# Building a communities of practice for the continuing professional development of History teachers: Insights from the TEMS project

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## Abstract

In a period of rapid curriculum change, many South African teachers are faced with the arduous task of new curriculum development and implementation. This is particularly true of the challenges facing history teachers as they embrace new curricular expectations. While some teachers view this as a daunting endeavour, others disturb this assumption, embrace the challenge and seek out opportunities for personal professional development. This paper draws on the findings of TEMS teacher development project. It argues for a community of practice approach to continuing professional development (CPD) of teachers of history. The peculiar demands of teaching this discipline in post-apartheid South Africa necessitates the creation of 'safe spaces' for teachers of history to engage with the new discourse in history education. Communities of practice as espoused by Wenger[1] offers a useful theoretical approach for CPD in history especially in the absence of substantive support from the Department of Education for teachers of history.

## Introduction

Day and Sachs contend that:

> The increased investment in practitioner inquiry as a way of learning, in professional development schools, or networked learning communities … are … signs that CPD (continuing professional development) is becoming understood to have a range of forms, locations and practices

1 E Wenger, *Communities of practice: learning, meaning and identity* (New York, Cambridge University Press), 1998.

> appropriate to its many purposes. Yet both time to learn and the right timing are essential to success.

In the above quote, Day and Sachs[2] present what they refer to as an optimist view of a new understanding of the purposes and forms of continuing professional development. They assert that internationally, there still is a substantial dearth of understanding with respect to the outcomes of teacher professional development as it occurs in its various forms, and that continuing professional development "is alive, but not thriving".

Against a background of fragmented and inequitable apartheid education, South African teacher professional development is diverse in terms of its service providers, contexts, and clients and as such presents unique challenges for continuing professional development. The issues, tensions and problems of teacher professional development in South Africa are indeed multi-faceted. Adler, writing from a South African perspective, comments on *one* significant aspect of continuing professional development of teachers as follows:

> There is little contention that teachers need to know the subject matter they are teaching, and moreover, that they need to know how to present this clearly to learners. The issue is how to integrate further learning of the subject with learning about how students in school acquire subject knowledge.

In describing the subject-pedagogy tension in teacher development programmes, Adler notes that teachers must be competent in terms of both the subject matter knowledge they teach and the ways in which to teach this subject matter knowledge. She highlights an important challenge that faces teacher development, that is, to integrate 'further learning' of subject matter knowledge with subject pedagogy.[3] .However, many teachers in South Africa have a limited conceptual knowledge base. This problem has its roots in the poor quality of education many teachers were subjected to under apartheid.[4] The challenge becomes

2 C Day & J Sachs, Professionalism, performativity and empowerment: discourses in the politics, policies and purposes of continuing professional development, C Dayand & J Sachs (Eds), 2004. *International handbook on continuing professional development of teachers* (Maidenhead, Open University Press, 2004), pp. 3-32.

3 J Adler & Y Reed, Researching teachers' take-up from a formal in-service professional development programme. In J Adler & Y Reed, (Eds), *Challenges of teacher development: an investigation of take-up in South Africa*. (Pretoria, Van Schaik Publishers, 2002), pp. 18-35.

4 N Taylor & P Vinjevold, *Getting learning right: report of the president's education initiative research project*. Johannesburg: Joint Education Trust/Department of Education, 1999.

more complex in a teacher development programme when teachers have limited or no subject matter knowledge in the subject they are expected to teach. This challenge is amplified in South African education, which has been undergoing unprecedented reform.

Policy development in teacher education has been prolific since the mid 1990s. While Welch is of the view that efforts to base educational policy in South Africa on sound research especially with regard to curriculum has at times been 'visionary',[5] Harley and Wedekind argue that the most influential and radical policy, namely, "... C2005 did not arise from a 'situational analysis' of existing realities. Teachers, and probably most teacher educators, simply found themselves in a new curriculum world".[6] Sayed[7] concurs that South African education policy comprises symbolic gestures and government initiatives that are out of sync with the 'realities on the ground'. He describes educational policy change in South Africa as 'symbolic rhetoric'. It becomes clear that South Africa's transition to a democracy from a previously fragmented education and social system has thrown up several challenges for all teachers (including those that teach history). Several questions remain unanswered: How do history teachers from disparate backgrounds address the expectations of a new curriculum that suggests a new ideology and pedagogy? How can we create a safe space for history teachers with differing social identities and values to begin to engage with the task of making meaning of and developing the school history curriculum development? The stark absence of substantive teacher development programmes to address teachers' needs has manifested itself in some teachers employing alternative mechanisms for learning. One such mechanism or model is a teacher community of practice. This usually takes the form of a voluntary network or grouping of teachers across schools. These teachers group themselves according to teaching subjects (or learning areas).

