY AND FLEXIBILITY TO FORMALITY AND RIGIDITY

Because networks are not tied to district specifications and particular in-service days, they are freer to create informal mechanisms to bring people together—serving food at meetings, perhaps, or meeting over dinner; they can set aside whole days for conferences or convene retreats in isolated settings. Networks develop their own ways of working, depending on context and/or character, often designing unique and informal ways of communicating and meeting that become particularly associated with their network "work." For many years the core activity of the Network of Progressive Educators has been an annual meeting with "inside" and "outside" speakers who legitimate and support progressive education practices while intellectually challenging the membership. Additionally, the National Network for Education Renewal (NNER) creates task forces and special regional conferences, and, where appropriate, makes use of the expertise of consultants. The League of Professional Schools began by organizing a congress to represent its member schools, while the Southern Maine Partnership started with "dine-and-discuss" meetings. The tension arises as the network matures: Trying to sustain the flexible forms of work that are a source of its strength, the network central office or leadership often tries to institutionalize them so that they will last. To give conferences, money must be raised, people must be hired, and rooms must be rented. To develop collaboration across schools, districts, or role groups, activities must be organized and facilitated, and work must be coordinated. The energy, initiative, peer support, and trust developed informally within each network are often threatened as the organization seeks ways to stabilize and expand (Miles, 1978). The more success networks experience, the more they reach out to other areas and the more pressure they feel to expand their bureaucracy. Protecting what makes a network special becomes more difficult as it grows, requiring time, effort, and—most of all—creative solutions to the problems of success. In the opinion of one network leader,

> organizations kill themselves with by-laws. Networks should leave it loose and keep the flexibility to go with serendipitous moments.

### *Negotiating the Tension*

Education networks bridge two cultures. On the one hand they are connected to a system that organizes the delivery of education to school-age children through an elaborate system of codes, regulations, standards, and assessments. On the other hand, they support the professional development of teachers and administrators who work within that system, who need to be free to step outside of it in order to consider ways to improve the very schools and system within which they work. One way in which net-

cially after the results of the first meetings of the Harvard Center. Roland Barth, the founder, received a start-up grant in 1981 and invited 1,500 people to the inaugural meeting. Two came. With that, Barth called on twenty-five Boston area principals to design the center themselves, and the network was under way.

With the development of the International Network of Principals' Centers—an outgrowth of the Harvard-based group—self-conscious efforts were made to move as much of the network operation as possible outside the central office at Harvard. Annual conferences, called "Conversations," were held at rotating sites throughout the country, and other responsibilities, such as publication of the network's journal, were assumed by the membership. Some of this diffusion—farming out publications, for example—although initially a response to limited resources, had the effect of strengthening a move toward decentralization and increasing member participation and commitment.

*Negotiating the Tension*

When networks are first getting started, the tension between centralization and decentralization is most intense. A university, for example, may begin a school collaboration with every intention of turning leadership over to participants at the first opportunity. In practice, however, a residual reluctance to let go, in combination with the tendency of traditionally trained school personnel to look to the university for direction, may make it difficult to decentralize. As school-based educators call for more knowledge, many university network central offices respond by providing a variety of expert consultants. When authority, knowledge, and power are presumed to reside in the central office, diffusion of leadership and responsibility does not take place.

Mechanisms, roles, and structures that forge collaboration must be consciously designed to achieve greater decentralization. In addition to their awareness of their own desires to retain control, network founders and facilitators encourage participation when they recognize that many teacher participants have not had the opportunity to play professional leadership roles in the past. Administrators, who are accustomed to models of individual accountability rather than shared leadership, may find that the transition to a collaborative organizational style can, at times, produce confusion and frustration, discouraging the participants. Ultimately, however, learning to collaborate and work with people who have different orientations to building knowledge is what many members find to be one of the most powerful experiences of participating in a network.

and flexible, the league could be considered a tight network. Every school has a site committee elected by the faculty. This committee writes a plan for its school's improvement—a critical document that serves to both unite the faculty and give the school a range of work. Schools are organized into regional chapters and are represented in a congress that is made up of chapters from all the regions. The leadership of the regional chapters is very active in making decisions. The role of the university is to provide consultation to the site committees to help them define their work. In this way the university provides "outside knowledge" to be used to deepen the schools' understanding of the work they want to do. Schools are responsible for addressing specific areas of their plan, such as shared governance, process for schoolwide change, and action research. The site committees from all league schools meet three times a year, documenting work being done in their schools in site reports that they share with their colleagues. The university provides the structure, format, and research materials for the on-site faculty. Each year the schools evaluate their work, submitting a written evaluation to the league; they can be asked to leave the league (by the congress) if they do not work seriously on their plans. While the problems of practice drive the network, and the university plays a facilitation role, it is the representative congress that demands accountability.

The *Consortium for Educational Change*, an Illinois network, has developed within the context of one of the most strictly regulated institutional relationships in education—the relationships that exist between the teachers' association, school district superintendents, and boards of education. Feeling that the traditional methods of formal efforts to move from negotiation to a more collaborative model would not be effective if the network was too decentralized, the consortium based itself on a model of shared decisionmaking, in a partnership between the schools' leadership and the teachers' bargaining unit. The fundamental unit of governance became a steering committee made up of all the association presidents and superintendents from the thirty-four participating school districts. Of a possible membership of 120, approximately 50 to 60 voluntarily participate on a regular basis. Working out of this larger body, a much smaller coordinating committee oversees the work of action teams that take on specific network projects.

Committed to transforming the adversarial relationship that has divided its membership, the consortium continues to look for ways to broaden the participation of its members. The inclusion of more parents will be an increasing focus of engagement efforts, as will the involvement of new or prospective school board members, local building councils, building-level administrators, and teachers.

The *Harvard Principals' Center* and the *International Network of Principals' Centers* have worked hard to decentralize from their very inception—espe-

## CENTRALIZATION/DECENTRALIZATION

While some networks are loose federations of people who come together to discuss and learn together (e.g., the Network of Progressive Educators or the International Network of Principals' Centers), others create tighter structures and build norms of membership by working to internalize explicit goals (e.g., League of Professional Schools, National Network of Educational Renewal). Some form for specific—even local—purposes, subsequently broadening their agendas as the networks' roots take hold (e.g., Bread Loaf, Foxfire, Harvard Principals' Center).

Each organizational tendency suggests a complementary style of organization: centralized, decentralized, or what we might call "evolving." The forms are not always rigidly adhered to however, since their effectiveness might be reduced. For example, a typical "district-office" approach might be very efficient, but fail to involve the membership in helping to shape the work. A totally "grass-roots" approach, on the other hand, might promote a committed membership but fail to link with other partners who have different perspectives, different knowledge bases, or different ways of working. An effective network organization creates ways to engage participants directly in the governance and leadership of the organization, while maintaining the flexibility to organize complex and potentially far-reaching operations. Some examples show the variety.

