'When is a teacher not a teacher?': knowledge creation and the professional identity of teachers within multi-agency teams

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'When is a teacher not a teacher?': knowledge creation and the professional identity of teachers within multi-agency teams

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Education is centre stage in current UK government initiatives to promote multi-agency team work. This paper draws on a research project which explored the way in which multi-disciplinary teams work and learn together in their practice with children, to consider the implications of 'joined-up' practice for theorizing dilemmas of knowledge creation and identity transformation for professionals in multi-agency teams. The paper focuses primarily on the experiences of education professionals. We exemplify some dilemmas of 'joined-up' team participation in specific workplace activities involving knowledge exchange. We then explore the impact of belonging to multi-agency teams on professional roles, identities and learning. The paper then summarizes strategies which professionals used for resolving dilemmas around learning and knowledge creation, and considers how participating in shared workplace activities might enable or constrain professionals to consolidate their professional identities and learning. Drawing on theoretical research into workplace participation and professional learning, the paper examines implications for theorizing the professional identity of teachers in multi-agency team work, within a systemic model that takes account of: creating new knowledge and practice; enhancing professional identity; and building inter-professional communities.

Introduction

This paper draws on a research project known as MATCh (Multi-agency Team Work in Services for Children), based at the University of Leeds, UK. The project aimed to investigate the reality for professionals behind the widespread policy shift in the United Kingdom towards multi-agency team work in delivering services. The focus of the research was on the implications of multi-agency team work for the professional activities and co-construction of new forms of professional knowledge. The research team, itself multi-disciplinary, worked closely with five well-established multi-agency teams, exemplary of types of teams operating in education, health, the voluntary sector and social policy in the United Kingdom.

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In this paper we focus on two major aspect of potential transformation for professionals in multi-agency teams: knowledge creation and professional identity transformation that are key to their continuing professional education. The paper focuses primarily on the experiences of education professionals in our sample, drawing on evidence from other professionals for comparison.

Across the modern western world there are widespread policy shifts towards child care policies which highlight the need for better multi-professional cooperation in delivering services (Frost, 2005). These trends reflect, at least in part, shifts towards globalization and information-based societies (Parton, 2004).

In the United Kingdom, education services are centre stage in current government initiatives to promote multi-agency team work. For example, the strategic Green Paper *Every child matters* (DfES, 2003) and the subsequent *Every child matters: the next steps* (DfES, 2004a) recommend that multi-disciplinary teams delivering universal services for children and their families will be based in schools or early years Children's Centres. By 2006 there will be at least one extended school (that is a school offering additional child and family services including child care) in each local authority modelling new ways of working.

The Children Act 2004, drawing on the Green Paper, legislates for aspects of the reforms in the United Kingdom. The focus of policy reform is to be on early intervention, parenting, information sharing, and common assessment frameworks across the domains of education, social care and health. Children's Trusts are being established at local authority level as agents of integrated commissioning and planning to ensure that the integrated frontline services function more effectively and efficiently and to obtain better outcomes for children and young people (DfES, 2004a, para. 2.20). Key characteristics of Trusts include: multi-disciplinary teams; co-location of services; joint training; and identification of a lead professional for each child/family to coordinate service delivery.

Theoretical frameworks

There is particular theoretical interest in understanding the processes of knowledge exchange and learning in multi-agency team work. Frost (2001) argues that, traditionally, claims to professional expertise are based on discipline-specific knowledge. Attempts to share and redistribute knowledge within and across agencies within multi-disciplinary and multi-agency teams may therefore create anxiety and conflict for professionals whose specialist expertise is put in question. In socio-cultural psychology (Wenger, 1998), a key concept is how these perturbations are reconciled. Wenger argues that knowledge creation and learning take place in communities of practice through complementary processes of participation (the daily, situated interactions and shared experiences of members of the community working towards common goals) and reification (the explication of versions of knowledge into representations such as documentation or artefacts).

Engestrom's (1999) Activity Theory offers an alternative model for conceptualizing knowledge creation and exchange in the workplace. An important premise in Engestrom's model is that conflict is inevitable as tasks are redefined and redistributed within changing organizations and teams in the world of work. His premise is that such conflicts must be articulated and debated openly if progress is to be made towards creating new forms of knowledge and practice. Engestrom argues that change should be anchored down to actions that are 'real' within workplaces whilst simultaneously being connected up to a clear vision for the future. He describes expansive learning cycles (Engestrom, 2001) in the workplace as when communities/teams come together with different knowledge, expertise and histories to pursue a common goal. In order to effect change they must work through processes of articulating differences, exploring alternatives, modelling solutions, examining an agreed model and implementing activities.

Both theories have been helpful in allowing the authors to understand and contextualize the data gathered in this study.

Wenger (1998) articulates the importance of professionals' constructions of their identities in shared practices and learning within multi-professional teams. Members of teams develop a community of practice (CoP) characterized by a shared history of learning and social relations of mutual engagement (co-participation), a joint enterprise (shared accountability), and shared repertoire (common discourses and concepts). For Wenger, identity *is* 'a way of talking about how learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities' (ibid., p. 5). Identity is one of four main organizing concepts in Wenger's model underpinning professional learning, alongside 'meaning', 'practice' and 'community' (which includes professional roles).