In this paper I draw on experiences gained from the Teaching Economic and Management Sciences Teacher Development project (TEMS) and

5 T Welch, Teacher education in South Africa before, during and after apartheid: an overview. In J Adler & Y Reed, (Eds). *Challenges of teacher development: an -investigation of take-up in South Africa*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers, 2002, pp. 17-35.

6 KL Harley & VK Wedekind, Political change, curriculum change and social formation, 1990 to 2002. In L Chisholm (Ed). *Changing class: educational and social change in post apartheid South Africa*. Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2004, pp. 195-220.

7 Y Sayed, The case of teacher education in post apartheid South Africa: politics and priorities. In L Chisholm, (Ed). *Changing class: educational and social change in post apartheid South Africa.* Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2004, pp. 247-266.

offer insights for the development of communities of practice for teachers of history. The TEMS project took place in the greater Durban area of KwaZulu-Natal. The research study set out to explore the nature of teacher learning in a community of practice in the context of curriculum change. Of significance was that this 'community of practice' was a structure that had been conceived by a group of interested teachers eager to support each other in the absence of support from the Department of Education. This presented an excellent research opportunity for me (as university academic involved in economics teacher education) to study the nature of teacher learning in this context while making a professional contribution to the work of this group. The project entailed a study of how teachers cooperated, collaborated and made meaning within this learning community. One of the critical questions that this study sought to answer was: *What is the nature of teacher learning in a community of practice?* Using insights from the TEMS project, I explore the implications of Wenger's[8] social practice theory of learning in a community of practice [for CPD? for teachers of history.

## Communities of practice and teacher learning

Among the many reasons why teachers often find formal professional development disappointing include the fact that teachers are positioned as clients needing 'fixing' rather than as owners and managers of programmes that supposedly aim to support their learning.[9] [This sentence reads somewhat clumsy. Reformulate] Clark notes that many teacher professional development initiatives are often superficial, short-term and insufficiently sensitive to complex local conditions. He accordingly maintains that teachers must become agents of their own and each other's learning, and that teachers' perspectives on their work should be carefully considered.[10] "In education, the emphasis has shifted from *describing* various communities of practice to *creating* various communities for the purpose of improving practice, particularly

8 E Wenger, *Communities of practice: learning, meaning and identity*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

9 CM Clark, *Talking shop: authentic conversation and teacher learning*. (Ed). New York: Teachers College Press. Y Sayed, (2004) The case of teacher education in post apartheid South Africa: politics and priorities. In L Chisholm, (Ed). *Changing class: educational and social change in post apartheid South Africa.* Cape Town: HSRC Press, pp. 247-266, 2001.

10 CM Clark, *Talking shop: authentic conversation and teacher learning*. (Ed). New York: Teachers College Press, 2001.

as it relates to professional development".[11] Communities of practice originated in response to several barriers to professional development that exist in the culture of schooling, such as the isolated nature of teaching and the lack of agreement as to what constitutes acceptable practices. They provide opportunities for collaborative reflection and inquiry through dialogue and thus develop common tools, language, images, roles, assumptions and understandings.[12]

In their study of the role that teacher communities of practice play in the development of the capacity of teachers to implement innovative pedagogical practices that make use of information and communications technology in three Canadian schools, Wideman and Owston[13] conclude that communities of practice are crucial to sustaining and expanding the momentum for change. Working with science teachers, Avery and Carlsen[14] studied the effects of teachers' membership of communities of practice on their management of their classroom communities. They found that teachers who had strong subject matter knowledge and experience with science were able to teach science in a 'sociologically' useful way. Teachers drew on their membership in communities of practice for support, ideas, and curricular innovations. An important argument for teacher community is that it provides a site or location for teacher learning. There exists a 'natural' interconnectedness of teacher learning and professional communities.[15]

