Learning leadership – examining in-school development through communities of practice

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Abstract:

Moving from middle management to senior leadership in schools was, until the late 1990s, a localised process. Having gained promotion, individuals were expected to learn on the job and it wasn't really until the introduction of the National College for School Leadership that widely available, alternative routes to leadership development became available. This paper sets out to explore how leadership 'learning' in schools occurs through the lens of Wenger's 'Communities of Practice'. It identifies how legitimised peripheral participation enables learning to take place as a process of participation and reification, through the ongoing negotiation of meaning and identity. Some consideration is given to the reasons for the development of national programmes and, specifically, implications of the Leadership Pathways course for aspiring senior leaders and its relationship to more traditional approaches.

Introduction:

During the 1990s, despite a history of 'in-post' development for school leaders, policymakers took the decision to exercise regulatory power and bring their professional development into the domain of Government influence (Orchard, 2007). This was achieved initially through the establishment of National Standards, as Anthea Millett, Chief Executive of the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) is quoted as saying:

> "We should make explicit all of the key characteristics of those most likely to succeed in establishing and maintaining excellence as the headteacher of a school."
>
> (Millet (1996) in Orchard, 2007, p.3)

The National College for School Leadership (NCSL) and subsequent legislation were established to ensure Headship applicants had successfully completed a qualification demonstrating they could meet the TTA standards (DCSF, 2009). The programmes offered by the National College combined a variety of learning approaches much of it dependant on experienced 'participants'.

Through the last ten years of my career I have had the opportunity to experience this 'professional development' from the perspectives of learner, coach and also as a Research Associate for the National College as well as through many opportunities offered to me for

'learning on the job'. These experiences left me curious as to how competence in a profession, which in my view is fundamentally social in nature and resonates well with practice-based learning, came to be defined by a set of standardised criteria. I would argue that in-school development previously stood as a good example of 'situated learning' which underpinned Lave and Wenger's development of 'Communities of Practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1999), following a process, in my view, akin to apprenticeship. Can leadership learning be viewed as 'learning through practice' - at what point and why did this change? What impact has the actions of policy makers had? Is it possible that by adopting methodologies that are so dependent on practitioners there is the potential for subtle or even explicit subversion of any desired 'identity' through the tutoring and coaching elements of the programmes?

This paper sets out to answer these questions through the lens of 'Communities of Practice' (Wenger, 1999). Wenger defines learning (for the individual) within this metaphor as "an issue of engaging in and contributing to the practices of their community" (Wenger, 1999, p.7). I will review the learning methodology used for school leadership development and how it supports the individual to move from a position of 'outsider' to one of legitimate peripheral participation moving toward full participation in a relevant 'school leadership' community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). I will also consider the implications for this model of the newer NCSL routes to professional development.

My research is conducted from an ontological position of social constructivism and interpretivist epistemology. The social nature of school leadership suggests, to me, that this is an appropriate standpoint for such research. However, interpretivist analysis is always subject to potential bias or misinterpretation as it depends on the subjective viewpoint of the researcher. In this instance, my role as a Deputy Headteacher means that I may find it challenging to view the situation from the perspective of an 'outsider' (Wenger, 1999). This could result in my analysis being restricted by my own socio-cultural experiences, understanding and exposure. Being aware of the risk is an important factor in addressing it and I will also do all I can to mitigate by continually questioning and testing my interpretation and by seeking feedback from the conference on the validity of my analysis.

Theoretical Lens:

Etienne Wenger and Jean Lave developed the idea of situated learning and Communities of Practice whilst studying and trying to "rescue the idea of apprenticeship" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.29) . The existent cognitive models of learning proved unsatisfactory to explain what was a highly social and situated mode of learning (Pea and Seely Brown in Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.11). Lave and Wenger sought to show that:

> "learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and that mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the socio-cultural practices of a community"
>
> (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.29)

The idea of learning as participation differed from previous "acquisitive" (Hughes, Jewson & Unwin, 2007) and social cognitive learning theories predicated on a view of learning as "internalization", such as Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ibid). Internalization focuses on learning as socially generated but individually experienced. Lave and Wenger suggested instead that "learning as increasing participation in communities of practice concerns the whole person acting in the world" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.49) placing emphasis on the social construction of knowledge.