The *Southern Maine Partnership* avoids being "staff driven" by diffusing responsibility among the participants. The superintendents of member districts meet once a year to decide on policy. They discuss the kinds of activities that have transpired during the year and decide which ones they should continue to support and which should be dropped. Initially "dine-and-discuss" groups dominated the partnership; at one time seventeen different groups were meeting regularly to read articles, eat dinner, and discuss issues. When attendance began to drop and this format no longer seemed to be working, it was discontinued—and revived a few years later when there was renewed interest.

The executive director, a professor from the university, has served as a liaison to the field through her initial connections with the partnership districts. The partnership staff consists of an executive director (with one course release time each semester), two partnership associates, and a clerical support person. Every major project created by the partnership has a school governance group. This group works with the partnership staff helping sustain the collaborative nature of the partnership. Strong, facilitative leadership from the executive director complemented by a loose structure that is collaborative in nature helps to drive this partnership.

The *League of Professional Schools*, a national network, has a more elaborate organization. Where Southern Maine might be described as loose

problems.) Responsibility for organizing these gatherings is rotated among member sites each year; the network found that the transition away from more traditional conferences that were centrally located increased the proportion of participants who were practicing principals—the major constituency the network hopes to serve.

One of the fundamental differences between conventional professional development and networking activities is that, in the latter, both outside knowledge *and* the content knowledge of school-based educators are acknowledged as important sources of agenda building. How and when these resources are used has to do with the purposes, the context, and the organizational arrangements of the network's central governing group and its participants.

*Negotiating the Tension*

Teachers are very ambivalent about the relationship between professional knowledge that they have developed over the years working in the classroom and the research knowledge of university scholars. The experience of public school teaching—with its limited resources, multiple and simultaneous responsibilities, and utter unpredictability—creates a sense of belonging to an embattled and besieged group. As the folklore has it, "only those who are or have been teachers can really understand teaching." These feelings are exacerbated by the experience of many teachers who have participated in traditional professional development. In a very common model, public school systems set aside one or two days a year to bring in an expert to speak on the improvement of professional practice. Even if some in the audience find the speaker's remarks relevant to their work, there is almost never any opportunity for follow-up, and teachers are left to struggle alone with new ideas that may or may not be translatable into their classroom work. Most important, from the teacher's perspective, experts have too often been brought in as part of someone else's agenda—perhaps to further the goals of the school board or of the administration—without involving teachers as legitimate partners with professional knowledge, needs, and understandings that might contribute to the discussion.

Within the profession itself, teachers have not yet developed a tradition of sharing their own expertise among themselves. Networks play a major role in providing opportunities for teachers to validate both teacher knowledge and teacher inquiry. By organizing activities around shared work, networks give recognition to the validity of the classroom educator's experience, while broadening the base of that experience through collaboration. As teachers become more secure about what they know, they are more willing and able to pick and choose among resources beyond their classroom doors for what they need to know.

a philosophy as well as a method born out of teaching practice. The primary work of the network, which joins together teachers who have taken the course, flows from the questions raised by teachers who are attempting to implement the project method with their students. But, as the network has matured, teachers have increasingly sought additional pedagogical knowledge and broader understandings of educational and school improvement.

Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network, in its use of a summer experience that focuses on writing as the vehicle for learning a new method, combines outside knowledge (the writing process) with teacher experience in using the process. As the work of teachers and students becomes the basis of the network after the summer experience, expert knowledge shifts from outside to inside. Problems of practice, and the development of teacher expertise, then drive the network.

The League of Professional Schools deals with inside/outside knowledge in still a different way. While the underlying philosophy of the league is to create schools as democracies, how that looks is determined by individual school-based plans that work toward the goal. After the schools have designed what they want to work on, the university prepares a research packet for them. Outside knowledge then informs the school's plans.

Another approach appears in the work of the National Network for Educational Renewal, which is organized around postulates (or values) for schools and schools of education, and works to connect problems of practice with ideas that are derived from these postulates. This network, perhaps the most complex of all that we studied, in trying to change entire institutions, works with a variety of clients. Its agenda is crafted by the individual school partnerships comprising the network, in combination with outside knowledge of what changed institutions might look like, provided by the network staff.

Both the Southern Maine Partnership and the Consortium for Educational Change used outside knowledge in different ways to build a constituency for change. While the Southern Maine Partnership started with participants' reading articles for group discussion, the consortium began with meetings with outside consultants. However, both networks, as they developed, incorporated the problems and agendas of the participants into their discussions, deepening them and building on the ideas brought in from the outside.

The International Network of Principals' Centers, by contrast, is committed to inside knowledge, so much so that organizers do not invite presenters to their annual conference. Instead these gatherings—called "conversations"—are built around sharing the experiences of the participants themselves, and what they can learn from each other. (At times, members may call on outside people to bring other perspectives or help with specific

## INSIDE KNOWLEDGE/OUTSIDE KNOWLEDGE

Whatever the purpose, networks must take a stance on *what* and *whose* knowledge should inform the work of the network. This is particularly true for educational reform networks, as they are often trying to forge connections between communities and/or different role groups that encompass a variety of perspectives and have different ways of knowing, and of developing and using knowledge (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992). Teacher and principal knowledge developed in the context of their work is of a different order from the knowledge of university researchers or that of outside experts. Simply reading and studying "outside" knowledge may fail to help participants make connections to the world of practice as they experience and live it in their particular contexts. But while networks have to find ways to accommodate these different ways of knowing, a network that deals only with experiential or context-specific knowledge may cut itself off from knowledge that inspires new ideas, expands personal and professional vision, or helps teachers and administrators invent new techniques and processes for improving their practices. In the worst of situations, participants might just be "sharing ignorance."

Most networks try to embrace both "inside" and "outside" knowledge, although no two networks appear to do it in quite the same way. The synthesis is affected by what the purposes are, how participants are involved with practical and conceptual ideas, and where the knowledge and ideas come from.

> The agenda has to emerge from the work of the participants. *(Network Leader)*

> The work must be driven by questions of practice. *(Network Leader)*

> A few times we have sought out "experts" but this was only when we got started. Students and teachers have become their own experts. *(Network Leader)*

> For awhile the postulates focused the work, but the dilemma is when to push for further success on values or when to accept a practical adaptation. *(Network Leader)*

The Foxfire way of teaching is embedded in a philosophy, even as it is also a method for involving students experientially in doing projects. Teachers read *Experience and Education* by Dewey (1938) and *Sometimes a Shining Moment* by Wigginton (1985). Dewey speaks about the importance of engaging students in "learning by doing," while Wigginton describes how, as a teacher, he found ways to create such opportunities with his high school English students. When teachers take a level-one course, they are exposed to

many different groups of school and university educators built the partnership. The initial purpose was to provide a collegial environment in which participants could talk about educational ideas to bridge the gaps between their two cultures. But as these discussions proceeded, larger purposes emerged from the many discussion groups. School-based educators found the conversations enlightening and relaxed; instead of being asked to implement new ideas or fix their practice, they were members of a professional community of educators talking together in a "public space for ideas." Many educators "began to replicate the partnership format in their own schools" *(Network Leader)*. The processes that involved discussion of ideas concerned with education and the development of more egalitarian relationships between school and university personnel became normative to the partnership, allowing participants to construct larger reform purposes together.

