

Creating Professional Communities in Schools Through Organizational Learning: An Evaluation of a School Improvement Process

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This article presents an analysis of the potential for a school improvement process to foster professional community in three rural middle schools through the processes of organizational learning. The findings of this 2-year qualitative case study demonstrate the tensions schools must negotiate between bureaucracy and professional community and suggest that four organizational factors influence the establishment of professional community: principal leadership, organizational history, organizational priorities, and organization of teacher work. The findings further suggest that double-loop learning is invaluable to sustain professional community.

Workplace learning is best understood . . . in terms of the communities being formed or joined and personal identities being changed.

(Brown & Duguid, 1995, p. 69)

Educational policy makers and practitioners increasingly call for new ways of reculturing schools (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Fullan, 1995; Lieberman, 1995a; McLaughlin, 1991) into community-like organizations characterized by shared norms and values, a focus on student learning, reflective dialogue, deprivatization of practice, and collaboration

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(Louis, Kruse, & Marks, 1996). However, transforming typically intransigent school cultures into communities where learning is continuous, reflective, and focused on improving student outcomes will require change beyond first-order restructuring (Cuban, 1983). Such transformations will necessitate identifying structural and institutional arrangements requisite to promoting ongoing teacher learning (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995) and introducing processes that change existing professional values and norms in ways that support development of schoolwide professional communities (Fullan, 1995). These transformative actions require schools to examine basic premises that guide organizational behavior and to continuously increase the existing organizational knowledge base (Argyris & Schön, 1978).

The concept of organizational learning as discussed in recent literature (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Cuban, 1983; Garvin, 1993; Hedberg, 1981; Huber, 1991; Levitt & March, 1988; Rait, 1995) offers processes with the potential to achieve this type of reculturing toward professional community. Through these organizational learning processes, schools (a) routinely examine and question values that guide organizational actions (Rait, 1995); (b) generate new insights and knowledge (Hedberg, 1981; Huber, 1991); (c) improve organizational memory through interpreting and sharing information (Argyris & Schön, 1978); and (d) build capacity for effective use and dissemination of knowledge (Argyris & Schön, 1978).

This article investigates a recently developed school improvement process that incorporates the principles of organizational learning to determine its viability as a mechanism for developing professional community. Two research questions guide this investigation:

1. How does this school improvement process foster the development of professional communities?
2. What organizational factors support and/or impede the development of professional communities?

THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROCESS

In 1997, Keefe and Howard developed the School Improvement Process—a process that attempts to develop organizations predicated on a set of shared values and norms, personal mastery, critical reflection, and collaboration. To date, no empirical studies have been undertaken that address the process's potential in K through 12 schools. At the heart of this process is a leadership team made up of several school faculty who guide the entire faculty in the development and implementation of a comprehensive school improvement

plan. This plan involves three basic steps. First, the plan is based on school mission and vision statements that explicitly focus on students and student learning. These mission and vision statements are developed with the entire faculty but are guided by the leadership team. Second, faculty identify school goals that operationalize the school mission and vision, and develop objectives needed to achieve school goals. Finally, the plan requires that the leadership team lead the faculty in identifying component areas of the school system that must be addressed to achieve the goals and objectives. These component areas include (a) curricula and instructional programs; (b) instructional strategies; (c) structure and organization; (d) leadership, management, and budgeting; (e) staffing and staff development; (f) communication and political structures; (g) school resources, physical plant, and equipment; and (h) an evaluation plan (Keefe & Howard, 1997). As part of this final step, faculty form component teams responsible for addressing the specific needs of component areas vis-à-vis the school improvement plan.

Using the school improvement plan as a framework, the leadership team then directs the implementation of a strategic action plan (Keefe & Howard, 1997, p. 20). This more detailed plan supports synchronous attention of component teams to all eight system component areas as the school works to achieve its goals. For example, component teams identify school tasks needed to achieve goals and objectives that fall within the purview of their component areas. Tasks identified by each of the component teams are then funneled back through the leadership team, which integrates the tasks into a strategic plan. This organic process creates an ongoing feedback loop between component teams and the leadership team through which formative and summative assessments of school improvement efforts can continuously inform the change process and strategies.

The focus of this study was a modified School Improvement Process (Valentine, 1997) used by a university school improvement center to lead change efforts in 27 schools. Although it follows the basic process described above, the modified School Improvement Process (SIP) differs from Keefe and Howard's process in several important ways. First, SIP requires an explicit commitment to the process by school faculty and school and district administrations. That is, each school's entire faculty was asked to demonstrate a willingness to engage in the process through a faculty vote, and the district's commitment is manifested in the allocation of \$3,000 per year to participate in the university-guided school improvement process. Second, as part of SIP, leadership teams from each school attend about 10 conferences over 2 years where university staff discuss with team members the latest research on such topics as (a) school improvement and change processes, (b) student learning processes and instructional strategies, (c) team and faculty self-assessment,

and (d) team building and collaborative processes (Valentine, 1997). Knowledge acquired at these conferences is then used by leadership teams as they develop and implement school improvement and strategic action plans with their respective faculties. Communication between leadership teams and school faculties typically occurs via staff meetings, faculty work sessions, memos, and grade-level team meetings. However, each leadership team determined which modes of communication were most appropriate for the school setting.

Third, unlike the Keefe and Howard process, SIP requires leadership team members to take on specific roles. Specifically, one member serves as *culture crier*, responsible for monitoring the emerging culture of the group and school; a second member serves as the *learning liaison*, responsible for charting shifts in group learning processes; a third member serves as the *chronicler*, a group historian responsible for plotting changes in the group's work; and a fourth member serves as *data collector*, responsible for disseminating and collecting minutes and surveys. Fourth, in SIP, the focus of component teams is not predetermined. Instead, through a process of critical reflection among leadership team members at SIP conferences and then with their faculties, component team foci are determined by each schoolwide faculty. Finally, although university staff from a center for school improvement guide schools in implementing SIP, the pace of implementation is determined by each school faculty according to their school's unique circumstances, needs, and demands. As a result, the degree of SIP implementation during the university-led school improvement effort varied widely across schools, as will be seen in this multiple case study.

ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK

Based on the assumption that major changes at the organizational level are needed to develop professional community, our conceptual lens has dual grounding in organizational learning and professional community literature. To demonstrate the potential for creating professional communities through synergistic and simultaneous structural and cultural change, we briefly examine literature on organizational learning, school as community, and professional community.