The starting point for this journey of learning was labelled as 'legitimate peripheral participation' – accepted into, but on the outside of the community or craft. New participants (newcomers) in a community of practice start on the periphery and move toward full participation, depending on their engagement and mastery of the socio-cultural practices of the community (Wenger, 1999).

There are a number of criticisms of Lave and Wenger's theory, regarding power, trust and predispositions (Roberts, 2006), not least from Wenger himself (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). Fuller suggests that the theory is underdeveloped in several regards such as in the definition of communities of practice and the adequacy of learning as participation (Hughes, Jewson & Unwin, 2007). The theory should not be considered a 'perfect' metaphor

for learning but rather a flexible thinking frame to generate thought and debate and I will refer to the critiques mentioned as and when appropriate.

Context

Leadership in English schools has a history highly intertwined with issues of class, with Headship becoming a dominant, patriarchal model rooted in the culture of independent schools (Grace, 1995).The Head's role was to give leadership in all aspects of socio-cultural and political life and, post 1920s, Headteachers' had achieved "extensive cultural autonomy" (Grace, 1995, p.13). Prior to the 1960s, 'learning' leadership would have been predominantly done in-post but, after the 60s, many school leaders studied 'educational management' in their own time (Orchard, 2007). The Plowden Report in 1967 identified a need for development for primary school heads (ibid) but it wasn't until 1983 that the Government sponsored a management training programme for school leaders and a National Development Centre (Bush, 2003).

In the 1990s, Gillian Shepherd (Education Minister 1994-7) proposed National Standards for Headteachers, as she felt that they "needed preparation and support for the exacting demands of the job" (Orchard, 2007, p.1). Her insistence on the mandatory, government regulated process may have been only partly about development, Orchard claims it was also to:

> "create a mechanism through which headteachers could be held publically accountable, demonstrating their competence against prescribed criteria"
>
> (Orchard, 2007, p.1)

I would suggest that this would be congruent with a predominant ideology of Technical-pragmatism / rationalism where the dominant discourse is of vocational education supported by competencies and skills profiles (Ernest, 1991) achieved through a government stress on "performance and public accountability" (Bush, 2003, p.9).

The task was given to the Teacher Training Agency who consulted on what the standards should be, but some felt that "little if any consultation was undertaken at all, a strategy that has been roundly criticised since" (Orchard, 2007, p.2) and that the final standards were mainly based on 'management standards'. There was a view that "The TTA document is

entitled 'National Standards', but in fact contains little or nothing that could reasonably be called a 'standard'" (Wilson, 1999, p.534) as it tended to refer more to desired characteristics and behaviours. The strategy was unpopular with Headteachers, but "came as no surprise" (Orchard, 2007, p.2) given the market philosophy prevalent at the time and the policy was continued by the following administrations. The National Qualification for Headship (NPQH) became a compulsory requirement for Headship applicants in 2009 (Tomlinson, 2005) until this year. Over time, the NPQH was joined by lower level development – 'Leading from the Middle' and latterly, 'Leadership Pathways' which targeted school leaders who were not yet ready for the NPQH.

School Leadership – 'A' community of practice?

Communities of practice are defined as "a set of relations between persons, activity, and world; over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.98). Roberts suggests that they cannot be established by 'management' – although their spontaneous emergence can be facilitated (Roberts, 2006). There are a large number of agencies with an interest in the field of School Leadership, but I would suggest that, rather than being a single community of practice, these may represent a "constellation of practices" where the 'diversity' of practices overlap and engage with each other across boundaries of demarcation (Wenger, 1999, p.129). Within this constellation there may be individual communities, separate communities which overlap and others which nest within larger communities.