Teacher communities differ from law and medical communities. Law and medical professions display their own unique characteristics and vary in the extent to which they are communities as compared to teacher communities. Membership of such communities entails the sharing of an identity, common values, role definitions and a common language. Teachers generally differ in their understandings of the goals of teaching, the structure of the curriculum, assessment, and basically

11 PW Wesley & V Buysse, Communities of practice: expanding professional roles to promote reflection and shared inquiry. *Topics in early childhood special education*, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 114–23, 2001.

12 PW Wesley & V Buysse, (2001) Communities of practice: expanding professional roles to promote reflection and shared inquiry. *Topics in early childhood special education*, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 114–23.

13 HH Wideman & RD Owston, (2003) *Communities of practice in professional development: supporting teachers in innovating with technology*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, April 2003.

14 LM Avery & WS Carlsen, (2001) *Knowledge, identity and teachers' multiple communities of practice.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Association for Research in Science Teaching, MO St Louis.

15 M McLaughlin & JE Talbert, (2001) *Professional communities and the work of high school teachers.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

anything that pertains to teaching. Differing values amongst teachers are linked to several factors, including the grade level they teach, the disciplines they teach, their teaching qualifications, and the type of pupils they serve. "Compared to medicine or law, education has been unable to forge a shared language of norms and values; and practically every significant question in education remains contentious".[16] This certainly has significant implications for teacher development and highlights the challenges of establishing professional community in teaching. Such challenges are exacerbated in education because here value systems, ideologies and teacher beliefs are more varied than in the case of law and the medical profession where consensus about 'end' and 'means' is much more easily achieved. The phenomenon of the contentiousness of education's norms, values and ideologies is pronounced in South African education where teachers' manifest behaviour has been shaped by a tapestry of influences and ideologies that date back to apartheid education.

In her analysis of case study data from a school reform initiative in a middle school in a major city in the south-western United States, Phillips concludes that by creating 'powerful learning' that is high quality learning for teachers, student achievement across all socio-economic, ethnic and academic groups improved dramatically. Teachers at the school were able to create a set of innovative curriculum programmes.

These programmes were focussed on previously low achieving students. Phillips notes that "…learning communities create spaces for teachers to form professional relationships, to share information and to provide collegial support".[17] Such collegial communities of practice represent a marked shift from traditional approaches to staff development. Research by Lieberman,[18] Westheimer[19] and McLaughlin and Talbert[20] also suggest that such communities of practice have enormous potential for teacher learning.

16 P Grossman, S Wineburg & S Woolworth, "Toward a theory of teacher community", *Teachers College Record*, Vol. 103, No. 6, pp. 942 – 1012, 2001.

17 J Phillips, Powerful learning: creating learning communities in urban school reform. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp. 240-258, 2003.

18 A Lieberman, *Building a professional culture in schools*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1988.

19 J Westheimer, *Among schoolteachers: community, autonomy, and ideology in teachers' work*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1998.

20 M McLaughlin & JE Talbert, *Professional communities and the work of high school teachers.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

In evaluating the usefulness of a socio-cultural approach for analysing teachers' responses to the professional learning of standards-based reform policies in the United States through a case study of six elementary teachers, Gallucci[21] asserts that communities of practice were sites for teacher learning and were mediators of teachers' responses to institutional reform. Characteristics of such communities of practice influenced the degree to which teachers worked out negotiated and thoughtful responses to policy demands. These findings confirm the value of teacher learning communities as sites for teacher learning. The study being reported on in this paper is a response to the challenges of South African institutional reform in the form of new education policy, as it seeks to explore how teachers use a teacher learning community as a vehicle to come to terms with new education policy.