Organizational Learning

Although organizational improvement has become a common endeavor, many organizations rely solely on structural change and thus seldom realize

success in their efforts to improve (Cuban, 1983; Garvin, 1993). The majority “simply repeat old practices” while change remains cosmetic, and improvements are either fortuitous or short-lived (Garvin, 1993, p. 78). Organizational learning, on the other hand, has been posited as a process that can lead to second-order change, that is, change that is the result of the critical evaluation of underlying values and assumptions that guide behavior (Rait, 1995). Organizational theorists define organizational learning in various ways. Rait (1995) summarizes four definitions as (a) detecting and correcting errors (Argyris & Schön, 1978), (b) generating new insights and knowledge (Hedberg, 1981), (c) using feedback from organizationally specific historical events in future decision making (Levitt & March, 1988), and (d) changing behavior through the process of information gathering and sense making (Huber, 1991).

Argyris and Schön (1978) refer to two levels of organizational learning: single- and double-loop learning. Like Cuban (1983) and Garvin (1993), they argue that many organizations engage in single-loop learning behaviors. Structural in nature, these responses to organizational needs or environmental pressures consist of actions embedded within existing ways of knowing (Garvin, 1993; Huber, 1991). Limited by existing norms, those actions ironically tend to perpetuate ineffective assumptions and practices (Argyris & Schön, 1978).

More applicable to this study, double-loop learning requires complex organizations, such as schools, to continuously question the basic premises governing behavior to ensure against systematic error (Argyris & Schön, 1978). Garvin (1993) highlights “a commitment to learning” (p. 78) as the key to organizational improvement. Organizations seeking change may adapt more effectively using double-loop learning by examining values that guide the actions they undertake (Rait, 1995). Informed by experience and relevant literature, these organizations question underlying assumptions that guide practice so that chosen solutions address the core problem and not merely symptoms. Organizations using double-loop processes often merge new learning with existing organizational knowledge or replace that prior knowledge entirely. In doing so, they create new organizational knowledge and new norms that guide future actions and create new cultures (Rait, 1995). Organizations that experience double-loop learning search for ways to increase their cognitive, behavioral, and performance effectiveness through multiple strategies (Garvin, 1993). These strategies involve acquiring knowledge and building capacity for effective knowledge use and dissemination. Concomitantly, these organizations attend to sharing and interpreting information as well as maintaining or increasing organizational memory (Garvin, 1993; Huber, 1991; Nevis, DiBella, & Gould, 1995).

School as Community

Morgan (1997) suggests that “all theories of organization are based on implicit images or metaphors that lead us to see, understand, and manage organizations in distinctive yet partial ways” (p. 4). Schools are typically understood as rational institutions (Sergiovanni, 1994) featuring linear lines of communication, chain-of-command decision making, differentiation of tasks, hierarchical supervision, and formal rules and regulations (Morgan, 1997). This bureaucratic form of organization shapes how schools are understood and how the work of schools is undertaken. However, some contemporary school reform efforts suggest a shift from the predominant view of schools as bureaucratic organizations to that of schools as communities. This construct of school as community offers a different perspective on “how to do school.”

Theoretical change demands exploration of underlying metaphors; a pertinent question then is, “What is the meaning of ‘community’?” To address this question, it is useful to view community and bureaucracy as occupying opposite ends of the organizational spectrum. Within the *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft* theoretical framework (Tönnies, 1957), “community (Gemeinschaft) may be experienced through kinship, through living in the same neighborhood, or through gathering with others in community of the mind” (Furman, 1998, p. 302). Each experiential source engenders a sense of shared identity, connectedness, trust, belonging, and mutual dependence (Furman, 1994) that serves to sustain the idea of community; commonality or alikeness among community members is a central defining notion (Furman, 1998). A shared sense of communal history, recounted and extended over time through personal narratives, further strengthens these community bonds (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985). In contrast to relationships experienced in community settings, *Gesellschaft*-type relationships are often contractual in nature, serve to achieve some goal or benefit, and are representative of relationships formed within bureaucratic organizations.

Clearly, community is a complex and abstract concept (Minar & Greer, 1969) open to multiple interpretations (Smith, 1996). Although assumptions about community that inform much of the contemporary school-as-community literature are consistent with those embedded in Tönnies’s framework, some researchers emphasize shadings of meaning consistent with their specific focus of research (Furman, 1998). Furman (1998) has identified professional community (Louis, Kruse, et al., 1996) and learning community (Oxley, 1997; Prawat, 1992, 1993) as distinct strands of community within the education literature. Professional community is the focal point of this article.

Professional Community

Since the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk*, professionalization of teaching and teacher development have been primary topics in school reform debate (Lieberman, 1995b). Ensuing teacher-centered reform strategies have targeted individual educators and have typically focused on such developmental issues as national licensing, fair and equitable pay, rigorous standards for entry into the teaching profession, and opportunities for continued professional growth (Louis, Kruse, et al., 1996). Facilitating teacher development requires additional strategies framed around collegial support (Lieberman, 1990; Little & McLaughlin, 1993). Whereas professional and educational networks external to the school serve as important systems of collegial support, professional community “offers the more inclusive support of a whole school” (Louis, Kruse, et al., 1996, p. 180), promoting collaboration among staff members, breaking down barriers that isolate teachers in their work, and supporting improved professional practices.

The development and growth of professional community is inextricably linked to organizational culture (Louis & Marks, 1996; Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996), the norms and values, rituals, history, and traditions shared by group members (Schein, 1992). Elements of organizational culture shape the group’s thinking, perceiving, and behavior (Schein, 1992). A cultural climate that promotes professional inquiry, risk taking among teachers, and rethinking leadership provides a fertile environment for professional community (Louis, Kruse, et al., 1996). According to Louis, Marks, et al. (1996), characteristics distinctive of and critical to professional community include:

- Shared norms and values: Collectively agreed-on professional beliefs (e.g., all students can learn at reasonable levels) support and sustain successful professional practice.
- Focus on student learning: Establishing students’ intellectual growth as a prime professional goal is characteristic of professional communities.
- Reflective dialogue: Teachers reflect on and evaluate their professional practice through conversations with colleagues.
- Deprivatization of practice: Continuous reflection on and improvement of practice requires interaction with and feedback from colleagues.
- Collaboration: In addition to sharing expertise, working collaboratively sustains reflective dialogue and deprivatization of practice.

This analytic framework, dually grounded in organizational learning and professional community theory, provides guidance for our investigation of the development of professional communities through a modified SIP process. The defining professional practices and habits of mind (Louis, Kruse, et al., 1996; Louis, Marks, et al., 1996) within the professional community

literature provide an organizing structure to observe how SIP fosters development of professional community. Also, particular conditions of organizational culture serve to distinguish those factors that support or impede the growth of professional community (Louis, Kruse, et al. 1996). Organizational learning theory provides a lens through which to view and understand school change as faculties add to their accumulated learning (Schein, 1992) during the SIP process.

