A shift is evident in views of professional development and ways knowledge is developed and applied in workplace environments. There is considerable evidence that situated action is likely to engage learners in activities and interactions that are reflective and practice oriented. A current Education Queensland initiative, Literate Futures: Professional Development – The Teaching of Reading for a Multiliterate World P–7, 7–12, (Education Queensland, 2004) addresses the need for teachers to work collaboratively to innovate and improve their teaching practices in partnerships within and across professional learning communities. The focus of this paper is to examine how partnerships might facilitate this process. An experiential action learning model is used as a framework to examine how partnerships in action support the development of new knowledge and practice. It accounts for those factors that enable or dis-able practitioners as they engage with their own professional learning needs as members of a learning community.

Introduction
Establishing professional relationships within and across systems and professional organisations has been reported as a way forward in developing new knowledge and understandings in workplace partnerships. In the Queensland education sector, literacy reform has emerged as a key priority informed by documents such as the Literate Futures: Report of the Literacy Review for Queensland State Schools (Education Queensland, 2000) which identified the need for action in four priority areas – student diversity, whole-school programs and community partnerships, future literacies and the teaching of reading. Understanding how community partnerships can work together in ways that address the notion of what constitutes future literacies and effective teaching of reading is the basis of this paper.

In 2001, Learning and Development Centres (LDCs) (Literacy) were established to support schools in managing the Education Queensland reform agenda in literacy. LDCs were to assist schools in the development of a Whole School Literacy Strategy and to offer a range of professional development activities that were literacy based. Documents such as Productive Pedagogies: Classroom reflection manual (Education Queensland, 2002), Literate Futures: Reading (Aristey, 2002) and Information and Communication Technologies for Learning (Education Queensland, 2003) provided the basis for broadening a view of literacy to incorporate the notion of Multiliteracies and Information and Communication Technologies [ICTs] (Sefton-Green, 2002, 2003, p. 47).
The genesis of the project reported here was the release of a CD-Rom resource titled *Literate Futures: Professional Development – The Teaching of Reading for a Multiliterate World P–7, 7–12* (Education Queensland, 2004). The purpose of this resource was to provide schools with information that would develop shared understandings about reading as a multiliterate practice and support the change process through professional development materials. Districts scoped learning and development plans targeting ways to support teachers in developing understandings that would inform their practices as teachers of reading. Generally, the role of the LDC (Literacy) was to provide ongoing training and support for facilitators who were working in schools with teachers during the implementation phase. The project reported here emerged as a result of this scoping and was designed to build on partnerships established in the District where participants from a university, district office, Learning Development Centre and schools came together to reform practice through reflective action. It was titled "Reading in a Multiliterate World".

An essential part of this project was progressive evaluation of the effectiveness of the partnerships and action learning processes in contributing to self-directed learning and transformed practices in a community of learners.

**Professional development and learning community**

Effective professional development for ICT use has been linked to broader issues of school reform where professional development is embedded in ongoing, daily teacher work. Teachers' sense of professionalism is thought to be vital, with opportunities needed for them to be involved as 'teacher as learner' and 'teacher as researcher' in ways that connect to a community. What is believed missing from educational research "are the voices of teachers themselves, the questions that teachers ask, and the interpretative frames that teachers use to understand and to improve their own classroom practice" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990, p. 7). Practitioner research where teachers are provided with the time and resources to get together and conduct collaborative action research often involving members of a university faculty has been advocated as an effective way to conduct professional development (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Therefore, research on the formation of 'communities of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991), 'learning communities' (Stein, Smith, & Silver, 1999) or 'learning organisations' (Senge, 1990; Watkins & Marsick, 1993) centres on the voices of participants as they work collaboratively, in understanding what constitutes effective multiliterate practices for the teaching of reading.

The following critical elements of a strong professional learning community underpin this project. Drawing on the work of Kruse, Seashore Louis and Bryk (1994), there was a need to understand how a community of practitioners:

- engage in reflective dialogue;
- share and de-privatise elements of their own practice;
- demonstrate a collective focus on improving outcomes;
- work to produce collaboration amongst members; and,
- demonstrate shared norms and values.
This paper is a work-in-progress and reports one aspect of this "Reading in a Multiliterate World" project. What follows is a brief description of the project and methods used in the research reported here.