An important element in the situative perspective on learning is the notion of 'distributed cognition'. Putman and Borko[22] assert that:

> The notion of distributed cognition suggests that when diverse groups of teachers with different types of knowledge and expertise come together in discourse communities, community members can draw upon and incorporate each other's expertise to create rich conversations and new insights into teaching and learning. The existing cultures and discourse communities in many schools, however, do not value or support critical and reflective examination of teaching practice.

This notion is supported by research conducted by Grossman and colleagues.[23] They state that forming a professional community requires teachers to engage in both intellectual and social work; that is, developing new ways of thinking and reasoning collectively, as well as new forms of interacting personally. It is important to be cognisant of the fact that in the development of teacher community some people know things that others do not know and that the collective knowledge exceeds that of the individual. Learning from fellow participants requires the ability to listen carefully to fellow participants, especially as these participants struggle to formulate thoughts in response to challenging intellectual content. Listening to the ill-formed thoughts and ideas of fellow participants

21 C Gallucci, Communities of practice and mediation of teachers' responses to standards-based reform. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 11(35), 2003.

22 RT Putman & H Borko, What do new views about knowledge and thinking have to say about research on teacher learning? *Educational Researcher*, 29 (1), pp. 4-15, 2000.

23 P Grossman, S Wineburg, & Woolworth, Toward a theory of teacher community. *Teachers College Record*, Vol. 103, No. 6, pp. 942 – 1012, 2001.

may be a new activity that participants have to learn to engage with.

Communities of practice alter the "linear relationships through which knowledge 'trickles down' from those who discover professional knowledge to those who provide and receive services shaped by it because the model invites and builds upon knowledge from each".[24] Cognition is distributed across the individual and other persons and is not considered solely as the property of individuals.[25] Participants "experience transformation in unique yet socially supportive ways", as they extend each other's thinking beyond what they might do as individuals.[26] In this way, teachers are better able to engage in learning that may influence their practice. Putman and Borko concur that for teachers to be successful in learning new knowledge and pedagogic skills, they need opportunities to participate "in a professional community that discusses new teacher materials and strategies and that supports risk taking … entailed in transforming practice".[27]

## A brief note on the research methodology

The purpose of the research study was to investigate teachers' learning in a teacher community of practice, designed in accordance with the principles of social practice theory. This study was informed by a symbolic interactionist perspective which entails interpretative research that is concerned with how people see things and how they construct their meanings.[28] It is located in the qualitative paradigm. Contextual factors play an important role in influencing teachers and teacher learning and

it is for this reason that a qualitative research study was considered to be most appropriate.[29] This qualitative study spanned a sixteen month period, commencing in September of 2002. It entailed tracking teachers as they participated in the TEMS community of practice. Three in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participating teachers;

24 PW Wesley & V Buysse, "Communities of practice: expanding professional roles to promote reflection and shared inquiry" *Topics in early childhood special education*, 21( 2), pp. 114–23, 2001.

25 RT Putman & H Borko, What do new views about knowledge and thinking have to say about research on teacher learning? *Educational Researcher*, 29 (1), pp. 4-15, 2000.

26 S Long, Separating rhetoric from reality: supporting teachers in negotiating beyond the status quo. *Journal of Teacher Education,* 55, (2), pp. 141-153, 2004.

27 RT Putman & H Borko, What do new views about knowledge and thinking have to say about research on teacher learning? *Educational Researcher*, 29 (1), pp. 4-15, 2000.

28 P Woods, *Researching the art of teaching: ethnography for educational use*. London: Routledge, 1996.

29 G Walford, *Doing qualitative educational research: a personal guide to the research process.* London: Continuum. G Anderson (1999) *Fundamentals of educational research*. London: Falmer Press, 2001.

one at the commencement of the programme, one approximately halfway through the programme and a final interview. Two lesson observations were conducted, with the first one taking place early in the programme and the second nine months into the programme. Detailed field notes of each participating school were recorded in order to develop a thick description of the context within which participating teachers were working. Detailed observation notes of teachers' participation in the monthly teacher development workshops were recorded. As the project progressed relationships of trust began to develop between the teachers and me. I was then able to negotiate for both lesson and workshop observations to be video recorded. Large quantities of rich, textured data were gathered over the sixteen month period. An inductive process of open coding was used to analyse the data.[30]