DESIGN OF STUDY

We used a constructivist method of inquiry to conduct our investigation of professional community. Grounded in the epistemological belief that truth and knowledge are created (Schwandt, 1994), constructivism holds that understandings of the world are socially constructed, transmitted and shared through systems of language and symbols, and adapted to meet the purposeful needs and intents of human activity (Gergen & Gergen, 1991). Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggest that, in accordance with the dialogic nature of constructivist inquiry, a tightly woven interpretive account of professional community and school restructuring may be generated through the hermeneutic-dialectic process.

Site Selection

We used a collective case study approach (Stake, 1994) to achieve our research objectives. In September 1996, 27 schools in a midwestern state began participation in the school improvement process (described earlier) under the guidance of a university-based team. The participating schools included 8 elementary schools, 9 middle schools, and 10 high schools.

Potential richness of data, school characteristics, and access drove our site selection decisions. Because our goal was to understand the role of SIP in creating and sustaining professional learning communities, we chose to concentrate on three rural middle schools engaged in the process. Our interest in rural schools derived from the uniqueness of rural contexts and the relatively limited research attention focused on rural schools (Capper, 1993; Howley, 1989). Our focus on middle schools was designed to further enhance the study's ability to explain the phenomenon of interest by focusing on one educational level. Pseudonymously named Northridge, Cedarbrook, and Westwood, the three schools demonstrated a set of shared characteristics common to most rural schools: small size, flattened organizational structure, low student-teacher ratio, and relative geographic isolation. Reflecting the

communities in which they resided, the student populations were ethnically homogeneous and predominantly Anglo American. Size of student population and certified staff were similar for two of the schools. School records for 1996-1997 indicated that about 550 students were enrolled and 60 teachers provided educational services at Northridge, 350 students and 26 teachers at Cedarbrook, and 300 students and 21 teachers at Westwood. Another difference among the schools lay in resources rather than demographic characteristics. Located in a district receiving revenues from a public utilities plant, the Westwood district's assessed valuation was significantly greater than either the Cedarbrook or Northridge district.

Participant and Event Selection

Consistent with our research purposes, we interviewed each school's principal and leadership team members and other randomly selected teachers. In total, 35 participants were interviewed. Five teachers from each school were interviewed to determine the extent to which SIP may have been influencing the wider school culture. To ensure adequate time to become acquainted with SIP, these faculty members were interviewed during the second year of implementation.

To supplement interview data and to more clearly understand our research settings (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992), we also conducted school-based observations. Specifically, we observed eight SIP conferences and six school-based SIP activities. Conferences were a source of observational data on the leadership teams. School-based activities provided an opportunity to observe leadership team and faculty interactions at faculty meetings.

Data Sources and Procedures

Data collection began in September 1996 at the onset of the project and continued through January 1998. Consistent with qualitative research methods, we gathered data from multiple sources including observations, interviews, documents, and artifacts. We observed the work of the leadership teams and interactions among their members during team work sessions. In addition, we observed leadership and component teams as they engaged in work at their schools. Observations were recorded in the form of written notes and organized into fieldnote journals. Early observations guided development of open-ended, semistructured interview protocols (Spradley, 1980) conducted with leadership and component team members. To ensure accuracy, interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. We also collected

SIP documents and artifacts generated by our case schools, including memoranda, notices, e-mail messages, faxes, and work products. Observations, interviews, and document collection continued until we reached a data saturation point, that is, where information gleaned from data sources became redundant (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). We assigned pseudonyms to individuals and school sites and coded fieldnotes and transcripts to ensure anonymity of participants.

Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously and continued throughout the course of the study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Ongoing analysis influenced the scope and direction of succeeding observations, interviews, and document collections. The process of open and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) resulting in descriptive themes guided our analytic procedures. As individual members of the research team, we wrote frequent memos; as collaborative researchers, we met weekly to discuss our memos, data collected, analytic processes, and necessary adjustments in our research procedures. In keeping with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) advice for trustworthiness of research findings we (a) used multiple data sources and member checks, (b) used thick description to present our findings, and (c) maintained a detailed research record.

Roles of the Researchers

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) describe the role of the qualitative researcher as situated on a continuum from observer to participant. In relation to this study and project, three of the four researchers played observer roles, taking primary responsibility for study design, data collection, and analysis. The fourth researcher was the lead facilitator (i.e., participant) of the SIP project. As a researcher, the fourth member played devil's advocate, challenging our emerging categories and providing his insights on the SIP process.

FINDINGS

As we indicated earlier, this study asks how SIP fosters the development of professional community, and what organizational factors support and/or impede professional community development. The following sections address these questions.

Evidence of Emerging Professional Communities

Our findings focus on two levels of professional community formation: professional community within leadership teams and within school faculties. As we mentioned above, Louis and Kruse (1996) describe professional community according to five elements: shared norms and values, focus on student learning, reflective dialogue, deprivatization of practice, and collaboration. We use these criteria to guide our examination of the degree to which professional learning communities emerged during SIP in the three case schools. In addition, we discuss factors that facilitate or impede the development of professional communities at each school.

Professional Communities Within Leadership Teams

One of the goals of SIP was to create an environment where leadership teams could develop group norms that value critical reflection on school policies and teacher practices, as well as how those policies and practices influence student learning (Keefe & Howard, 1997). Through SIP's five annual conferences over 2 years, leadership team members were able to periodically escape the frenetic pace of their classroom work and coalesce as a leadership team. Our observations revealed that SIP conferences created a potentially powerful learning environment where leadership teams could confront critical issues surrounding teaching, learning, and school leadership. In addition to providing opportunities for intrateam learning, SIP conferences benefitted team members by promoting interteam learning through shared experiences with professionals from other schools. The Northridge leadership team made notable progress in establishing professional community. At Cedarbrook and Westwood, however, progress of leadership teams toward professional community was less evident. Our recounting of each school's experience exemplifies the difficulty of defining a complex phenomenon like professional community. Although we discuss professional community according to five elements, we underscore their interrelatedness and the synergy they can create.

The Northridge case. At Northridge, the opportunity to deprivatize practice and discuss issues critically and reflectively within and among the leadership teams led to meaningful collaboration. One Northridge teacher described the benefits of having a forum (i.e., SIP conferences) to engage her peers both at Northridge and other schools:

It's hard for the leadership team to gather together [during school]. . . . Obviously, talking with other schools [at SIP conferences] is powerful. We might do more of that [on our own] if it's possible—that is, more collaborative time with other schools. [At SIP conferences] we break out with other schools a lot and focus on important issues; it's helpful to talk about generalities of school.