*Negotiating the Tension*

Each of these networks had to struggle with the tension between activities that successfully involved the participants and the necessity to link these activities to the larger purposes of the network—thereby giving the work greater meaning. When the balance between purposes and activities was achieved, each informed the other. Larger purposes gave meaning to activities that otherwise might have become an end in themselves, while the activities translated lofty ideals into the real work of school reform. In networks where purposes were emergent, the activities encouraged different kinds of discussions between cross-role groups, or safe spaces for exploring ideas, which helped encourage the development of larger purposes.

It is imperative that reform networks find ways to build connections between the larger or emergent meanings of their work and the logic of the specific activities that maintain them. Such clear connections help teachers, such as those in the DEWEY network, remember that when they are working on the detailed design of a block schedule, its ultimate success depends on the extent to which it supports equality of access for students. It is also important to note that many participants are first drawn to a network by the organization's activities—its focus on issues of immediate professional concern to them, or on opportunities for teachers to work together—rather than by its broader purposes. Participation in an activity, even if it does not seem of major importance, may lead new members to ultimately identify with the network's goals and contribute something from their own perspective. It is this dialectic, between the larger meaning of the network's goals and the concrete vitality of its daily activities, that grounds its purposes and ennobles its practice.

ties have to be compelling enough to keep people coming back for more, no matter how meaningful or well intentioned the purposes of the network. The tension that exists between purposes and activities occurs both in the long and the short term. For example, in a defining experience of the Breadloaf Rural Teacher Network, teachers go for a six-week summer session during which they have a variety of learning experiences, often resulting in changing the way they think about teaching writing. They learn through their own experience of writing.

> The six-week summer sessions provide something most teachers desperately desire and rarely get—time for personal reflection and adjustment. We study together, debate, exchange, challenge, grow, and experiment during that period face-to-face. Then, we extend that experience through the regular school year. *(Network Teacher)*

One of the purposes of the network is to support these teachers as they try to apply what they have learned in their own classrooms. But the daily routines, and the contexts within which teachers try to use these newfound pedagogical ideas, make it hard to sustain the transformative experience of the summer. The network has to be responsive, developing additional activities to provide support during the year.

Similarly, in a Foxfire level-one course, teachers read and discuss *Experience and Education* by John Dewey (1938). Then, together, they design and participate in doing project-based work. These activities, in which they learn by doing, are often described by members as transforming. Here too, the network must find ways to support teachers after they return to their classrooms and try to implement these new ideas. When the glow of the transformation has worn off, the network must try to create compelling activities that are tied to the larger purposes.

In other networks, the tensions between purposes and activities manifest themselves somewhat differently. In the Consortium for Educational Change, where they are trying to forge a reform partnership between the teachers' union and the district, activities were first directed at bringing together people who played very different roles in disparate organizations. Because the purposes had to be broad enough to be inclusive, it was difficult to devise activities that advanced these purposes without being too broad to interest the participants or too narrow to be inclusive. The network had to provide activities that embraced a new collaborative mode, consistently modeling that collaboration, so that new norms of cooperation—and the activities that flowed from them—kept members involved.

Sometimes purposes are generated by the activities that are created by the network. In the Southern Maine Partnership, conversations within

## THE POWER AND FRAGILITY OF NETWORKS: NEGOTIATING THE TENSIONS

The tensions included: negotiating between the purpose of the network and the dailiness of the activities that constitute network "work"; dealing with the balance between "inside knowledge" and "outside knowledge"; creating a structure to resolve contradictions between centralization and decentralization; moving from informality and flexibility to more formal and rigid forms as the network grew; and making decisions about how inclusive or exclusive membership policy should be.

### MEANINGFUL OR EMERGENT PURPOSE/COMPELLING ACTIVITIES

Initially networks attract participants who agree with their stated purposes, which in some cases may represent lofty ideals and/or long-standing aspirations. Examples of these are the National Network for Educational Renewal, which focuses on the simultaneous renewal of teacher education and the restructuring of schools, and the League of Professional Schools, dedicated to creating democratic schools. Alternatively, compelling purposes can be driven by ideas that promise to transform classroom practice in specific ways. The Four Seasons network focused on assessment, while the Breadloaf Rural Teacher Network focused on the writing process and literacy. Educators with shared philosophies often form networks: The Network of Progressive Educators and the North Dakota Study Group are made up of members committed to the principles of progressive education; educators in the Center for Collaborative Education are bound together by a commitment to child-centered education.

Other networks, made up of several different groups with different roles or perspectives, may decide to work together in the interests of improving schools before they have developed an all-embracing philosophy. (The Consortium for Educational Change links school district administrators with the teachers' union, while the Mission Valley Consortium brings teachers and administrators together across building and district lines.) Some networks have a single focus. (Foxfire's commitment is to developing literacy teaching, while Harvard's Principals' Center provides primary support to building administrators.) And there are networks that have a more systemic mission. (Both the DEWEY network and the National Network for Educational Renewal are committed to a model of school reform that engages them with the institution at every level.)

However, no matter what the purpose of the network, the nature of the activities and the growth of relationships within the group appear to be the crucial elements in cementing the commitment of the participants. Activi-

sortium and the Consortium for Educational Change, the former initiated as a collaboration among three school districts and the latter by a regional branch of the Illinois Education Association). Those networks with sources of support in addition to foundations received money from universities (6), the U.S. Department of Education (2), the National Education Association (1), and participating school systems (2).

Three-fourths of the network representatives who contributed to the study affirmed that the struggle to find funding was an important part of their story. In some instances the pursuit of funding actually helped to create the network because it encouraged prospective constituents to share available moneys more broadly by forming a network. (The Elementary Teachers Network in New York City is an example of this.) Alternatively, funders actually built networking into the conditions of the grant (as with the funding of the DEWEY network).

Foundation funding can, however, also produce great tensions for networks. Matthew Miles's (1978) admonition of twenty years ago still stands, that finding primary funding outside the collaboration can be "fatal" (p. 33). The Network of Progressive Educators struggled over the very name of their network, with many members arguing that the word "progressive" would be unappealing to prospective funders. (It might indeed have contributed to the difficulty of getting funds.) In another instance, a funder felt entitled to exert ongoing influence on the emphasis a network placed on each of its multiple goals. Often, the needs of many foundations for an assessment that documents outcomes can be at odds with the process-oriented work of networks. One interviewee said: "No one wants to pay the bill for a network. The problem is wired in. It's not clear to anyone who the beneficiaries of a network are and what the outcomes should be. All the data are soft."