Within this work I will focus on a community of practice formed around leadership **in** a school, where participants (Heads, deputies, etc) have " joint enterprise, mutual engagement and a shared repertoire" (Wenger, 1999). My aim is to use communities of practice as a metaphorical lens to view the development of a middle manager in this school into an active member or 'agent' in senior leadership. Eg. Assistant, Deputy Head or similar role which has a whole school dimension.

Legitimacy and peripherality

The first point to consider is legitimacy – how does a 'newcomer' gain legitimacy and join the periphery of the community? There is a temptation to see legitimacy as something that

is 'granted', indeed Wenger referred to it as such (Wenger, 1999), but the reality may be lot less simple and legitimacy could be affected by issues of power and politics, a point I will return to later.

In the case of the school leader, legitimacy may be gained where competence has already been demonstrated but also where the values, beliefs and vision of the individual are congruent with those of the community - evidence of already existing 'alignment' (Wenger, 1999). By offering a senior position the Head, as a full participant in the community of practice, may legitimise membership and facilitate access to the community's practices, however, even if this occurs there is no guarantee that the 'legitimacy' will be recognised by the community as a whole and it may be more reasonable to view the initial achievement of legitimacy as probationary.

I would argue that 'probational' legitimisation could also be achieved by an 'outsider' demonstrating expertise which is valued and recognised by the community of practice as a whole – not just the Head, perhaps resulting in a more democratic invitation to the periphery. Is it also possible that an individual, who joins the school from a previous post where they held legitimacy, has to achieve legitimacy anew? I would suggest that, however close the practices between communities, legitimacy may not be transferable, but rather remains a provisional state for any 'newcomer'. Despite this, it is reasonable to suggest that an experienced colleague, once fully legitimised, may take a more accelerated route to full participation.

The introduction of Leadership Pathways and other NCSL courses may have offered another route to legitimacy, albeit through a national community of practice rather than a local one. This is not to suggest that such legitimacy was entirely divorced from local communities. A candidate would have needed permission from the school and agreement that the school would provide coaching by senior staff – this suggests that, although the individual may not have been invited to join the periphery of the *local* school leadership community of practice, there is at least a tacit acknowledgement of their potential to do so. It is highly unlikely that such decisions would be made in isolation of the Headteacher and so, I suggest, that this could also be seen as a form of provisional or delayed legitimisation to the local community.

By 'granting' legitimacy, the community may be recognising or acknowledging the *potential* of that individual to contribute to the 'negotiation of meaning' and allowing them access to practices allowed the newcomer to start learning and begin their journey toward full participation (inward trajectory). The peripherality of their practice may ensure some allowance for their position. As Wenger described it:

> "Granting the newcomers legitimacy is important because they are likely to come short of what the community regards as competent engagement. Only with enough legitimacy can all their inevitable stumbling and violations become opportunities for learning rather than a cause for dismissal, neglect or exclusion"
>
> (Wenger, 1999, p.101)

Having achieved legitimacy our 'newcomer' joins the periphery of practice and is able to participate in the 'negotiation of meaning'. Within any community, different actors may have differing degrees of agency in the negotiation of meaning. Emirbayer and Mische see agency as a temporal and structurally related process which "both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations"(Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p.970) and I would suggest such agency can be exercised either directly (Headteacher, Senior leadership teams) in everyday practice of leading a school or indirectly through policy, regulation and inspection (OfSTED, DfE). The newcomer could be quite peripheral, but hold specialist knowledge in finance or technology and so hold greater cultural capital in those aspects than in others, leading to greater power / agency within that discourse.