Whereas the above remark reflects the deprivatization of practice, another Northridge leadership team member described how the team had begun to think reflectively and focus on student learning. She described how SIP had begun to change her perspective on her role as a teacher, that is, how she approaches school and classroom level change:

From SIP I've gotten the idea that, as a faculty, you don't want to be satisfied with what you have; you want to improve it, evaluate it, throw out the bad, and keep the good. Then [you can] devise better ways to do the things that don't work. SIP stresses that we emphasize middle school kids; that needs to be the focal point. I think consistency within the school, especially our values . . . [is] very important. I think SIP brings that before the whole faculty.

Her peers echoed this comment as reflective dialogue led to meaningful collaboration between the leadership team members. This collaboration was further evident at Northridge as leaders prepared for and delivered a presentation to the school faculty where they began to delve into a discussion of schoolwide norms and values via the development of a school vision statement. Another leadership team member described the team's collaborative activities this way:

The leadership team has had good exchanges and we've done a lot of things together toward getting SIP concepts out to people and giving them an opportunity to give us feedback. There has been argumentation or disunity on the things we have done [as a team]. We've had opportunities to sit and meet and talk about it and kick ideas around. Then we've come up with a plan for each of our in-services that seem to work pretty well. Each of us had a certain job that we did at the in-service, it wasn't like one teacher got up and ran the whole thing. So we've all been involved in an active participant way each time.

Interestingly, almost all of Northridge's leadership team members described how "all types of faculty" were represented on the team. Team members believed that they represented new and experienced teachers, academic and exploratory teachers, and teachers who had been in the elementary or junior high school 2 years ago. The majority of Northridge team members described how their diverse perspectives grounded in their different professional experiences actually made the team function in ways they never ex-

pected; for example, teachers worked to understand each other and develop a common set of team values, as this team member stated:

We've got a really interesting mix of people. . . . We older teachers have become more nurturing and open to younger teachers. We accept each other's values and listen to each other and communicate well together. We are all learning from each other. You don't hear people finding fault with each other. We're really coming together as a team.

The Cedarbrook case. The SIP process provided the Cedarbrook leadership team an opportunity to engage in professional learning experiences focused on student learning and to begin to overcome a school culture built around norms of professional autonomy. These four teachers and their principal used the SIP conferences primarily as a forum where they learned about the latest research on student learning, teaching, and assessment. This leadership team member described SIP conferences as a type of professional refresher course:

After 25 years you forget a lot [of the research] and so it's nice to get refreshed once in awhile. That's what I have done through [SIP]. [SIP content] is what we should know and we should always practice. But you get so involved in teaching that sometimes you forget what you believe. It's refreshing to be [at SIP conferences] and to be with teachers that care and want to do something positive . . . It sort of energizes you.

The above remark also reflects other leadership team member comments concerning existing norms of autonomy and SIP's role in deprivatizing teacher practice. Another teacher described the challenges to collaboration that remained to be resolved and the implications of these challenges for SIP:

The people on the leadership team are interested in seeing [SIP] succeed. Finding an opportunity when we can get together and talk with each other about [SIP] and what we can do here at school is an ongoing battle. The team works well together when it can get together. For us to sit around and talk about what should be done in this or that area doesn't really happen. . . . I keep hoping things will slow down enough that we can initiate some of the things that we've wanted to do from the beginning of the school year. I don't see that happening until January at this point, and I guess I would figure that we're lucky if in January some way it's possible to call people out. Again, you don't feel like placing even more stress [on teachers].

In spite of the potential benefits provided by SIP, the sheer exhaustion and a sense of being overwhelmed by the many "hats" these leadership team

members were did not allow for an environment conducive to the types of sharing and reflective dialogues that define collaboration in professional communities. Thus, although discussions concerning student learning began via SIP conferences, collaborative activities designed to bring this knowledge and change back to the faculty did not materialize.

The Westwood case. The Westwood leadership team, stuck in a cycle of self-adulation, made the least progress in becoming a professional community. The principal captured this sense of being a highly effective school when he said, “We have a staff at the middle school that, for the most part, has always been on the cutting edge. No one is comfortable with sitting back and doing the same things year after year.” However, this sense of being on the cutting edge was not supported by data. For instance, from observations of SIP conferences, it was apparent that the team lacked commitment to SIP, which was reflected by the rare attendance of the entire leadership team.

Furthermore, the Westwood leadership team consisted of teachers considered by the principal to be “proven” leaders. In fact, the leadership team also doubled as the principal’s advisory committee. As a result, the team’s like-mindedness on issues such as teaching, learning, and leadership created an environment where critical reflection and the development of a shared set of values and beliefs supportive of professional community were unlikely to occur. Only after 2 years of SIP conferences did the leadership team’s underlying assumptions about themselves and their school begin to waver. This can be seen in an excerpt from our fieldnotes of an SIP conference activity where each leadership team reported on its progress during the past year:

It was obvious that after all schools had described their recent efforts that the Westwood team felt much less proud of themselves. [During the team reports] there was some rationalizing occurring at the [Westwood] table, like “We had [state mandated school plans to develop]”; “We had turnover in some of the SIP component teams”; “The turnover hurt our ability to communicate”; and “Communication has been informal because of the turnover, and we should try to communicate formally.” [The principal] mentioned that the lack of time made it difficult to take the enthusiasm of SIP conferences into the “real school world.”

As the data show, the level of professional community within each leadership team varied by school. Northridge’s team, consisting of teachers representing a variety of experience levels and subject areas, appeared to make the most progress in establishing norms and values consistent with professional community. Those norms and values were achieved through dialogue that, although often intense, addressed core issues of student learning, classroom

practices, and school leadership. On the other hand, the Cedarbrook leadership team, unable to experience professional community at their school, found a semblance of professional community at SIP conferences. It was at these conferences that Cedarbrook teachers could find respite from their isolated work lives to discuss professional matters. Finally, Westwood showed little progress in establishing professional community within the team as a result of deeply ingrained beliefs of school excellence. These beliefs influenced Westwood's approach to change. Rather than ask "how should we change," they seemed to ask, "how might we do more of the same?"

Professional Communities Within Schoolwide Faculties

Developing professional community among leadership team members was certainly a goal of SIP. However, the primary goal was to create professional community in the school. Not surprisingly, inculcating the elements of professional community at the school level would prove to be more difficult. Only Northridge made significant progress in establishing professional community.