Learning in networks can be powerful, but it is often indirect—a result of new commitments and friendships, the exposure to new ideas, contacts with and observation of others' work, long-term involvement with many kinds of educators, growing cosmopolitanism and openness to ideas. This view of learning presents a measurement and evaluation problem that has not yet been solved in ways that satisfy the expectations of many funders, or confirm the concrete experiences of those who view reform networks as the most appropriate forms for professional growth and learning.

There were other tensions in all these networks. From our perspective, the dynamics inherent in these tensions appeared to be central to the process of how networks organize, build new structures, learn to collaborate, and develop a sense of community. While the resolutions to these tensions were heavily influenced by the context and character of each network—sometimes obscuring their similarities—the tensions themselves were common to all of them.

> poses of the project. We would then have a visionary in every building. *(Network Leader)*

With the avowed purpose of engaging in curriculum review in this young consortium of school districts, the curriculum coordinator used her position to construct a leadership structure that involved cross-role groups, teacher leaders, and a principals' group in a process of creating conditions that enabled the three districts to learn from one another. This layered approach to leadership helped to allay fears and deal with resistance, while providing a powerful beginning forum for curriculum review and the building of a learning community.

*Maintaining Collaborative Models*

These profiles illustrate some of the different entry points for network beginnings and the roles that leadership can play in building a network community. At times, facilitating networks appears to be about making phone calls, raising money, establishing connections, forming groups, finding places to meet, and brokering resources and people. However, it is also about creating "public spaces" in which educators can work together in ways that are different in quality and kind from those typical of their institutions, as well as from much that is considered standard professional development. It may be building structures that encourage a respectful dialogue between and among school and university personnel, or modeling more collaborative stances toward learning and support, enunciating important ideals (as in the National Network for Educational Renewal, Foxfire, and the League of Professional Schools), or leaving room for emergent goals (as in the Southern Maine Partnership, the Breadloaf Rural Teacher Network, and the Consortium for Educational Change). Network leaders phrased it thus: "providing a challenge, not a delivery of services"; "figuring out how to push people along and give them what they want at the same time"; "understanding the tension between the values of the network and the problems of the field"; "facilitating teachers' work outside, so that they can make changes inside"; and "keeping the focus on the partnership way of doing work." It is also about figuring out how to sustain these networks and help them develop and deepen their work while the education dollar continues to shrink.

## THEME FIVE: DEALING WITH THE FUNDING PROBLEM

Of the sixteen networks studied, fourteen received significant or complete support from private or corporate foundations. The two that did not were started by constituents in the public school system (the Mission Valley Con-

vehicle for supporting teachers as they learned to use these methods in their own classrooms.

Leadership style grew out of the specific nature of the Foxfire project and its commitment to experiential learning. In the two summer courses for teachers, Wigginton and Smith would consciously model what they did with their high school students. The organization of the larger network reflected that same commitment to leading by doing. As they became teachers of summer courses themselves, the network coordinators provided a regional network that linked teachers to their Foxfire roots. The coordinators became increasingly skilled as facilitators and, where the context was supportive, the regional networks began to take on a character of their own.

In the *Mission Valley Consortium*, organized within three districts of a public school system, a formal leadership structure was built in from the beginning. In the fall of 1994, superintendents of three rural school districts on the Flathead, Salish, and Kootenai Indian reservations formed a consortium and, as required by Montana state education law, hired a curriculum coordinator. Kay Sagmiller was hired, and she and the three superintendents created a "management team." The initial mission of the consortium was tied to the job description of the coordinator, which was to organize a curricular review process for all subjects across the three districts. The coordinator added to that mission a commitment to create "a community of learners." In the first two years, great emphasis was placed on building this community.

Working within a structure that was built on top-down leadership from its inception, the coordinator created councils and committees that would share responsibility for leadership and build a broader base of participation. The coordinator formed a primary leadership committee—the Curriculum Coordinating Committee (CCC)—from a diverse group of school personnel that included one teacher from each building, one representative from each curriculum team, five administrators, three superintendents, the coordinator, and one parent. Their charge was to build awareness and help develop consensus about the project's core beliefs. The CCC, in turn, created teacher-staffed curriculum teams in each subject area to do curriculum reviews. These teams were intensively trained by the coordinator and members served as teacher "ambassadors" who could support the project's need to build support and understanding within the three districts. The principals, initially resistant to the curriculum project, formed yet another leadership group. By reviewing historical problems, sharing issues, and visiting each others' schools, they too became invested in the project and the process of curriculum review.

> I understood my goals to be building a team of visionaries who would each return to their own building to support and promote the pur-

While leadership of this network has consistently involved brokering, it has also involved reminding participants of their commitment to democratic education, the central question being how to authentically engage people in their own learning—learning that connects them to others and to the common good. Although these underlying values were introduced initially by Glickman, the emphasis on shared leadership, democratic ideals, and commitment to community has become embedded in the structure of the network. As currently organized, the direction of the league involves a process of democratic decision making in which directors, representing regional chapters, serve as delegates to a larger "congress." It has been the vision of the leadership of this network to develop processes that encourage participants to broker their differences and share their work as interdependent colleagues.

In the *Foxfire Teacher Outreach Network*, the form leadership and learning took was marked by the founder's identity as a classroom teacher. Eliot Wigginton (1985) developed a way of teaching secondary school English that connected students' own experiences to their literacy development. As the process gained recognition, it became known as the "Foxfire way of learning," named after the journal Wigginton and his students published from their classroom. After his success in reaching traditional literacy goals by involving students in research on their own communities, Wigginton sought a way to involve other teachers in the process. He and his colleague, Hilton Smith, created a summer course that involved teachers in learning the philosophy and the practice of experiential teaching and learning. They were aware, however, that providing courses and workshops alone would never lead to sustained improvement of practice. As teachers began to come to Rabun Gap, Georgia, to take courses, the need increased for a support system to help them practice what they learned during the summer. Wigginton's first grant was written to create and nurture "regional networks." Coordinators of the five networks that were formed were also teachers of the level-one and two summer courses, and used the regional groups to support alumnae of the program. As interest in the courses and network continued to grow, the five coordinators, along with Hilton Smith, began to write criteria for new networks, explicating the principles that they thought represented the Foxfire way of learning.

> These networks became the primary vehicles for Foxfire. What started as a support system became quasi-professional development organizations and other agendas evolved. *(Network Leader)*

In this network, experiential methods of teaching developed into the basis for creating a teacher reform movement. Regional networks became the

ences between participants to simply scheduling the meetings. As personal relationships grew stronger among members, schools began to repeat the format and process of discussion in their own settings. "Dine and discuss," as this activity was named, became a basic structure of the network. Participation built on an underlying assumption of parity between school and university personnel came to symbolize the partnership, and it was the director's job—in addition to scheduling meetings, inducing colleagues to participate, visiting districts, and keeping the communication flowing—to protect this value.