Power – the "ability or capacity to achieve something, whether by influence, force, or control" (Roberts, 2006, p.627); is an area that critics feel Lave and Wenger neglected. They did recognise the role of power and how peripherality could result in disempowerment but also suggested that the converse applies – peripherality is also an "empowering position" (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Being on the periphery at least gives *opportunity* to become part of the negotiation of meaning but Roberts argues that, with the importance of this within the theory, "meanings may continue to be merely a reflection of the dominant source of power" (Roberts, 2006, p.627) – possibly the Head. She also suggests they have failed to investigate

the 'distribution of power' across and within the community (ibid) as "Inequalities of power characterise relationships between participants *in* communities of practice" (Hughes, Jewson & Unwin, 2007, p.173). She acknowledges Marshall and Rollinson's view that the "account of the negotiation of meaning" is too "quiescent and consensual" instead of being plagued with "misunderstandings and disagreements" (Marshall & Rollinson (2004, p. S74) in Roberts, 2006). Foucault suggested that issues of power exist within all social situations, including discourse (Mills, 1997) and is fundamentally related to the creation of knowledge (learning, practice and legitimation) (Hughes, Jewson & Unwin, 2007). I would suggest that 'negotiation of meaning' may be, in practice, a form of 'Discourse' and a means for creating knowledge. As such, it "is in constant conflict with other discourses and social practices" (Mills, 1997, p.17) which, perhaps, implicitly addresses the concern Marshall and Rollinson raised. Wenger did in fact suggest that, as knowledge is social, such disagreements and controversy are what make a community of practice "vital, effective and productive" (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, p.10)

Disempowerment could stem simply from the positional authority of the Head within the relationship. It is not a meeting of equals and the Head can always use their positional power to override the views of the newcomer, ensure they are undermined, go unheard or even facilitate a marginalisation of their position (Wenger, 1999) or, ultimately, a removal of their legitimacy. This could also occur if the newcomer failed to continue to 'align' themselves with the behaviours, beliefs and values of the community as a whole.

For Leadership Pathways candidates the issue of peripherality may be a key potential barrier to learning through practice. In some senior teams they may not be granted access to any of the practices of the team other than via their coaching sessions. Limiting access to 'practice' may limit their exposure to the full range of knowledge, both codified / explicit and tacit, that is distributed among the leadership team (Hildreth & Kimble, 2002) so, in Communities of Practice terms – learning may also be limited.

Learning through practice - Participation and Reification

Once established as legitimate, the 'newcomer' becomes 'one' with the community of practice in a continuous, dynamic negotiation of 'meaning', which is contextual, historic and

unique (Wenger, 1999), producing “abstractions, tools, symbols, stories, terms, and concepts which reify something of that practice in a congealed form” (Wenger, 1999, p.59).

Wenger suggests that “practice is about meaning as an experience of everyday life” (Wenger, 1999, p.52), that it is located within a process called the ‘negotiation of meaning’ and that this is rooted in a duality of participation and reification (ibid). Within this context, negotiation is a continuous interaction of social factors and relations that is both dynamic and historic. Participation is the “process of taking part and also to the relations with others that reflect this process” (Wenger, 1999, p.55) and reification is defined as “the process of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience in “thingness”” (Wenger, 1999, p.58). In essence, participation and reification continually influence and affect each other, with practice leading to new reification of meanings and reification leading to new forms of practice. This means that negotiation of meaning is a process which “constantly changes the situations to which it gives meaning and affects all participants” (Wenger, 1999, p.54) and as such results in ‘learning’ for both individual and community (Wenger, 1999).

Amin and Roberts argue that “practising is the same as knowing in practice, whether the subject is aware or not” (Amin & Roberts, 2006, p.4) and specifically, although codified knowledge can be gained through academic study, tacit knowledge has to be gained through “learning by doing” (Amin & Roberts, 2006, p.11). Hildreth and Kimble argue that, although tacit knowledge can have explicit components, it is essentially “deeply rooted in action” (Nonaka (1991) in Hildreth & Kimble, 2002, p.5). Taking the example of our newcomer to the ‘leadership in school’ community of practice – having been granted legitimacy they now have “a way of gaining access to sources for understanding through growing involvement” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.37) or, I would argue, an opportunity to ‘learn through doing’. They will have to attend meetings of the senior team, perhaps with Governors or other agents. Such involvement will give them an opportunity to listen to discourse – both the way in which it takes place and the meanings that are being negotiated and reified. They will have an observation lookout post (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to view the acceptable behaviours of the community, the hidden power relations and gradually increase

their own involvement in the dynamic process of negotiation and reification, demonstrating their 'learning'.