The Northridge case. The Northridge leadership team was able to engage its faculty in a series of professional community-building activities. Through these activities the Northridge faculty examined their school's culture by identifying underlying assumptions, assessing faculty attitudes toward change, developing a vision statement, and identifying critical issues deserving of faculty attention. As a result of these activities, the faculty began to develop a common language reflecting an increasingly shared set of professional norms and values. Specifically, the Northridge leadership team and faculty were observed discussing such issues as learning theory, organizational and school change, and new approaches to professional learning at SIP conferences. In fact, the Northridge leadership team modeled SIP project staff approaches to adult learning with the faculty. As this excerpt from our fieldnotes suggests, the team made progress in reshaping faculty norms for engaging in reflective dialogue and collaboration:

The leadership team was astounded by the exchange of views put forth by the faculty during their discussion of the vision statement. They remarked afterward that, historically, staff meetings were usually much less cooperative or productive. This meeting started off slowly. The leadership team asked faculty to review the vision statement and then comment on it with suggestions for changes. The cafeteria, where the meeting was held, remained silent until a

first-year teacher said that she thought the vision statement left off parents. This started a discussion about how specific they should be about parents in the vision statement, which then led to a discussion of parents' role in the school. The discussion then flowed into issues about how to teach children. One teacher said that "we can't teach children like they used to teach them." As they continued to discuss the vision statement, their conversation focused on terms used in the statement like "real life." A significant number of the faculty participated in a spirited debate about how to operationalize the term so that it "meant something."

Louis, Kruse, et al. (1996) suggest that communities can benefit from constructive conflict. This constructive conflict was apparent at Northridge as the leadership team led the faculty through the processes of developing shared norms and values and focusing attention on student learning through the vehicles of reflective dialogue and collaboration. One leadership team member who (a) was initially reluctant to participate in SIP and (b) had a historical perspective informed by 20 years in the district, noticed the change in faculty norms of practice. He described these changes:

[Since SIP began] we as a faculty are more cohesive in our thinking about school culture and I think we are all looking for ways to improve the culture, as far as positive input on ways to help kids, to get the student body interested and excited about the learning process, and about discipline and those type of things. . . . I think our school culture has improved because of that cohesion.

On a daily basis it is probably hard to see, but if you look at things from an overall perspective there are a lot of positive things happening. In the last year and a half, I think our faculty has become more attuned to each other, partly because of what we're doing here. We did some things to build a team feeling in our faculty, some activities that were kind of fun and enjoyable, which provided a more relaxed environment for talking about change. [The faculty has] an identity now as a group who want to make positive changes, and I think positive changes are happening. I don't see as much resistance to change anymore.

In spite of the progress being made at Northridge, a healthy skepticism (i.e., constructive conflict) remained concerning the adoption of new reform efforts. One Northridge teacher described why he remains cautious about SIP:

Our administrator says we don't tout [SIP] enough around the district. I told him that's because [the faculty is] not certain where it's leading us. We've talked about change but we're not sure where [SIP] is taking us. I know I'm a little uncertain in that respect. I know [SIP] is putting some ideas into our head about what this school should look like, what the teaching should be, and where we should be directing our kids. But I'm still not sure what the finished product will look like.

The Cedarbrook case. Cedarbrook's leadership team made fewer inroads in educating their faculty about SIP than either of the other case schools studied. For instance, teachers described their understanding of the process as "fuzzy" and felt they were in need of "concrete" ideas that would guarantee improved classroom practices before they could commit to SIP. The lack of time and structures to facilitate collaboration among leadership team members had serious negative consequences for establishing professional community throughout the school, as this leadership team member noted:

[The leadership team members] had thought that we would use a lot of our faculty meetings this year as a time to handle SIP matters and get more of the faculty involved with us. Well, we soon found ourselves into November, and we had yet to have a faculty meeting that was not already tied up with other things on the agenda, so there was no time to say "Well, let's address this issue too." I think we find limited support from other faculty, but I think that limited support is because we never have the opportunity [to meet] . . . and say, "Well, let's try this, this and this."

Cedarbrook faculty who were not on the leadership team provided evidence that SIP had not filtered through to the faculty. For instance, a sixth-grade teacher described a very superficial understanding of SIP more than a year into the project, "I just understood SIP to be the study of our school and particular perceptions of our school so that we can get ideas on how to improve it."

The Westwood case. Data suggested that whereas Westwood's leadership team attempted to bring its faculty into the SIP process, they were less successful than Northridge in engaging teachers in ways that reculture schools into professional communities. However, unlike Cedarbrook, the Westwood leadership team was moderately successful in disseminating SIP goals and objectives throughout the faculty. Data showed that, guided closely by the principal's leadership, the leadership team discussed what they had learned at SIP conferences and attempted to involve their peers in conversations concerning student learning and school change. An excerpt from our fieldnotes describes an activity where such conversations occurred:

The purpose of the January faculty meeting we attended was for the faculty to develop a set of goals and objectives according to various components of the school improvement plan. Teachers organized themselves into component teams at four round tables in the cafeteria according to the following predetermined topics: research, technology, instructional practices, curriculum. [The principal] introduced the activity, explained its purpose, discussed each component team's tasks, and responded to questions. Each group of teachers had

the same broad school improvement goals for which they had to develop specific objectives. The first goal focused on the use of technology in the school. We observed teachers in a free-flowing discussion among group members at each table. However, we also heard a substantial number of teachers wonder aloud how SIP was different from the state required school plan, and why they had to do both.

Where teachers were organized into grade-level teams with leadership team members represented among them, faculty appeared to be more aware of SIP and its purposes. In addition, where grade-level teaming was practiced, leadership team members were able to gather faculty input to incorporate into the implementation process. For instance, a Westwood leadership team member stated, "I feel like the fifth grade team is working well. Because I'm on that team, I take things back to them [from SIP conferences]." However, although dissemination of information was an important aspect of the process, not all Westwood faculty worked in grade-level teams. As a result, some faculty members did not benefit from these types of information exchanges, nor did they come to understand SIP. One Westwood faculty member noted the lack of cohesiveness among faculty, "Even though we have some teams in the middle school, we still need to get people closer together."

Taken together, these two sections on professional community formation show the promises and pitfalls of an SIP approach to establishing professional community. For instance, if the elements of professional community are to guide school faculties, ensuring the establishment of professional community within SIP leadership teams is critical. In part, this may be facilitated by including in the leadership team teachers who represent various groups (i.e., based on experience, subject area, educational philosophy). Also, although not intimately involved in the earlier stages of SIP, the wider school faculty must be included in discussions regarding SIP from the moment of commitment through implementation. In the next section, we discuss organizational factors that played important roles in SIP implementation and development of professional communities.