## Applying Wenger's theory of learning in a community of practice

According to Wenger's framework, an individual's learning in a community of practice can be analysed in terms of four components that make up the concept of learning in a community of practice; namely, meaning, practice, identity and community. The focus of Wenger's theory of learning is on 'learning as participation', that is, being active participants in the *practices* of social communities and constructing *identities* in relation to these communities. He posits the following elements of a social theory of learning:

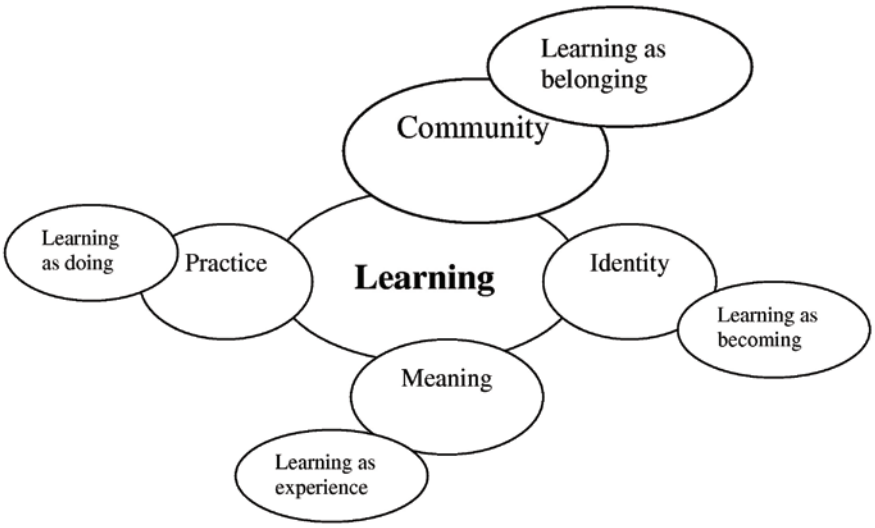
- Meaning: a way of talking about our (changing) ability – individually and collectively – to experience our life and the world as meaningful.
- Practice: a way of talking about the shared historical and social resources, frameworks, and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action.
- Community: a way of talking about social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognizable as competence.
- Identity: a way of talking about how learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities.

These elements are deeply interconnected and mutually defining. The concept 'community of practice' is a constitutive element of a broader conceptual framework, whose 'analytical power' resides in its ability to

30 E Henning, *Finding your way in qualitative research.* Pretoria: Van Schaik, 2005.

integrate the components of the model.[31]

***The elements of Wenger's Social Theory of Learning***




The focus on participation implies that for individuals, *learning* is an issue of engaging in and contributing to the practices of their communities.

The data analysis reveals that teacher learning had occurred for all participants, but to differing degrees and along different trajectories. The following table presents an aggregate picture of teachers' changing understandings of the new learning area they were engaging in, their evolving practices and their evolving identities. While learning had occurred for all teachers, the extent of teachers' changing understandings of the learning area varied.

31 E Wenger, *Communities of practice: learning, meaning and identity*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

**Table 1: A composite table of teachers' learning in terms of meaning, practice and identity**

| | Evolving *Meaning* (Extent of change) | | | | | Evolving *Practice* (Extent of change) | | | | | Evolving *Identities* (Extent of change) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Not discernable | Limited/marginal | Moderate/modest/fair | Substantially notable | Significant/profound | Not discernable | Limited/marginal | Moderate/modest/fair | Substantially notable | Significant/profound | Not discernable | Limited/marginal | Moderate/modest/fair | Substantially notable | Significant/profound |
| John | | | | | X | | | | | X | | | | | X |
| Mary | | | | X | | | | | X | | | | | X | |
| Ben | | X | | | | | X | | | | | | | X | |
| Kim | | | | X | | | | | X | | | X | | | |
| Shirley | | | | X | | | | | X | | | | X | | |
| Beth | | | | X | | | | | X | | | | | | X |
| Debbie | | | | | X | | | | | X | | | X | | |

Wenger suggests key indicators to analyse the emergence of a community. From the table below, we see that a community of practice had certainly begun to take root in the TEMS programme.