Their 'empowered' presence may influence practice resulting in learning for other members of the community and they may gradually become an increasingly embedded strand of the fabric of distributed knowledge. Being peripheral could place limits on the degree of involvement and influence, but not necessarily and being a full member should not exclude someone from the 'learning' of the community as a whole. It is also important to realise that being a community does not suggest homogeneity, everyone becoming the same – but the processes will result in "differences as well as similarities" (Wenger, 1999, p.75) – "shared practice does not itself imply harmony or collaboration" (Wenger, 1999, p.85).

Wenger suggests that "successful communities capture and document insights, ideas and procedures" (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, p.147), although this carries a risk that it will become a purpose in itself. The newcomer may be exposed to previously reified meaning in the form of policy and management documents or artefacts (Hildreth & Kimble, 2005), they may even have to create new ones or update older ones. I concur with Wenger's view that "practices evolve as shared histories of learning.....a combination of participation and reification intertwined over time" (Wenger, 1999, p.87) and these documents can represent an historical and cultural context of meaning within which they can view their current participation / learning. Engaging with this element of practice may result in further negotiation of meaning – what do the written texts mean – how are they positioned with regard to the spoken discussions? Engaging with this will itself be a process of negotiated meaning, with themselves as well as the community as a whole and may result in further learning. For Leadership Pathways candidates, if the artefacts and boundary objects used in the course seem unrelated to their experience of practice the reified meaning that they represent will also seem questionable. They may attempt to renegotiate the meaning of those artefacts with their tutors and coaches resulting in a reification of meaning mediated through the medium of experience. This may not necessarily be the same meaning that the artefacts authors intended.

One further aspect of participation relates to engagement with members of the school community who are 'non-participants' in the leadership community of practice – such as

mainstream teachers or non-teaching staff. Participation may enable the newcomer to observe how meaning, once reified within one community is negotiated within the wider school community of practice – these communities are not isolated but are interconnected and influence each other (Wenger, 1999). Practice may include observing and participating in writing notices or documents (which Wenger refers to as "boundary objects" (Wenger, 1999, p.105)), leading meetings of groups and individuals and continued engagement within the teaching community of practice - "boundary practices". Although the boundary objects / practices represent the reified meaning from one community they also exist as a means to 'bridge' the different forms of participation in different groups. As such, they, in Wenger's terms "both connect and disconnect" (Wenger, 1999, p.107) facilitating negotiation between the communities, but highlighting the fundamental differences in role and power.

The degree of practice that a Leadership Pathways candidate will be able to participate in will be down to their peripherality and, therefore, access to the negotiation of meaning may well be restricted. They may only be able to access practice through the filter of the NCSL learning materials but a large part of the course is acquisitive rather than participatory. Knowledge has already been reified, as have desirable qualities, and there is no opportunity for negotiation of meaning and re-reification with the authors – although there may be with the self or fellow candidates and tutors. The online materials only allow for compliant understanding. The coaching and tutorial sessions are supposed to be aligned with the aims of the course, tutors follow set scripts and coaches should not give guidance or direction at all. Even the coaching model itself, in my view, seems to isolate the individual from wider social relationships and community learning that Wenger suggests are a natural outcome of communities of practice (Wenger, 1999). It appears to me as if learning, in this context, is not viewed as a socially constructed process.

The tutors and coaches are practitioners and this, along with the school based project, opens up the possibility of contestation and subversion. The tutors, through group discussion, may slip off message to illustrate practice from their own experiences or that of the group – thus linking learning back into their own processes of negotiation and reification of meaning. The coaches may slip out of coaching mode to pick up on questions of practice and, in so doing, once again re-engage the individual in 'experienced' practice, participation

and negotiation / reification. It is unlikely that the school based project would be allowed to take place outside of the accepted practices of the local community and, as such, reverts to an experiential / participatory learning mode. Through the process of developing the project, the candidate is again immersed in the negotiation of meaning and reification – at least as far as their peripherality allows and has access to the web of distributed knowledge.