In the *League of Professional Schools*, leadership has been heavily influenced by the league's early commitment to democratic schooling. Although an initial partnership was begun by Carl Glickman, forming a league around the idea of creating schools as democracies was suggested spontaneously by several schools that he was working with. (Because this was presented as a long-term commitment rather than a short-term project, prospective schools were not afraid to join, since Glickman's prior work on democratic schooling reassured them that he would not impose his ideas on them.) The number of member schools began to grow, and Glickman enlisted more and more faculty to work in specialized areas, as the schools identified particular issues of concern and commitment.

Some leadership functions were distributed in ways that made them an organic part of the organization itself. For example, as more schools expressed an interest in joining, a mechanism for conveying the basic principles of the network to new members became an issue. As a result of this concern, a two-day orientation program was created to which six-member teams from each prospective new member school were invited. Made up of a principal, teachers, staff, and parents, these teams learned about the democratic premises of the league, what was involved in schoolwide change, and, as the league grew, the importance of action research. The new school teams assumed responsibility for developing a plan for school change, seeking 80 percent approval of their faculty and the support of their school board and superintendent. At present, schools that commit to this change process receive direction and help from an "on-site faculty" (the volunteer school-based team) who, in turn, make progress reports three times a year to the League Congress. The congress is made up of representatives from all the different regions where there are league schools.

> My job was to broker for the schools. We would help identify resources. No program was put on any school forging a democratic community. We were always united on principles and premises of education, not prescriptive programs and practices. *(Network Leader)*

functions of leadership include both backstage and on-stage work in the development of collaborative stances and activities that help stimulate and move the network forward. Brokering, facilitating, and organizing are functions common to the leaders of the networks we studied, but the styles and particulars varied in each network. We discovered how layered the leadership role is and how tied it is to relationships, activities, and settings. Several examples help illustrate how leaders of different networks handle these functions.

In the *Southern Maine Partnership*, leadership evolved from an exclusively university function to one that depended heavily on membership responsibility. The partnership was begun by Paul Heckman, a university professor, who brought six superintendents and a group of teachers together, initiating ongoing discussions within each group. Subsequently a principals' group, early childhood teachers, secondary and middle school teachers, and math teachers also began to meet. By the third year there were seventeen groups. The format was to meet once a month over dinner, read and discuss an article, and decide on the subject for the next meeting. Usually the university partners would organize the meetings and find an appropriate article.

At about the same time, the state issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) to give small sums of money to schools to support school restructuring. Six of the ten districts to receive grants from the state were districts in the partnership. Lynne Miller, the new director of what was to become officially a school-university partnership, encouraged her university-based colleagues to make use of their knowledge and expertise by increasing their participation in and leadership of member groups. As more districts joined, and the partnership took root, ideas about restructuring schools emerged as the most important agenda items for discussion.

> Groups became a way of talking about ideas, without owning them. Groups replicated the format in their own schools. Principals played with the ideas too. There were no prescriptions, but there was a public space for ideas. *(Network Leader)*

The centerpiece of this partnership became the conversations between school- and university-based educators. One role of leadership was to involve additional faculty in the process, increasing the investment of the university in the enterprise. There was no effort to prescribe what the schools should do with the ideas that were discussed; the leadership limited itself to creating a format for discussion. Meeting every month, school and university personnel came to know each other, increasingly valuing intellectual engagement and gaining a better understanding of their differences in perspective. Leadership responsibilities ranged from the complex to the mundane: from brokering the intellectual and ideological differ-

roles, and respond flexibly to unanticipated problems and opportunities is as central to the purposes of networks as it is to the processes of school reform.

Sometimes the gap between the norms of the network and the professional expectations of the schools can be a source of tension. Educators, accustomed to meetings and staff-development activities for which someone else provides the agenda and leads the session, may initially perceive the more open-ended style of network gatherings as too loose or unstructured. Activities that draw on participants rather than experts for professional knowledge may be experienced as "sharing ignorance." Networks try to transcend these perceptions and provide meaningful professional experiences that are based on collaboration. But who facilitates the changes in norms and expectations? How are the activities organized? Who makes it all happen?

## THEME FOUR: LEADERSHIP: CROSS-CULTURAL BROKERING, FACILITATING, AND KEEPING THE VALUES VISIBLE

> I really strive to operate democratically. The organization is never dependent on a single person. The leadership function is to articulate the values and help people work through how to express them. *(Network Leader)*

> I keep my ear to the ground. *(Network Leader)*

> I'm a teacher! I see the network as a big class. I spend a lot of time with personal relationships fighting to protect the emergent, reciprocal stance that has become normative. *(Network Leader)*

> Leaders need to understand the relationship between communication and the development of professional identity. It is a struggle to make sense in common! *(Network Leader)*

Leadership may be one of the least studied aspects of networks, coalitions, and partnerships. Although Parker (1977) speaks about a "facilitator" of a network, he gives few details as to what this means and what facilitators actually do. As federal programs concerned with education increased during the 1970s, there was talk about linking schools with universities in ways that anticipated a form many networks are taking today. In these arrangements the leadership role was often defined as "linking agent" (Crandall, 1977).

Leadership appears to be important in ways that are sometimes not readily apparent to the network constituency, perhaps because of the subtle quality of what leaders do, as well as what they encourage others to do. The

*Small Informal Groups*

Legitimating a role for both university- and school-based educators (i.e., the university personnel can select articles, but the discussion can be geared to school-based educators' perspectives on the ideas).

Offering flexibility or participation to members who are unable, or not yet ready, to make sustained commitment to an activity. (In one of the networks, this became a defining activity for the network.)

Encouraging the sort of informal conversation that is often the backbone of network relationships.

Enabling participants to take charge of the discussion, organization, and/or facilitation.

Characteristic of all these activities is the emphasis on opportunities for the members to talk to and learn from each other, forming relationships that will support them when they return to their work settings. One network leader argued for keeping the structure of even these kinds of activities loose, so that there is room for conversation "between the cracks."

> A lot of work goes on in the men's and women's room, lunch hour, over a beer. . . . I think it's a way of making the cracks become valued, so the crabgrass can grow. . . . If you pack the soil, the crabgrass won't grow.

Although the titles of many activities are the same as those sponsored by school districts and traditional staff development organizations, network activities appear to differ in significant ways. One leader discussed the importance of gatherings where the tone is "welcoming and forgiving"—unlike many schools where the emphasis is on self-sufficiency, individual accountability, and a prescribed way of doing things. Another mentioned the importance of serendipity, all but ruled out of school planning but so much a part of everyday life in schools. In this leader's case, his network developed a strong arts strand because it happened to share space with a theater and arts group during the first summer institute. A consultant suggested using examples of theater, design, and architecture in their work on assessment.