Description of the project
The devolution of professional development responsibilities to local networks and schools has been a recent phenomenon in the Queensland Education department. With support from the Mt Gravatt District Literacy Strategy and in collaboration with schools, the LDC (Literacy) Belmont cluster designed a project where teachers would come together over three school terms to examine collaboratively and critically their teaching of multiliterate reading practices. While the project aimed to facilitate teacher reflective practice and change around teaching reading in a multiliterate world, the research reported here used action research methods to evaluate the action learning processes of the group. There is a need for research in this climate of devolving responsibilities, which documents ways partnerships and communities can work together as a self-improving system (Dick, 1997).

Method
In this project both action learning and action research approaches were used in complementary and self-informing processes. Within the context of this study, the purpose of action learning was to achieve learning through reflecting on actions taken by the collective group; while the purpose of action research was to advance understandings of ways learning could be facilitated within a professional learning community as evaluated by two members acting as researchers. Thus action research methods provided a systematic and rigorous evaluative role where the authors of this paper monitored the learning process, interactions and documented outcomes in an effort to make sense of those factors that contributed to teacher change. The action research methods enabled maintenance, review or modification of the project design in response to the ongoing evaluative data gathering.

The design is based on an action research approach (Zuber-Skerritt, 2001, 2002) using an action theory for change model to evaluate if and how learning partnerships contribute to professional learning (Fletcher, 2002, 2003).

The integration of theory and practice through reflection-in-action determined ways members of the community made sense of their experiences using a process of "review, reflection, rethinking and reinterpretation of taken-for-granted knowledge" (National Staff Development Committee, 1995, p.2). This process enabled members "to identify the nature and complexity of the teacher’s work and to provide ways of thinking about the processes of change and support" (Calderhead, 1996, p.721).

Sample
Members of the professional learning community who formed partnerships in this project were a deputy principal, LDC co-ordinator, English adviser, two academics, one of whom was a critical friend and the other a doctoral candidate who formed the leadership team and 9 classroom teachers. Data from the Corporate Data Warehouse, Education Queensland, identified a group of schools where cohorts of students showed
results below the 50 percentile in Year 2 Net, but performed above the 50-percentile rank in Years 5 and 7 tests. These schools were asked to nominate Year 4 and 5 teachers to participate in the project.

**Analysis**

The authors assumed a dual role as participatory members of the learning community and as action researchers as they evaluated processes, responded to feedback, reflected on, and modified the progress of the project. As participatory members of a group of practitioners who were engaged in professional learning we adopted an action learning approach in working with the group. This meant reflecting on 'where to from here?' questions that resulted in acting on, or re-acting to, the issues and learning needs that emerged during the learning team meetings (Fletcher, 2003). In addition, we used action research as a means of researching and evaluating the effectiveness of an action learning approach to facilitate change. At this level, action research was used to explore "What is happening here? How is this happening? Is this effective? Why?" questions. An action theory for change model (Fletcher, 2004) provided an evaluative framework for analysing factors, conditions and critical events that influenced the professional learning during the course of this project. Data collected in the form of transcripts of meetings, interviews, observations, semantic webs, and journal reflections together with survey data were analysed and categorised according to the evaluative framework. The model's explanatory power was tested in theorising ways factors impact on the effectiveness of learning communities as they seek to critically examine practices that are transformative. Results are reported below.

**Results and discussion**

When a group of practitioners come together to reflect on their existing practices and explore ways of transforming their actions to accommodate policy initiatives and innovations in curriculum, forces are operating that may or may not facilitate the process. Furthermore, these forces often remain tacit and a goal in this project was to explicitly evaluate how partnerships in action contribute to self-directed learning and those factors that influence this.

**Force factors for change**

Force factors in the action theory for change model refer to factors that have the potential to exert power and to control action within particular contexts (Fletcher, 2004). Two types of force factors may initiate and influence change in actions. These force factors may be external or internal to an individual and have the potential to activate positive or negative responses in individuals. At the initial phase of this project, it was important to evaluate how these factors effected the formation of partnerships.

External force factors for the teachers participating in this study were the institutional policy documents and initiatives mandated by Education Queensland that aimed to reform ways schools and teachers go about their work practices. The "Reading in a Multiliterate World" project was supported by the District and conducted through an LDC. Internal forces were evident in participants' interest in coming together as a group, improving their own practice and better understanding what contributed to the improved
performances of their students in the test results. The interaction of these sets of forces activated a meeting where teachers discussed the purposes of the project and projected external (professional) and internal (personal) outcomes. When professional and personal needs are seen to conflict or compete in terms of desired outcomes, members may question the reasons behind the 'espoused' (Argyris & Schon, 1974) goals and withdraw from the community.