**Table 2: Criteria for the emergence of a community of practice**

(P = Substantially Present; D = Developing; A = Absent)

| Criteria | P | D | A |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sustained mutual relationships – harmonious or conflictual | x | | |
| Shared ways of engaging in doing things together | x | | |
| The rapid flow of information and the propagation of innovation | x | | |
| Very quick set-up of a problem to be involved | x | | |
| Substantial overlap in participants' descriptions of who belongs | | x | |
| Knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to an enterprise | x | | |
| Mutually defining identities | | x | |
| The ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products | | x | |
| Jargon and shortcuts to communication as well as ease of producing new ones | x | | |
| A shared discourse reflecting a certain perspective on the world | | x | |

Although Wenger's framework provided a useful tool for an analysis of learning as constituting these four components, these components and the changes that had taken place within them were inextricably linked to one another. An intricate relationship between the components existed. Although each component of learning had been analysed separately, they were in fact interconnected in a complex way. In terms of Wenger's first component, 'meaning' namely, 'learning as experience', the study has elucidated the changing understandings and meanings (changing ability) of the TEMS participants with regard to the new learning area and the teaching thereof as a result of participation in the TEMS community of practice. Teacher learning *had* in fact taken place. Teachers had begun to experience the new curriculum as meaningful. While some degree of uncertainty still existed, these uncertainties were not as pronounced as at the commencement of the programme. With regard to teachers' understandings of the content of the learning area, it was evident that teachers had experienced definite shifts in their content knowledge and pedagogic content knowledge base.

With regard to 'practice' namely, 'learning as doing', the study illuminated teachers' changing practices in relation to their teaching. All participating teachers had experienced changes in their practice which they attributed to their participation in the TEMS project. Changing 'identity' namely, 'learning as becoming' was signalled by the fact that teachers experienced their learning in terms of changed perspectives about who they were and what they were becoming. Teachers identified themselves as EMS [explain abbreviation] teachers and envisaged a future for themselves as EMS teachers at their respective schools. The study also shows that their increased involvement in EMS activities at their schools had strengthened their positions in these schools and that they were perceived as 'valuable' to their schools. Their participation in the TEMS programme had resulted in their repositioning themselves within their own school communities. They had also started receiving recognition for their participation in the TEMS community from their school *and* other communities.

Finally, in terms of 'community' namely, 'learning as belonging' (participation), the study suggests that the community subscribed to the

notions of a community as outlined by Wenger.[32] The TEMS community had created opportunities for different forms of participation, both core and peripheral and had developed a wealth of communal resources from which members could draw. Healthy brokering relationships began to emerge with other communities. Thoughtful community maintenance activities were also a significant feature of the TEMS community.

Each of the components of learning is connected and mutually reinforcing. Teachers' abilities to talk about and make meaning of new knowledge influenced their practice and shaped their identities. These changes occurred within the context of a supportive learning community. Enhanced identities led to increased participation in the practice of the community, which in turn facilitated improved meaning. However, as noted above, outcomes for different participants were not uniform. They were, in fact, uneven.

This unevenness is attributable to several factors. Individual teachers differed according to previous experience, qualifications, biographies, career trajectories, cultures, present practice and expectations of the future. These differences influenced the extent of their learning along the learning continuum for each of the four learning components. The TEMS programme was an informal teacher development programme that invited different levels of participation (core membership, active membership, while also accommodating 'lurkers', and 'peripherals') and therefore had a unique appeal in that participation in the TEMS learning community was voluntary, allowing teachers to participate at will. Such voluntary participation was always likely to produce uneven outcomes as a result of uneven participation. Peripheral participation is a phenomenon where members rarely participate, but prefer to observe the interactions of the core and active members from the sidelines. "In a traditional meeting or team we would discourage such half-hearted involvement, but these peripheral activities are an essential dimension of communities of practice … people on the sidelines often are not as passive as they seem". In interactions with such members before and after TEMS workshop sessions, they often described the insights that they had gained from attending TEMS workshops and their attempts at applying this new knowledge to their classrooms. "Rather than force participation, successful communities 'build

32 E Wenger, *Communities of practice: learning, meaning and identity*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

benches' for those on the sidelines".[33] A community of practice allows for free movement of members between the core and the periphery.