> This turned out to be a powerful intellectual experience for the teachers and, by example, they began to understand that performance assessment was a topic of professional concern for many—not just educators. *(Network Leader)*

Engaging educators in activities in which they learn to work interdependently, reflect on their practice, value their own expertise, play leadership

Serving as a common induction experience while strengthening the identity of the network and the members' sense of belonging.

Building a common base of knowledge and experience that contributes to the group's shared goals and values.

Creating opportunities for participants to meet members from outside their school and to build personal-professional relationships.

*Workshops (Emphasis on Learning by Doing)*

Modeling many of the network's norms by providing members with learning opportunities through collaboration with other participants.

Building collaborative relationships among practitioners that may continue to be a source of support after the workshop has ended.

Encouraging participants to contribute their own knowledge and skills to the work of the network—to give as well as get.

Supporting participants in working directly on projects that will be useful in their classrooms and buildings.

*Teacher Research Teams*

Supporting teachers in creating context-specific knowledge.

Encouraging teachers to ask and answer questions that are important to them in ways that have meaning for their work.

Building interdependent relationships among peers that are grounded in shared professional work.

Supporting the development of teachers as experts who can contribute to their professional community.

*Study Groups*

Providing a way for small, self-selected groups of participants to pursue an area of professional interest with other network colleagues.

Organizing opportunities for sustained professional collaboration that supports ongoing peer networking.

Creating a sense of belonging that may then extend to a larger network.

Enabling participants to assume a leadership role in organizing, presenting, or facilitating the group.

> Reading *Experience and Education* [together] turned out to be the most valuable thing we did because it engaged teachers in the "whys" not just the "hows." This speaks to teachers' personal values as well as what they do in their class. *(Network Leader)*

The following list of activities is drawn from the networks we studied and is intended to be illustrative of the work they do. The activities are matched with the multiple purposes each might serve, illustrating the ways in which the cultural strands of the network—its values, purposes, activities, and relationships—are inextricably woven together.

*Electronic Networking*

Sustaining contact with colleagues and friends after a face-to-face activity.

"Meeting" new people who share a professional interest through web pages, bulletin boards, and conferences.

Connecting with "experts" who might make themselves available during scheduled blocks of time.

Accessing resources available on-line or through the library.

Providing teachers (and in several cases students) with an audience for their work.

*Conferences: Face-to-Face and Electronic*

Providing an opportunity to see the size and scope of the network; experiencing it as a movement that is larger than any one individual contribution.

Renewing contacts with friends met at previous conferences or on-line.

Extending one's personal-professional network through meeting new people.

Making opportunities available to hear nationally known educators validate and expand the work in which members are engaged.

Holding meetings to hear presentations from other school-based educators who have learned to look at their own work as a source of expertise.

*Courses and Institutes (e.g., Focus on Leadership or Writing or Interdisciplinary Studies)*

Providing knowledge and skills in a relevant area of school reform.

also built the substance of the conference experience around work that the participants did together. Professional Development Schools (PDS) based the shape of their collaboration on work done in problem-solving sessions attended by the representatives of their school/university partnerships.

Activities like these serve different levels of interrelated purposes. Speakers provide information and inspiration—conferring a sense of validation by an outside authority. But because the design of collaborative activities is driven by participants' needs and interests, they can also focus on their own particular problems by giving people alternative ways of thinking and acting. In this process, activities build identification with a larger group of colleagues, and commitment to purposes beyond one's own classroom, school, or district. They support the sort of reciprocity that motivates members to contribute to the larger project, believing that it will be helpful to their individual work as well (Kadushin, 1976).

Most problems in education are not solved by the mechanical application of simplistic schemes or panaceas. Peer presentations have the advantage of offering insights into the complexities of the process from colleagues who share comparable goals and constraints. (Four Seasons teachers found collaboration essential to their progress on assessment work; the PDS network had a much better vision statement after the contribution of all of its participants.)

But the effects of collaboration extend in many directions. Working actively with others strengthens the investment participants have in the network; the work becomes, quite literally, their own. Connecting with other members across schools, institutions, roles, and geography enables participants to develop more complex views of the issues they are concerned about, and encourages them to take different perspectives and different ways of knowing into account (Granovetter, 1973). One leader commented:

> What the schools were seeing and hearing from each other was more powerful than any facilitation. It opened up worlds to people. There were things they never thought about and had never imagined. (*Network Leader)*

Collaboration within the network develops the skills of communication, negotiation, and accommodation that members need to translate their ideas into proposals for school change outside the network. While participating in the many connecting activities that are involved in this work, members develop relationships that bind them more closely to the goals of the larger group, for, in important ways, a network is built on its relationships.

> You really have to focus on relationships first, then create structures. All this is part of creating an environment that has multiple entry points. *(Network Leader)*

**Table 1. Purposes, Participants and Contexts of the Sample of Educational Reform Networks—Continued**

| *Network* | *Participants* | *Purposes* | *Contexts* |
|---|---|---|---|
| National Network for Educational Renewal | school-university partnerships | to promote the simultaneous renewal of schools and the education of educators | national |
| Network of Progressive Educators | teachers, teacher educators, parents, public and private schools, child advocacy organizations | provide a professional network for people who share the same values and beliefs about progressive education | national |
| North Dakota Study Group | educators committed to the principles of progressive education who have been invited to join | bring together educators from across the country, who are committed to progressive education, support democratic schools and are interested in assessment | national |
| Program for School Improvement —League of Professional Schools | schools committed to shared governance, instructional initiatives, and action research | to help create schools that are driven by internal decisions based on the school's own criteria for success—"democratic schools" | regional/national |
| Professional Development Schools | professional development school partnerships, university and school-based educators | to share support and build knowledge about professional development schools (school-university partnership) | national |
| Southern Maine Partnership | school districts | to help schools reflect on their own practice/move toward restructuring and help the university reflect on and restructure its preparation of educators (evolved over time) | regional |