Factors That Influence the Establishment of Professional Communities

This 2-year study raised questions about the role of antecedent conditions in SIP implementation and the establishment of professional communities. Although they were not necessarily present in each school, factors concerning leadership, organizational history, organizational priorities, and organization of teacher work influenced how and to what extent SIP was implemented at each school.

Principal Leadership

The principal's approach to leadership influenced the extent to which professional communities were established. In each of the schools, data revealed how leadership actions either facilitated or impeded the establishment of professional communities through SIP. These styles, observed by us and/or perceived by the participants, influenced the manner and extent to which faculty engaged in SIP.

Data suggest that the new Northridge principal's attempts to build trust among the school's professional staff was an important factor in creating a shared sense of purpose among the leadership team *and* faculty. The principal's espoused philosophy of leadership was to develop a foundation of mutual trust. His views on leadership included the following:

Before I started [at the school] I spent last August in the building [listening to staff]. Then I hired several teachers, and the teachers I hired knew what I thought, and I knew how they thought. But there were some old timers, and I really tried to listen to them, to what they thought. I tried to listen to what was good and what was bad. I set down the administrative needs and played out the issues and then together we attempted to develop strategies and implement them. If they don't work we'll do something else.

Based on teacher comments, the Northridge principal put his espoused values into practice. Although new to the school, the principal's ability to quickly build trust between himself and the faculty was reflected in his support for SIP—a process that began before he arrived. A leadership team member described why she believed the principal's trust in faculty ability to lead the project was successful:

A lot of [the success] has to do with principal involvement and involvement of strong faculty members. . . . So when your colleagues are [leading the process], for no other reason than friendship and respect, you show up. The key is to take it out of the principal's hands. This principal is the support factor, the person backing the project. He gives the teachers time, but any effective program I have seen—and I've been a teacher for years—has more weight coming from faculty. So the project, since it is faculty based, has a big strength.

The faculty's trust in the principal grew out of the principal's commitment to both teachers and students, as this teacher noted:

We have had administrators so busy working on their upper degrees, they are off taking classes at night, having someone cover. This principal still lives quite a distance away, he has a family, and I don't know how he juggles it. But he is

here and the kids see him here, the teachers see him here, he puts in the time. He comes to all the events, and he's around.

The Cedarbrook experience offers another example of the influence of a principal's leadership style on professional community. This principal's approach to SIP was to abdicate responsibility to a group of teacher leaders. He explained,

I have not been the number one leader in SIP simply because of who I am and where I've been. I've had lots of ideas and as long as they're mine, that's who has to implement them. To make anything successful teachers have to buy-in. It can't be a hard sell. So, that's what I've come to. I don't care if it's just two or three small things, as far as unity and team building I want it to be theirs and I want it to be successful.

Unlike Northridge's principal, who supported SIP from the background, the Cedarbrook principal took a hands-off approach that negatively affected SIP implementation. Although the teachers on the leadership team worked diligently to formulate their ideas of how the process might work in their school and to bring the entire faculty "up to speed," the principal did not create norms, either through words or deeds, that suggested the importance of continuous professional learning, collaboration, and change. Thus, the reluctance of the principal to use his position as a bully pulpit to engender support for SIP constrained the ability of the process to move forward.

Westwood provided an example of different leadership issues, that of encouraging single-loop learning. Schein (1992) and others (e.g., Argyris & Schön, 1978) differentiate between espoused values and theories-in-use. The Westwood principal viewed his faculty as willing to change and take on challenges. Although observations confirmed that the principal treated staff professionally and maintained a cordial and professional climate, data suggested that actual values and norms were not aligned with espoused views. An excerpt from our fieldnotes describes this:

It was clear that [the principal] valued the Westwood faculty and always talked about them in glowing terms. He described them in ways that suggested the faculty had a "take charge" attitude. [The principal's] language is also empowering, but so far evidence suggests that his teachers are just that. . . . *his* teachers. He speaks a lot in the first person, "I did this," "I asked my teachers to do that." He leads SIP faculty meetings with little leadership team participation. It appears that ideas flow from [the principal] down to the teachers in this school. He chooses the direction, and he has a cadre of teachers upon whom he can rely to implement his ideas.

Ironically, what made change difficult in this school was the belief that the professional staff was already at the cutting edge of their field. For example, the principal appointed the same core group of teachers to his most important committees: the principal advisory committee and the leadership team. Whereas the principal knew he could rely on these able professionals, his reliance on them did not strengthen the overall faculty's commitment to such programs as SIP, and it distanced most faculty from critical school decisions.

Organizational History

The stories and myths passed on to organizational members over time represent one vehicle in which the culture of organizations is carried (Schein, 1992). In two of the schools, teachers and principals described stories that had persisted over time and had defined their roles as professionals, guided peer interactions, and set the tone for administrator-faculty relations. These stories influenced the manner and extent to which SIP was implemented and professional community was developed in the two settings.

At Northridge, the recent creation of the middle school challenged efforts to inculcate norms of professional community. In spite of a merger of sixth, seventh, and eighth grades into a middle school 2 years earlier, sixth grade teachers have continued to embrace a close-knit elementary school culture whereas seventh and eighth grade teachers have remained aligned with a high school model (i.e., working in isolation from their peers and identifying most strongly with their departmental areas). The formation of other communities as a result of recent staff turnover and the hiring of new, less experienced teachers further complicated this tension by creating even more "communities." One novice teacher provided his perspective:

Question: Where do you see community existing in your school?

Response: Young teachers, veteran teachers.

Question: There are two communities in operation?

Response: Yes.

Question: Where, if any, are the bridges between the two?

Response: There may be bridges now because they just hired some new teachers that were inserted into the older teams, so there is kind of a bridge. But that bridge has barriers. You know, "he's with us, she's with us." Then there are people like myself who really have no identity. I belong to my grade-level team, but I interact with other teams. I am not scared to do so. There are other teams that will say we've done that, it just doesn't work. Well, I ask, "why?"

Question: So you see that maybe identities formulate around the teams, but not around the school?

Response: No, I see them around the teams, but only when the teams are together. Once the teams break up, they go back to their two separate groups, young and veterans. It's evident, when we sit at faculty meetings. Younger teachers flock together. . . . it is a pet peeve of mine. That is what I see, the two communities, young versus veterans, and until you've been here 5 years and have your tenure, shut up, do your work.

However, at Northridge what could have turned into divisive turf battles between communities within the school, instead added a powerful dimension to SIP as groups with different perspectives, experiences, and values were able to forge a new set of organizational values and beliefs through reflective dialogue and collaboration.