![Force factors activating change diagram](image)

**Figure 1.**  
Force factors activating change.

In this study, a group of teachers reacted to the external forces at play and raised issues related to the system or District goals for the project. These potential participants became apprehensive about who the actual stakeholders of the project were and distrustful of a perceived system involvement. They were concerned about their roles and responsibilities in the project, about who would have access to and ownership of the ensuing findings and how the District might use results for their own benefit and self-promotion. They resisted forming a partnership with a body that represented authority and several teachers withdrew, as they could not resolve the external versus internal forces that in their mind, were competing and conflicting in terms of control and self-directed learning. There was one notable exception. For this teacher, the internal forces that had motivated her attendance at the planning meeting exerted a strong influence in minimising her suspicion about the intent of the external stakeholders. During the meeting her interactions moved from those of resistance to emerging inquiry where she focussed on her interests in learning about herself as a successful practitioner, in testing practice she thought contributed to her students' success, and, in exploring new ways of developing Multiliteracies in her teaching program. She chose to participate in the project.

Internal force factors that determined participation in this project varied for individual teachers. Those teachers who chose to continue with the project and form a community of learners to investigate multiliterate reading practices cited various personal reasons for doing so. Provision of support was a motivating factor for many teachers as exemplified in their comments about how the project could assist them. Areas of need included:

"Classroom management of my reading program (Have I covered everything?)"

"Time to reflect and internalise."
"Inservice / professional development in the teaching of reading."

"Help with analysing and refining literacy learning outcomes in my current unit plans."

One teacher commented she was, "looking forward to improving my own practices", while two other teachers viewed finding out reasons why actions they were already doing worked as a motivating factor for participating.

Consequently, understanding the potential effect external and internal force factors had to activate knowledge construction for the teachers of this project explained the level of participation. Some schools and teachers chose to engage with and be positively activated by the force factors that were either imposed upon them or provided personal motivations to develop knowledge about effective multiliterate reading practices. At the end of the meeting, a group of teachers had committed to participating in the project. However, if the community was to develop, enabling conditions needed to be in place to operationalise teachers' participation in forming a learning community.

**Change conditions**

The action learning model framing this study identified a set of enabling conditions that need to be in place if personal learning is to develop through communal understandings. The data were analysed to explain the role these conditions played in contributing to the success of the project.

**Figure 2.**

Enabling change conditions.
Drawing on the explanatory power of the model, conditions that enabled or dis-abled practitioners as they engaged with their own professional learning needs as members of a learning community examining their multiliterate reading practices emerged as significant for the growth of this learning community:

- **Personal conditions** – Affective influences that affect how an individual responds to a professional learning encounter such as good will, motivation, emotion and response;
- **Social conditions** – Influences such as participation, collaboration, and interaction;
- **Physical conditions** – Related to time and space of a working environment; and,
- **Cognitive conditions** – Declarative, procedural and conditional thinking processes required to engage in critical reflection.

Personal conditions emerged as significant in contributing to the success of the teachers in this project. In addition, the chance to collaborate with other teachers, facilitators and critical friends and contribute to a community of learners proved to be a beneficial contributing social factor for many participants. In addition, the positive role of facilitators and critical friends to guide and support learning processes has been acknowledged as a positive social condition. Partnerships formed and were consolidated as members adopted different roles and responsibilities in managing collective and individual knowledge construction. The following comment refers to how members supported the learning:

"...’s (name withheld) help and encouragement. She often found useful sites for me. Her supervision of a group has been great each week."

An additional condition emerged in terms of the role institutional partners played in supporting the process. Institutional conditions relate to the role and vision of partners across organisations, including mission statements, programs, and policies that guide the work to be done. In this project, partnerships were formed with members of a university and leaders in the education district. These partnerships enabled the action learning to progress through funding release time for teachers, and resourcing their learning on an emerging needs basis. This offered opportunistic oriented actions that responded to issues that emerged during the action learning cycle. Comments focusing on the positive effect of being able to share ideas with the community have provided supporting evidence for the importance of social conditions to be fostered and funded.

"Collaboration with others … input from others … time for me to reflect out aloud."
"Sharing ideas etc with other teachers in the area."
"Listening to experienced (and inexperienced) people and the variance of opinions towards issues within Literacy and the wider school learning."

However, institutional conditions caused some teachers to become dis-engaged with the project as they attempted to address institutional policy related to a New Basics initiative in Queensland. For the teachers associated with two of the participant schools mandated to follow a New Basics curriculum, the complexity of integrating project ideas and practices in conjunction with the demands involved for conducting Rich Tasks
competed for their time. This alerted the leadership team to look for approaches that would alleviate these demands by integrating the project's goals with those of the New Basics curriculum. As the learning community explored their own practices, a critical events chain based on action learning processes directed the course taken by individuals in their journey as members of a learning community.