**Table 1. Purposes, Participants, and Contexts of the Sample of Educational Reform Networks**

| *Network* | *Participants* | *Purposes* | *Contexts* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Breadloaf Rural Teacher Network | secondary school English teachers and their students | ease the isolation of teachers in rural schools across the country | national - electronic |
| Center for Collaborative Education | New York City public schools; Teachers and Directors | to promote education reform and school restructuring based on the successful practices of its member schools | NYC affiliate Coalition of Essential Schools |
| Consortium for Educational Change | districts that, in conjunction with their N.E.A. union leadership, commit to involvement—superintendents, school boards, union leaders and, increasingly, community members | build trust and collaboration between the teachers' union and district/school administrators | regional |
| Diversity and Excellence Working for the Education of Youth (DEWEY) | 8 school districts selected because of their increasingly diverse student populations; administrators, teachers, and university, based educators | share and support practices that promote diversity and excellence | regional (Westchester and Rockland Counties in New York) |
| Four Seasons | teachers | collaboration among three networks to build knowledge about how teachers learn, use, and shape authentic assessment | national - electronic |
| Foxfire Teacher Outreach Network | secondary school English teachers | support individual teachers who have adopted the Foxfire approach to the teaching of writing and learning and to integrate that approach into the life of the school | national |
| Harvard Principals' Center | public school principals in the greater Boston area | provide a professional support network for principals committed to school improvement | regional |
| (Harvard) Teachers' Center | teachers from the greater Boston area | to provide teachers committed to their own professional growth and to school improvement opportunities to learn and share with like-minded colleagues | regional |
| Institute for Literacy Studies—Elementary Teachers' Network | primarily elementary teachers | promote effective literacy instruction using the primary language record as the focus | regional (NYC) |
| International Network of Principals' Centers | principals centers, both nationally and internationally | connect the professional support networks that serve school principals | international |
| Mission Valley Consortium | all members of the Mission Valley school community | review and revise curriculum in participating districts and build a sense of shared ownership and commitment to curriculum reform | regional |

> For several years we met once a month over dinner. University professors would find an appropriate article and the groups would eat and discuss ideas. There was no attempt to prescribe anything. People would take the ideas and the format back to their school and create similar discussions. *(Network Leader)*

> Regional networks grew out of a real need to provide a support system for teachers after they had taken a summer course on the Foxfire way of teaching and learning. These became a lifeline for the teachers. *(Network Leader)*

> People came because they knew that NCREST was a "bridge group" and the idea of a larger purpose grew because there was trust and people were unafraid to share their difficulties as well as their successes about their partnerships. We liked each other and looked forward to the meetings. *(Network Leader)*

> We were fortunate, we got a grant that sponsored teachers coming to a summer conference for nine years. But the teachers all said they were devastated by the antagonism they felt at the local level. That is how we started the electronic network. *(Network Leader)*

Regardless of how these networks evolved, the initial relationships seemed to involve meetings, conversations, or activities that created opportunities for people to gain information while receiving psychological support (Parker, 1979). Whether original purposes were broad or narrow, focused or only loosely defined, seems of less importance than the fact of people being brought together who think that what they are doing is worthwhile and productive. This contrasts with many conventional professional development efforts because of the nature of the activities that are mounted, the relationships among the participants, their participation in shaping the network's work, and the perceived opportunities for personal and professional development afforded by the network.

### THEME 3: ACTIVITIES AND RELATIONSHIPS AS IMPORTANT BUILDING BLOCKS

The activities sponsored by a network are designed to serve the collaborative's purposes, which include building relationships among participants. At the Diversity and Excellence Working for the Education of Youth (DEWEY) leadership academy, members not only listened to experts, but presented their own work to peers and made connections with participants from other districts who shared their problems and concerns. The summer workshops, sponsored by Four Seasons, offered presentations by experts, but

with one school seeking a consultation with Glickman, and grew to encompass over 100 schools that embraced his democratic vision. A fourth pattern, where networks were formed to support educators as they tried to develop and support their reform ideas in a hostile environment, is illustrated by the Center for Collaborative Education in New York City. This network was organized to protect and support several alternative elementary and secondary schools that were multi-age, student-centered, heterogeneously grouped, and developing strong school-based accountability measures within a large urban, highly bureaucratized system. Table 1 shows the variety of the purposes, participants, and contexts of the reform networks we studied.

## THEME 2: BUILDING COLLABORATION, CONSENSUS, AND COMMITMENT

Networks derive great power and energy from the possibility that they offer members a voice in creating and sustaining a group in which their professional identity and interests are valued. Norms of participation and leadership support agendas that are responsive to the members and their particular needs in ways that most educational institutions are not; yet the very egalitarian quality that draws people to networks can be a source of tension. Most educators have spent their professional lives in school organizations that expect self-sufficiency in the classroom, but dependence on outside sources for expertise. The transition to working interdependently is not always easy. In the Four Seasons Network, for example, teachers listened to the ideas of experts concerning assessment as if the experts could provide them with all the answers. When those same teachers began to organize regional conferences on assessment, however, they recognized that their own peers had a significant contribution to make to the understanding of assessment practices. As one teacher commented,

> When I was first in Four Seasons, I thought the gurus were the only ones who knew anything. It took a while before I felt that I had something important to say and that I was an expert too. *(Four Seasons Teacher)*

The ways in which people are brought together affects the interplay between participants' developing relationships with each other and with the ideas that will form the basis of their work. Collaborative relationships build trust, essential to the development of ideas, and ideas build network interest and participation as they themselves are transformed by the participants and fed back into the network (Schön, 1977). In the process, people become committed to each other and to larger ideas and ideals that expand their world and their work.

> The partnership started with conversations. In the beginning we had as many as seventeen different groups. These conversations led to a linkage between teacher development and school development. *(Network Leader)*

> We began in one rural school where the principal wanted to change. Another school heard about our discussions . . . then seven to eight other schools eventually came to a meeting and said "Let's form a League, looking at schools as democratic institutions." *(Network Leader)*

> In the first wave, we began eight school-university partnerships and had the postulates as a guide representing the purposes of the network. In the second wave we reinvented the process. *(Network Leader)*

While the networks evolved from different starting points—some from conversations, courses, or consultations (e.g., the League of Professional Schools and the Southern Maine Partnership) and others with high purpose, then figuring out how to engage their membership in working toward the goals (e.g., the National Network for Educational Renewal, the Consortium for Educational Change, the Mission Valley Network, Foxfire)—the idea or focus of the network founders eventually became a superordinate goal for the group. Ideas were usually broadly formulated in ways that left much room for learning, teaching, shaping, and inventing. A strong sense developed in the group that working together in this way would be of mutual importance to its members and the institutions from which they came (e.g., school/university educators, cross-role groups, groups of districts, people of like mind in geographically distant places, etc.).

### *Patterns of Development*

The networks developed in a number of different ways. For some it was a slow, evolving process in which one activity gave rise to another and eventually led to the need for a more systematic way of connecting. For example, Foxfire began teaching summer classes to teachers from a variety of school settings. As it became clear over time that these teachers needed support during the year, the Foxfire Teacher Outreach Network was created. In contrast, the National Network for Educational Renewal originated with the explicit purpose of linking the restructuring of schools with simultaneous renewal of teacher education. It was this goal itself that necessitated the formation of partnerships between teacher education institutions and schools. In an example of a third pattern we observed—where strong leaders were able to attract and bring together people who were willing to follow their vision—the League of Professional Schools began with Carl Glickman's passion to develop schools as democracies. A relationship began

How do these networks evolve and take shape, and how do they build commitment to common purposes? Who leads these networks and what is the nature of their work and their learning? What activities bind people together in these networks and how are they organized? What tensions and dilemmas do they face in the process of developing and sustaining these entities?