Learning as Identity

Lawler suggests that it is not possible to have a single definition of identity as there are different ways of theorizing the subject and suggest an inherent "paradoxical combination of sameness and difference" (Lawler, 2008, p.2), while Sfard and Prusack bemoan the frequent lack of definition the term is given, applying that specific critique to Lave and Wenger's work (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). They accept the socially constructed nature of identity, while developing an idea that it is a narrative, a "discursive diffusion" (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p.18). It is difficult to see that anyone can have a single, stable notion of self as they may hold several identities in a "nexus of multi-membership" (Wenger, 1999). These may be in contention with each other – e.g. Mother and worker. Each role may have differing demands requiring differing practices, resulting in discontinuity of self perception. Ball uses the example of a Deputy Head who stands in a "dual relation to the staff and senior management. He understands both parties, he stands between and inhabits their two worlds be he feels unable to secure a permanent reconciliation"(Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992, p.149). This may reflect Foucault's idea of 'heterotopia' – the "coexistence in 'an impossible space' of a 'large number of fragmentary possible worlds'" (ibid) and, ergo, possible identities. It may be that coping with this requires an ability to 'situate the self' or compartmentalise to avoid or limit the impact of 'crises of confidence' (Lawler, 2008).

Foucault suggested that identity is intrinsically linked to power and that particular identities could be 'made up' (constructed?) through a process of 'subjectivation'.

> "Through subjectivation people become tied to specific identities: they become subjects. But also they become subject-ed to the rules and norms engendered by a set of knowledges about those identities"
>
> (Lawler, 2008, p.62)

This lens asks us to view the building of identity as "negotiating the meanings of our experience of membership in social communities" (Wenger, 1999, p.145). I would argue that these two views are compatible as the subjective view of identity would allow the self and others to have differing perceptions of identity based on their own 'knowledge' while differing modes of participation in different communities of practice will facilitate continuous negotiation of those identities.

Our newcomer may have formed a very clear sense of identity as a 'Teacher', one which came from full participation in the field of teaching and through membership of the teaching community of practice. They may have held significant capital and influence and been fully participative in the negotiation of meaning and practice of teaching, learning and becoming part of the distribution of knowledge in the community. The concept of the "historical and cultural production of individual practices....and, on the other hand, the individual production of practices" (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002, p.15) describes 'habitus', perhaps a commonality of what it means to be a teacher or 'Senior Leader' – i.e.: 'identities' are socially constructed.

There seems to be a clear delineation between teachers and 'Senior Management' and joining the leadership team could result in non-participation / marginalisation (Wenger, 1999) in the teaching community and a renegotiation of personal identity. Even if the individual maintains the same behaviours and beliefs as teacher colleagues, just the legitimisation of their membership of the leadership community may result in renegotiation of their participation as a 'teacher', they may be perceived to have different accountability to the enterprise and less mutuality of engagement in the practice of teaching (ibid). The closer to Headship an individual gets (moves toward full participation), the more opportunity they may have to exercise power, the greater the move away from full participation as a 'teacher' may be. Re-negotiating self-identity as a school leader, therefore, also means re-negotiating identity as 'teacher'. Learning could also come from observing how other community members manage their own multi-memberships (Wenger, 1999) and occupy differing 'spaces' within different communities (Walker, Justesen & Robinson, 2006) – once again there is knowledge from experience / practice that is distributed in the community.