**Critical events: Collusions and collisions**

It is important for members to monitor and understand the role critical events play as they engage in knowledge construction through action and reflection. Evaluating critical events and designing actions that responded effectively to them was an important outcome of the action research process in responding to the learning experiences of the group. Critical events had the potential to maintain the collective learning through collusion or redirect the learning through collision.

Throughout the project, teachers would describe critical events that helped them collude as members of the community of learners involved in this "Reading in a Multiliterate World" project. Events that were 'in simpatico' with teachers' beliefs where they could make sense of experiences within the community contributed to the learning. However, when events resulted in unpredictable learning outcomes or did not match teacher expectations, participants faced a conundrum. In an effort to resolve this they embarked on a course of action that collided with the group intentions and resulted in a range of learning outcomes that was idiosyncratic as demonstrated in the model.

**Figure 3.**

![Diagram showing Force factors, change conditions, and critical events facilitating action learning.](image-url)
Evaluating these events equipped the group to manage a self-directed learning approach throughout the project. Multiple critical events maintained collusion among participants where individual knowledge was transformed into collective action. These critical events maintained a momentum for change (Fletcher, 2003) where partnerships sustained the energy and effort needed throughout the action learning process. However, all members of the group encountered collisions at some point in the project. These collisions were confronting and had the potential to isolate members from the learning community as they grappled with their own changing view of what worked for them in their classrooms in the light of the communal understandings that were being shared at meetings. These collisions may account for absences from meetings or the individual focus of some members on exploring areas that were not necessarily related to the multiliterate reading focus of the project. However, throughout the life of the project, members maintained commitment and were able to reflect on the benefits gained and lessons learnt as they recorded those events that directed their thinking and actions. The community worked together as they encountered those professional 'conundrums' that marked transformed learning and innovations in practice.

A teacher who had recently graduated found the experience represented in the group initially daunting and questioned the contribution he could offer to the group. During the early phase of the project, his input was framed within a limited experience view. However, the momentum of the group appeared to reposition him as a valued member. Early collisions he shared were explored during the group meetings as he faced the conundrum of student motivation in reading and actions that would resolve this in his classroom. Towards the end of the project he reflected:

"Hearing people/teachers that have been teaching for between 5 to 20 years or more still struggling with life at school… This gave me a lot of confidence, funny enough though it is. I have become a better teacher by providing a wider variety of activities to [sic] which the students enjoy."

The design of the project emphasised the need for teachers to examine their own challenges related to multiliterate reading practices, encouraging them to maintain control over ownership of the journeys taken. An experienced teacher commenced the project recognising her need to integrate ICTs in her classroom. She had experienced many collisions in her attempts to do this and identified her lack of confidence as a major issue. Critical events related to the use of technology, classroom organisation and resources emerged as learning opportunities where she adapted her teaching practices and reflected on ways to collude with the project aims as illustrated in the following comment:

"Very useful … Enabled me to focus on my Reading Groups and my reluctance to use the computers in my classroom. I will continue to do what I'm doing with my Reading Groups and try to continually improve it."

The reflective journal became a data collection device where teachers recorded critical events associated with the journeys undertaken as they made sense of the conundrums encountered. These reflective journals have proven to be a beneficial means of tracking teachers' reflection-through-action and explicating their learning. Teachers recognised the importance reflective journals played as a positive cognitive influence on their learning and development processes.
"Journal reflections made me focus on problems / successes … often led to a change of direction."

"Proved useful … Helps to crystallise ideas … I tend to keep too much in my head."

"Any type of reflecting on yourself is valuable/ useful in all facets of your life. All data gathered from discussions, interviews, readings, comprehensions, test results have assisted in how, when and why the learning I provide or am going to provide assists my thinking."

**Conclusion**

There is an escalating reform agenda in the Queensland education sector that has a significant effect on the work that teachers do. Ways to manage the reform imperative need to be researched and evaluated. The project "Reading in a Multiliterate World" has attempted to manage the reform process in a way that is teacher-centered where professional learning is action-oriented in a transformative way. This paper is a snapshot of what constitutes effective professional development. The constitutive elements are drawn from a model that offers a way forward in evaluating those factors, conditions and critical events that impact on the learning outcomes of a professional learning community where partnerships interact to facilitate the development of new knowledge and transform practice.
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References
Educating: Weaving Research into Practice