We expanded our inquiry to gain additional information from other educational reform networks that had been in existence for enough time to have a history, were made up of a variety of organizational forms, and linked together people who were of different status and played many roles (see Table 1 for complete list). In addition to interviewing the leaders, we collected their newsletters and other print materials to expand our understanding and gain further insight into these seemingly improvisational arrangements, effective in practice but hard to characterize theoretically or conceptually.

We found five descriptive organizational themes woven into the fabric of all sixteen networks that we studied, as well as five tensions that were a source of recurring negotiation. These organizational themes and tensions provided the frame we used to better understand the practices, structure, and culture of these networks (Miles, 1978).

## ORGANIZATIONAL THEMES

### THEME 1: PURPOSES AND DIRECTIONS

Central to the "start-up" of networks are the myriad ways organizers rally prospective participants to a particular cause, idea, or set of connections, and the ways in which those connections grow to encompass larger goals. As one network founder states, "You've got to have a compelling idea . . . a dust particle around which to coalesce . . . but it must be compelling to the potential coalescees." *(Network Leader)*

Since educators belong to a variety of organizations and have tremendous claims on their time, it would seem that reform networks must somehow demonstrate a compelling reason to convince people to participate in what is, after all, still another activity (Schön, 1977). In practice, we found that the reasons for the creation of networks were often embedded in the particulars of the contexts out of which they emerged. Some began with informal conversations that led to broader and deeper purposes, while others, starting with lofty purposes, had to develop practical ways of engaging people in understanding what these ideas might mean on a day-to-day basis. Still others were begun by charismatic leaders and the networks were organized around the vision associated with a particular person. For example:

different kinds of people. Participants have opportunities to grow and develop in a professional community that focuses on their development, providing ways of learning that are more in keeping with their lived professional lives (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993).

## TOWARD A DEFINITION OF NETWORKS

Although many educators have observed and participated in educational reform networks for some time, little is known about how such networks are formed, what they focus on, and how they are sustained. Much of what we do know about these networks is anecdotal or drawn from studying single networks that have their own particular context and purpose (Sirotnik & Goodlad, 1988).

The most important general study of networks, done by Allen Parker (1977), described five "key" ingredients drawn from studying over sixty networks organized for educational improvement more than twenty years ago. At that time he argued that each of these networks should have:

A strong sense of commitment to the innovation.

A sense of shared purpose.

A mixture of information sharing and psychological support.

An effective facilitator.

Voluntary participation and equal treatment. (p. 25)

A key insight for him was that members "have a sense of being part of a special group or movement" (p. 7). Parker's key ingredients, and his observation about the role networks play in helping people work outside the system, served as the basis for an initial working definition as we began to inquire into the nature of contemporary educational reform networks.

## WHOM DID WE TALK TO AND WHAT DID WE ASK?

At the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching (NCREST) at Teachers College, Columbia University, we have been learning more about educational reform networks, while helping to support and, in some cases, organize them. After extended discussions with the leaders of three of the networks organized by NCREST, we recognized that these reform networks, unlike more permanent institutions, were intentionally constructed without rigid borders, buildings, or permanent structures and embedded in a complicated web of connections, events, and relationships. These interviews led us to seek answers to such questions as:

> The first-time attendee at a principals' center conference arrives promptly at the beginning of the second day without having had a chance to first consult her program. Twenty to thirty people are drinking coffee, eating pastries, and milling comfortably between the four or five conversation groups scattered throughout the lounge area. After thirty minutes of good talk on an issue of special interest to her, the newcomer looks at her watch and feels guilty: "But what are we supposed to be doing?" she asks the woman next to her. "This," she is quickly assured.

> Two neighboring districts have put intensive resources into independent initiatives on performance assessment. One district has concentrated its work at the primary level and the other at the secondary level. Administrators and teachers in both districts want a K–12 program. The two systems are active members in a regional partnership and principals from each district contact the executive director of the partnership asking her help. They suggest she convene a meeting of the leadership teams from both districts to work collaboratively on assessment in a retreat setting.

> Although her district has been a member of a network for almost two years, this is Ellen's first time to attend an activity. Somehow she's never gotten involved—never even really understood what a network was—but this time she comes for the topic: alternative scheduling. As a ninth-grade English teacher, she thinks this is her issue. Entering the presentation room she is pleased and confused. Instead of a podium for a distinguished speaker, the front of the room has a long table with name cards identifying the nine presenters as teachers from neighboring schools. Ellen has always found the advice of official "experts" somewhat removed from the classroom, but colleagues? Did they know enough? The next surprise is the arrival of her superintendent and principal, who join the audience as participants. Ellen has never done staff development with her administrators. Is she supposed to take her cues from them, or can she feel free to present her questions and concerns from her own point of view? Her ruminations on the lay of the land are finally interrupted by a greeting from another ninth-grade teacher in her building. "I'm so glad you came. You're going to love this!" she says enthusiastically.

These vignettes, scenes from four different educational networks, introduce us to the workings of an organizational form that is of growing importance to the reform movement in American education. Networks are a way of engaging school-based educators in directing their own learning; allowing them to sidestep the limitations of institutional roles, hierarchies, and geographic locations; and encouraging them to work together with many

# Networks and Reform in American Education

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*Educational reform networks are becoming increasingly important as alternative forms of teacher and school development in this time of unprecedented reform of schools. These networks appear to be a way of engaging school-based educators in better directing their own learning; allowing them to sidestep the limitations of institutional roles, hierarchies, and geographic locations; and encouraging them to work with many different kinds of people.*

*In a study of sixteen educational reform networks, we found that they shared organizational themes relating to: (1) purposes and direction; (2) building collaboration, consensus, and commitment; (3) activities and relationships as important building blocks; (4) leadership as cross-cultural brokering and facilitating; and (5) dealing with the funding problem.*

*Regardless of their differences, the sixteen networks we studied appear to have in common agendas more often challenging than prescriptive; learning that is more indirect than direct; formats more collaborative than individualistic; work that is intentionally more integrated than fragmented; leadership more facilitative than directive; thinking that encourages more multiple perspectives; values that are both context-specific and generalized; and structures more movement-like than organization-like.*

Eight assistant superintendents from neighboring districts gather in a member's boardroom for their monthly network meeting. As the other seven listen, one participant introduces a presentation on their district's efforts at implementing a model of inclusion for special education students. "Please understand," he begins, "I'm here to tell you what we're doing and share what works for us, but we also have some real problems and I'm hoping you can help." In the hour that follows the member's opening remarks the participants lean across the large conference table that divides them to share their own experiences and insights. The discussion ranges from issues of implementation and instruction to politics, ethics, and philosophy.

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