Once in a role which offers positional authority and power over other teachers, the 'others' may reconstruct their knowledge of the individual to re-align it with their experience of 'leaders' – reifying them as participants (Wenger, 1999). At the same time this 'meaning' is renegotiated through their experience of the individual. The individual is also renegotiating their own 'knowledge of self' in light of their own previously reified identity of leadership (from the perspective of being a teacher) and their negotiated meaning from experience – 'knowing in practice'. Self-identity and perceived 'identity as' may be a constant zone of negotiation and reification as leadership is practiced. Roberts identifies another criticism of the metaphor here in terms of the relevance of 'Trust'. She suggests that "Trust, familiarity and mutual understanding, developed in their social and cultural contexts, are prerequisites for the successful transfer of tacit knowledge" (Roberts, 2006, p.628). I would suggest, then, that trust is a condition of legitimacy and once that is challenged, it may result in marginalisation from the previous participatory position, resulting (potentially) in the mutual renegotiation of identity away from that of 'Teacher' toward ' Leader'.

The Leadership Pathways course is predicated on a set of 'standards' which represent a set of 'professional qualities' and 'knowledge' (DfES, 2004) reified by the 'governmental' community of practice for school leadership. It may be argued that the standards represent an idealised 'identity' and that the course is a means to achieve the homogeneity of practice that Wenger refutes (Wenger, 1999). This identity may not be aligned with the habitus and practice of the specific communities of practice which have developed through mutual negotiation of meaning and identity and in a temporally situated, socio-cultural context. The NCSL approach may attempt to sterilise this mode of construction or at least replace it with an approved version but the use of practitioners from the local community of practice and other similar ones may mediate this. By filtering the acquired learning and qualities / knowledge through the medium of experience and practice, the resultant leadership 'identity' may well end up close to that of the community's, even allowing for lower levels of participation.

Conclusions

'Communities of Practice' provides a useful way to view how school leaders 'learn' their roles through participation in the practices of their local school leadership community. It

stresses the deeply social nature of knowledge and that the processes of knowledge production are continuous, impacting equally on the individual and the leadership team as a whole. The school leadership's socio-historical knowledge (Billett, 2000) may be distributed in and across the team and, even though some of it may be 'explicit' and codified in artefacts (school policies, handbooks, documents), much of it may be 'tacit' (knowing in practice) and only accessible through observation of and engagement in the shared practices of the community. Engaging in these practices allows the newcomer to develop the knowledge of the role as well as behaviours shared by the leadership team - how to conduct themselves as leaders in the team and through their 'boundary' encounters with teachers, pupils and others in the school community.

The continual renegotiation and reification of meaning through participation ensures that the process never ends. 'Meaning' should, thus, be considered temporally situated and this creates questions for those following the Leadership Pathways course. Elements of the course assume an acquisitive model of 'transfer' of knowledge (online units, face to face), but as these may represent a reified / codified ideal from the National College, there may be a gap between them and practice that is experienced in their local leadership team. The Leadership Pathways candidate may have limited legitimacy and high peripherality allowing them only the slightest participation in practice and limited opportunity to participate in the negotiation of meaning. The involvement of experienced practitioners as tutors and coaches, however, may act as a filter to negotiate and reify the meaning within these artefacts so that it becomes closer to that of actual practice.

The lens is not perfect and shouldn't be expected to be so. I think my use of the lens, while appropriate, suggested a simple, neat match between the theory and the subject, where there is actually a lot more depth and complexity to consider. Although I had recognised the mutually affective nature of learning the lens highlights, conference feedback suggested I needed to give more consideration to the way in which the participation of the new leader impacts on the distribution and development of knowledge across the whole community. There was also a view that issues of identity could be fundamental in the tensions in the Leadership Pathways relationship to practice. I have tried to reflect some of this feedback in this final draft of my paper. **Wordcount 5406**

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Appendix A

Conference proposal.

The nature of this paper aligns it closely with the professional development of senior professionals is schools. It may be of interest to practising senior leaders, as represented by the professional bodies, or to those that develop and deliver professional development.

I would suggest that an appropriate forum for this paper would be the annual conference of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) who represent a large body of practising Heads and senior leaders and who also develop and run their own programmes. The presentation would give them opportunity to reflect on the methods and issues related to the development of senior staff to aid their own course development but also to ensure that school leaders understand the value of engaging aspirant and potential future members of the community of practice, in peripheral participation.