At Cedarbrook, the principal described how the manner of his appointment as middle school principal years earlier had continued to influence his ability to lead:

Several years ago we had three principals in the district—the high school, the middle school, the elementary school. I was the high school principal. The superintendent at that time chose to cut the budget—and it needed to be. So there was a middle school principal with less tenure than anybody else who was let go. And the teachers were angry. At that point I picked up the middle school. The previous principal had some pretty good relationships with some of the people that are still in the middle school. So it's been a difficult time getting the teachers together as a team.

According to the Cedarbrook principal, the lack of faculty trust in leadership stemmed from this occurrence years ago and has continued to make difficult the establishment of an environment conducive to collaboration, reflective dialogue, and a focus on student learning—critical elements of professional community. The need for a trusted leader was one of the reasons the principal had decided to retire.

Organizational Priorities

Setting priorities for securing and allocating scarce resources (e.g., time, funding, and personnel) with which to implement SIP was a constant challenge for principals and leadership teams. In addition to these implementation costs, the initial fee (\$3,000) to join SIP became a major point of contention. The competition for these scarce resources played out at the school and district levels.

The tension between district visions and school-level reform efforts played out clearly at Northridge, where vying for scarce resources placed the project in jeopardy. At the district and school level, stakeholders of other programs and processes saw SIP as competition. For instance, during one of our observations of an SIP faculty meeting, leadership team members had to defend the importance and validity of the process to the district's assistant superintendent, who was concerned about using a significant portion of professional development monies for the process. Although the district did not discontinue support for SIP, the message to produce measurable results quickly was clear. A Northridge faculty member who serves on the district's professional development committee reflected the pressure to produce tangible results in the short term:

[The leadership team] spent a year doing groundwork. And we've spent a lot of time working on a vision statement and goals. But now it's time to move this out of the talking stage into some action stage. There has to be a point where you stop talking and you start doing. If you're not careful our [leadership] team can talk you to death. They can take an issue, which is very minor, and spend hours debating it. That's fine if you've got gobs and gobs of time. . . . I think the faculty is focused . . . they've got their goals in mind. Now I think it's time to get some results. . . . Let me see where we're going by the end of this year.

She continued,

We've had to justify [SIP] quite a bit to [the district administrator]. He said, "we could have taken that \$3,000 and divided it among the faculty for instructional supplies. That's a lot of money in our school district. So at the end of the year, show me what you've done." We need to show him that we've done more than talk. We've talked for a year and a half. That's pretty hard-nosed, but it's reality.

The direct and indirect competition for resources like those described above played important roles in shaping SIP. The two instances described provide examples of how existing priorities and norms of efficiency can define the parameters of professional dialogue in the name of short-term, measurable results. Although this is not necessarily at odds with elements requisite to professional communities (i.e., elements such as reflective dialogue and collaboration), these priorities can define organizational ground rules that focus, and in some cases, limit professional action.

At the school level, the struggle manifested itself most clearly at Westwood. Concurrent with SIP implementation, Westwood was undergoing a multiyear and comprehensive state accountability review process, a piece of which required the development of a school improvement plan. To cope with

the demands of externally and internally imposed school improvement activities, the Westwood principal chose to “piggy back” SIP onto the state requirement. An excerpt from our fieldnotes corroborated this “kill two birds with one stone” strategy:

Another issue to explore is how SIP, at times, gets co-opted by other school programs or initiatives. For example, at Westwood SIP is primarily confined to in-service slots a couple of times a year. It maintains a sideline status to competing issues that are seen as higher priority such as [the state required school and district plans]. At our last site visit to Westwood we observed the faculty working diligently on further establishing a school improvement action plan according to the component areas. However, we also noticed the lack of reflection on the part of some teachers as they literally cut and pasted excerpts from the school and district plans into SIP binders. This type of perfunctory approach to school improvement threatens SIP viability.

Organization of Teacher Work

The manner in which organizations structure the time and space of the work environment can provide useful clues regarding underlying organizational assumptions (Schein, 1992). Each of the schools relied on traditional, formal faculty meetings to inform teachers of SIP and its goals and objectives. What made SIP implementation more effective at Northridge and, to a degree, Westwood was the use of teacher time during the school day that supported professional learning. At both schools, at least some teachers worked in grade-level teams. Where teachers worked in teams, information about SIP was disseminated more freely, even when SIP was not the purpose of the meeting. As a Westwood teacher stated, “It seems that the team concept of the middle school has helped [improve communication] because while each team has its own way of doing things we are still on the same page.” Thus, the knowledge dissemination through teams made formal faculty meetings and in-services more productive because teachers were more aware of the project.

On the other hand, Cedarbrook teachers described their work lives as typically isolated and uncontrollably frenetic. In this small school of 26 faculty, the lack of formal planning and teaming time for teachers relegated SIP to a footnote in teachers’ days. Already wearing “many hats” out of a sense of professional responsibility and the demands created by a small staff, these teachers could not commit the energy needed to implement SIP effectively. The experiences recounted by two of Cedarbrook’s leadership team members reflect the impossibility of trying to implement something as extensive as SIP through infrequent staff meetings. One stated,

We wanted to pull [the faculty] together and have a meeting after school on various research outcomes, articles in professional journals, things like that. And we only had one or two people show up because it got busy and we didn't want to make it mandatory. But when you make it voluntary, everybody's busy and it's been hard to hold [a meeting].

Another Cedarbrook leadership team teacher described how time affects SIP:

The [SIP] process is great. I think it works. I think we need to meet with the faculty more often than we have. I think that's where the breakdown is. . . . [The process] helps people to focus on what it is they are actually trying to accomplish. Unfortunately, due to time and space, we break down in our communication between the team and the entire faculty.

As the above examples illustrate, certain organizational factors, idiosyncratic to each school, either facilitated or impeded SIP implementation and progress toward professional community. Several issues influenced the degree to which professional community was (or will be) achieved: (a) principal's leadership style and approach to school level change, (b) past events and occurrences remembered and passed on to new organizational members, (c) politics of allocating scarce resources, and (d) the persistent bureaucratic organization of schools. These issues form a serious dilemma when they surface as impediments reflecting school cultures that are incongruent with professional community. We explore this dilemma and other issues in the conclusion.