## Some implications for the development of a history community of practice

Financial and human resource constraints facing provincial education departments necessitate a creative approach to continuing professional development of history teachers, one that embraces existing financial and human resources in local communities. The present study and the Graven[34] study with mathematics teachers suggest that formations such as teacher communities of practice, that have as their basis the principles of social practice theory, offer much potential for continuing professional development of history teachers in South Africa.

Policy at present exists at a symbolic level.[35] Stimulating the formation of a history community of practice is an important initiative, as it creates a space where teachers from across schools can come together to collaborate on educational issues that are relevant to them. Given the complex world of history teaching where problems are unpredictable, solutions are unclear and the demands and expectations of teachers are intensifying, collaboration amongst teachers in learning communities is beginning to emerge as a strategic response to overcome these challenges.[36] Teacher learning communities allow teachers to come together and learn from one another and to engage with curricular issues. It is the response to an important issue and that is that responsibility for continuing professional development simply cannot be left to 'others' (namely bureaucrats in the Department of Education).

Grounding continuing the professional development of teachers on the principles of social practice theory necessitates a 'paradigmatic' shift in the way in which we conceive of CPD. It implies a radical reconceptualisation of CPD, one that would mark a departure from the

33 E Wenger, R McDermott & WM Snyder, *Cultivating communities of practice: a guide to managing knowledge*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002.

34 M Graven, An investigation of mathematics teachers learning in relation to preparation or curriculum change. D.Ed. thesis (unpublished), Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 2002.

35 P Christie, K Harley & A Penny. Case studies from Sub-Saharan Africa. In C Day & J Sachs, (Eds). *International handbook on continuing professional development of teachers.* Maidenhead: Open University Press, pp. 167-190, 2004.

36 A Hargreaves, Beyond collaboration: critical development in the postmodern age. In J Smyth (Ed). *Critical discourses on teacher development.* London: Cassell, pp. 149-179, 1995.

traditional 'training model'. The 'training model' for CPD advances a "skills-based, technocratic view of teaching… (i)t is generally 'delivered' to the teacher by an 'expert', with the agenda determined by the deliverer, and the participant placed in a passive role".[37] The weakness of this model is that it creates an artificial separation from the classroom context, as much of the 'training' takes place off-site. How new knowledge is used in practice is an issue that this model does not address. CPD in history that is context specific and responsive to the needs of history teachers is likely to be more effective when approached from a social practice theory perspective.

Christie et al[38] identified two typologies of CPD that occurs in southern Africa. Firstly, one in which the teacher is viewed as a technician, with CPD directed at institutions and systems and based on the assumption of teacher deficit. This notion is supported by Sayed[39] who notes that the weakness in many continuing professional development programmes is that they position teachers as clients that need 'fixing'. The second more progressive notion is framed along the lines of the teacher as a reflective practitioner, where CPD is aimed at the personal domain and based on the principle of teacher growth. CPD in Africa subscribes to the former typology, which starts from the premise of teacher defect.[40] Because CPD is often viewed as a means of implementing reform or policy changes, this can disguise issues relating to the underlying purposes of the activity. If CPD is conceived of as serving the purpose of preparing teachers to implement reforms then it is likely to align itself with the training and deficit models (transmission view of CPD). A community of practice model for teachers of history based on the principles of social practice theory, while it could also serve the above function, is however more likely to create opportunities that support teachers in contributing

37 A Kennedy, Models of Continuing professional development: a framework for analysis, *Journal of in-service education,* Vol. 31, No. 2, pp. 235-250, 2005.

38 P Christie, K Harley & A Penny, Case studies from Sub-Saharan Africa. In C Day & J Sachs, (Eds). *International handbook on continuing professional development of teachers.* Maidenhead: Open University Press, pp. 167-190, 2004.

39 Y Sayed, The case of teacher education in post apartheid South Africa: politics and priorities. In L Chisholm, (Ed). *Changing class: educational and social change in post apartheid South Africa.* Cape Town: HSRC Press, pp. 247-266, 2004.