CONCLUSIONS

At the outset of this article, we described a continuum with community (or more specifically, professional community) and bureaucratic organizations at either extreme. Schools as formal organizations experience the tension between a professional community ethic of caring for students, critical reflection, and collaboration on the one hand, and the bureaucratic necessities of hierarchy, accountability, rationality, and control (Meltzoff, 1994; Minar & Greer, 1969), on the other. As more and more schools use the metaphor of professional community to guide practice, professionals in those schools will have to negotiate these tensions. Such educators will also need to locate a balance that provides sufficient communal characteristics while attending to bureaucratic imperatives in ways supportive of continuous and reflective professional learning that has the best interests of students in mind. These three cases illustrate the promises and pitfalls of trying to move

schools toward the professional community end of the continuum. The lens of organizational culture is useful in illuminating exactly how SIP may (or may not) have nudged these schools toward professional community.

We defined organizational culture as those facets of organizations that reflect the underlying assumptions guiding decisions, behaviors, and beliefs within organizations (Schein, 1992). Professional community, defined by a particular set of shared norms and values, focus on student learning, reflective dialogue, deprivatization of practice, and collaboration, represents a specific kind of organizational culture. We also defined double-loop learning as a process that examines the underlying assumptions and leads, not only to the acquisition and integration of new knowledge, but to the effective use and dissemination of professional knowledge. Thus, we argue that organizational learning (i.e., double-loop learning) can, and should, occur anywhere on the professional community-bureaucracy continuum. Indeed, if professional communities are to continuously learn in productive ways, double-loop learning is invaluable.

As our findings suggested, Northridge demonstrated significant changes in the underlying assumptions that guided professional practice and led to the beginnings of a cycle of double-loop learning. We find the most evident changes in the relationships between various factions or communities-within-communities (Brown & Duguid, 1995) at this school. Prior to SIP various communities-within-communities, such as new and experienced teachers, academic and exploratory teachers, sixth grade (i.e., elementary) and seventh and eighth grade (i.e., junior high) teachers, worked in isolation from each other. However, a combination of SIP's reliance on leadership teams and a past principal's decision to encourage participation from members of various teacher groups within the school created an environment in which differing views on teaching, learning, and change were acknowledged. By legitimating these diverse views, the members of the leadership team were able to meaningfully address the underlying assumptions guiding the school in general as well as its communities-within-communities. Thus, this reflective dialogue among group members focused on deep-seated values and beliefs, led to hard fought consensus that the leadership team could present and defend to the entire school faculty. Furthermore, the unified front of a diverse group of leadership team members did not go unrecognized by the faculty who, while cautious, engaged in the change process with uncharacteristic enthusiasm.

The ability of the Northridge leadership team to examine the assumptions that guided each member's practice and to then broaden that reflective dialogue to the entire faculty was evidence that double-loop learning strategies were beginning to take place. In addition, Northridge was able to move

beyond an awareness of a need for change and into the action realm, where creative solutions to problems constraining school improvement and alternative professional practices became the focus of faculty dialogue. Northridge began to demonstrate evidence of interconnectedness with peers and interest in critical inquiry, two fundamental components of professional learning communities and learning organizations.

Conversely, Cedarbrook and Westwood did not show the same clear signs of movement toward professional communities capable of engaging in double-loop learning. However, 2 years may not be long enough to detect the influence that SIP has had (or will have) on each school's culture. At Cedarbrook, SIP effectiveness in influencing school culture was impeded by several factors, including leadership style of the principal and the organization of teacher work. As a result, change was, at best, slight and limited to the leadership team. SIP's influence on the leadership team was primarily manifested in the deprivatization of team member practice. In addition, because of lack of principal leadership in the form of administrative, moral, and political support, the leadership team was unable to approach school faculty in ways that might have influenced school culture. Unfortunately, these factors not only made the formation of professional community unlikely, but also confined professional learning to individual professional endeavors in an inhospitable professional learning environment.

Like Cedarbrook, Westwood showed little movement toward professional community. However, after 2 years of interacting and sharing experiences with 27 other leadership teams at SIP conferences, the insulated perception of high standards and achievement at Westwood began to be challenged. By the end of their 2-year SIP experience, the tone of the Westwood leadership team's discussions had begun to change, reflecting an acknowledgment that the single-loop learning approaches they had relied on in the past were inadequate for the challenges they currently faced. In fact, at the leadership team level, both Cedarbrook and Westwood had begun to exhibit a newfound professional ethic of inquiry as a result of their participation in SIP. However, unlike Northridge, Westwood did not display behaviors or actions indicative of double-loop learning. Instead, the Westwood faculty displayed clear signs of single-loop learning as they avoided thorough and critical analysis of the norms, values, and beliefs that guided present practice.

We end our discussion of professional community with several observations. First, professional community was defined according to five elements that foster work environments where participants are constantly learning and critically reflective; professional community is strengthened when the communities-within-communities are acknowledged, legitimized, and brought into the fold of professional community in meaningful ways. Given

that professionals have differing views grounded in different career experiences, embracing these diverse views is a fundamental first step toward establishing professional communities. As Brown and Duguid (1995) discuss, communities—even professional ones—are not inherently, nor are they continuously, innovative. Innovation, rather, is the product of the creative, and at times conflictive, tension that occurs at the confluence of communities-within-communities.

Second, this collective case study was, more than anything, a lesson in the difficulty of forming professional community. However, through this long-term examination of professional community formation, it was evident that SIP can provide the organizational architecture—that is, “the ways communities are linked together” (Brown & Duguid, 1995, p. 78)—that leads to reflective dialogue and collaboration among professionals within and among schools and eventually double-loop learning. However, our optimism is guarded as we also acknowledge the dilemma posed by existing organizational factors, some of which are deeply rooted in the bureaucratic traditions of schools. After months of data collection and analysis, the question remains, Where cultural changes occurred that reflected the formation of professional community, was it SIP that made the difference, or did the pre-existing conditions allow change to occur?

Third, an important implication of this study is the need to understand those factors or characteristics that define a school’s place on the professional community-bureaucracy continuum. For example, probably the most important facilitating or impeding factor discussed was the role of the principal. Although all principals felt the utmost respect for their faculty and concern for student well-being and achievement, their leadership styles played critical roles in the degree of professional community achieved. Thus, a better understanding of antecedent conditions, as well as intervening actions that lay the groundwork for establishing professional community, can create the conditions conducive to its formation.

Finally, as this study shows, SIP provides the organizational architecture that supports (a) the premises of professional community and (b) a process for double-loop learning. Because the elements that define professional community and the principals of double-loop learning are inextricably intertwined, we propose a new label to describe the desired outcome: professional learning community. Thus, the principles of double-loop learning can guide us in establishing professional learning communities. In turn, these professional learning communities can serve as a foundation for developing school-wide communities that maintain a focus on student learning, the fundamental purpose of schools.

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