40 P Christie, K Harley & A Penny, Case studies from Sub-Saharan Africa. In C Day & J Sachs, (Eds). *International handbook on continuing professional development of teachers.* Maidenhead: Open University Press, pp. 167-190, 2004.

to shaping education policy and practice.[41]

Collaborative initiatives that manifest themselves in teacher learning communities allow teachers to participate more in decisions that affect them. It also allows teachers to share pressures and burdens that result from policy changes. While collaboration may at first glance suggest an increase in the quantity of teachers' tasks, it is likely to make teachers feel less overloaded if their tasks are viewed as being more "… meaningful and invigorating and the teachers have high collective control and ownership of it". CPD based on the principles of social practice theory minimises uncertainties faced by teachers and is likely to create what Hargreaves[42] refers to as situated certainties and collective professional confidence among particular communities of history teachers.

The potential for knowledge production in communities of practice is enormous. Communities of practice offer an inclusive approach to knowledge production that respects the contributions and roles of every member of the teacher education community. Social practice theory as it plays itself out in teacher learning communities is a fertile medium for deliberating and contesting the type of knowledge that should be valued in CPD initiatives. This is particularly applicable to new history knowledges that teachers of history have to engage with. While most CPD initiatives have as their aim the need to enhance or introduce new knowledge and skills, this is indeed a contentious issue as one needs to take into consideration both the type of knowledge, the context in which it is acquired and the how this new knowledge is to be applied.

On this issue, Day argues that knowledge created in the context of application is more useful than prepositional knowledge that is produced outside the context of use. Knowledge that is created in the context of application is more likely to be the result of the efforts of a heterogeneous set of teachers collaborating on a problem specific to a context. Such knowledge is the product of negotiation and is likely to reflect the interests of all participants. Furthermore, such knowledge is more likely to minimise the problems associated with transfer, relevance and adoption. This perspective allows for the development of context

41 A Kennedy, Models of Continuing professional development: a framework for analysis, *Journal of in-service education,* Vol. 31, No. 2, pp 235-250, 2005.

42 A Hargreaves, Beyond collaboration: critical development in the postmodern age. In J Smyth (Ed). *Critical discourses on teacher development.* London: Cassell, pp. 149-179, 1995.

specific knowledge (local city or province). Day[43] notes that such an approach acknowledges that knowledge production extends beyond the traditional understandings thereof to a process in which all participants can be contributors to new knowledge generation. Learning communities have much potential for creating opportunities for this to happen. Social practice theory as envisaged in teacher learning communities presents a dynamic forum in which the issues raised above can be deliberated.

CPD for teachers of history based on social practice theory offers hope for addressing another complex phenomenon facing South African education, namely teacher authoritarianism. Christie et al warn that authoritarianism is a phenomenon that is firmly entrenched in the psyche of many teachers in South African schools and serves as a serious impediment to moving teachers from the role of technician to that of reflective practitioner. Learner-centred pedagogies as advocated by the new history curriculum are frequently in conflict with teachers' lived experiences and previously established realities and expectations of the teaching task. CPD initiatives that have as their objective the development of reflective practitioners place participating teachers in potentially conflictual roles. Teachers' traditional values and historical experience are compelling factors that determine the extent to which teachers may assume or attempt roles as reflective practitioners.[44] Teacher learning communities however, can provide a safe environment in which such tensions can be played out, examined and discussed, as was revealed in the learning community in the present study.

## Conclusion

Social practice theory as envisaged in the functioning of teacher learning communities can provide a vehicle for the kind of development that is so needed in South Africa. It holds tremendous potential for the continuing professional development of teachers of history. Well-co-ordinated teacher learning communities can harness the skills and expertise of history teachers, history teacher educators and department of education curriculum specialists towards developing and sustaining

43 C Day, Developing teachers: the challenges of lifelong learning. (London, Falmer Press, 1999).

44 P Christie, K Harley & A Penny, Case studies from Sub-Saharan Africa. In C Day & J Sachs, (Eds). *International handbook on continuing professional development of teachers*. Maidenhead: Open University Press, pp. 167-190, 2004.

the continuing professional development (CPD) of teachers.