He views identity dynamically within CoPs. Individual identity trajectories are negotiated (ibid., p. 154). Moving between communities in the workplace, professional identity is reworked, integrating conflicting forms of individuality and competence through participation in work activities (ibid., pp. 158–159). However, Wenger's primary concern is the social influence of communities of practice on identity transformation: 'participation involves creating an identity of participation, identity is constituted through relations of participation' (ibid., p. 56). Wenger does not make a distinction between self- and other ascriptions of an individual's professional identity, although the two dimensions may be viewed as interrelated and intrinsically social (Jenkins, 1996). The point is that experienced professionals in multi-agency teams will have passed through different historic processes of both self-determination and social determination of professional identity.

Empirical evidence of the impact of multi-agency team work on practice

There is limited empirical evidence of the effects of multi-agency team work on professional practices. However, commentaries on the implementation of multi-agency teamwork in the United Kingdom include Easen *et al*. (2000), Webb and

Vulliamy (2001) and Atkinson *et al.* (2001). Themes emerging from the literature include dilemmas associated with: reconciling different professional beliefs and practices; managing workers on different conditions of service and pay scales; problems combining funding streams from distinct service budgets; and the need to invest in joint training and professional development (see Frost, 2005).

In the United Kingdom only small-scale empirical studies have addressed the challenges of multi-agency work for professionals. For example, Parsons (1999) describes the structural barriers to effective multi-agency coordination as different training, hierarchies, pay scales, funding and physical location. Evaluative research by Harker *et al.* (2004) on the education of looked-after children identified interdependence between structural factors enhancing coordination (such as pooled budgets and joint meetings) and an inter-professional culture of 'commitment' as key to effective inter-professional collaboration. Their findings indicated that despite joined-up thinking at the 'top', commitment was undermined at the grassroots level by conflicting priorities within different professionals' workloads. Dyson *et al.*'s (1998) research suggested that agencies lacking 'internal cohesion' face problems delivering joined-up practices. In a study of multi-professional team work, Freeman *et al.* (2000) identified the dual dilemmas of organizational coordination and problems of individual, professionally differentiated values and attitudes to team work. Larger scale government-funded research is still in progress on the impact of integrated services on children and families, for example the National Evaluation of the Children's Fund (DfES, 2004b).

In the United States, large-scale research has published findings. For example, Glisson and Hemmelgarn (1998) researched the effects on children of increasing inter-organizational services coordination in American public children's services agencies. The research team collected both qualitative and quantitative data over a three-year period by investigating the quality of services provided to 250 children in 24 counties in the state of Tennessee.

The US researchers focused on 'organizational climate', defined as the service provider attitudes within a cultural system, and outcomes for children. Low conflict, cooperation, role clarity, and personalization were identified as measures of a positive 'organizational climate'. They also measured 'inter-organizational coordination' and outcomes for children. Their data suggest that 'organizational climate' is the primary predictor of positive service outcomes, characterized as the children's improved psychosocial functioning, and a significant predictor of service quality. In contrast, there was no evidence that inter-organizational coordination had a positive effect on service quality and outcomes (Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998, p. 401). They conclude that:

> Efforts to improve children's services systems should focus on positive organizational climates rather than on increasing inter-organizational services coordination. Many large-scale efforts to improve children's services systems have focused on inter organizational coordination with little success and none to date have focused on organizational climate. (Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998, p. 401)

The MATCh project did not focus on the impact of integrated service delivery on users. The focus was on the processes by which professionals learned to work together in new ways within their team micro-climate.

The project

The MATCh research project was a qualitative, multi-method study involving three phases:

- Phase 1 of the project included gathering documentary evidence from the teams and observation of their team meetings.
- Phase 2 consisted of interviews with team members to explore issues arising from analysis of evidence from the meetings and documentation.
- Phase 3 involved team members in focus groups responding to vignettes based on critical incidents from their workplaces around decision making and knowledge sharing.

The interview and focus group data were analysed using NVivo software.

The multi-method approach allowed us to explore the complex interplay of:

- structural systems underpinning team functions;
- team members' experiences as learning communities of knowledge exchange and redistribution;
- the impact of changes in practice on the participants' professional identities, status and personal feelings.

The five multi-agency teams included a team with a youth crime focus, a community-based team working with young people with emotional difficulties, a health-based team working on child development issues, another health-based team working with children injured in accidents, and a nursery-based team working with children with additional needs and their families. All five teams engaged in work with schools concerning children at risk of social exclusion. Team members included teachers and education officers working alongside health and social welfare professionals.

Figure 1 represents major themes emerging as our project findings from iterative cycles of analysis of evidence within theoretical and practice contexts. Key *dilemmas* emerging from our data analysis were located across four nodes (A–D) represented in Figure 1. The focus of this paper primarily addresses node C—*professional knowledge exchange*—to consider dilemmas around the influence of team activities on professional knowledge exchange, and node D—*learning communities*—to consider dilemmas around the impact of membership of multi-agency teams on professionals' identities. We then explore node E—*transformations*—highlighting teams' strategies for resolving dilemmas towards new ways of working. Specifically, we tie together the threads of the previous sections by considering potentially transforming relationships between co-participation and knowledge creation in team activities, and profes-
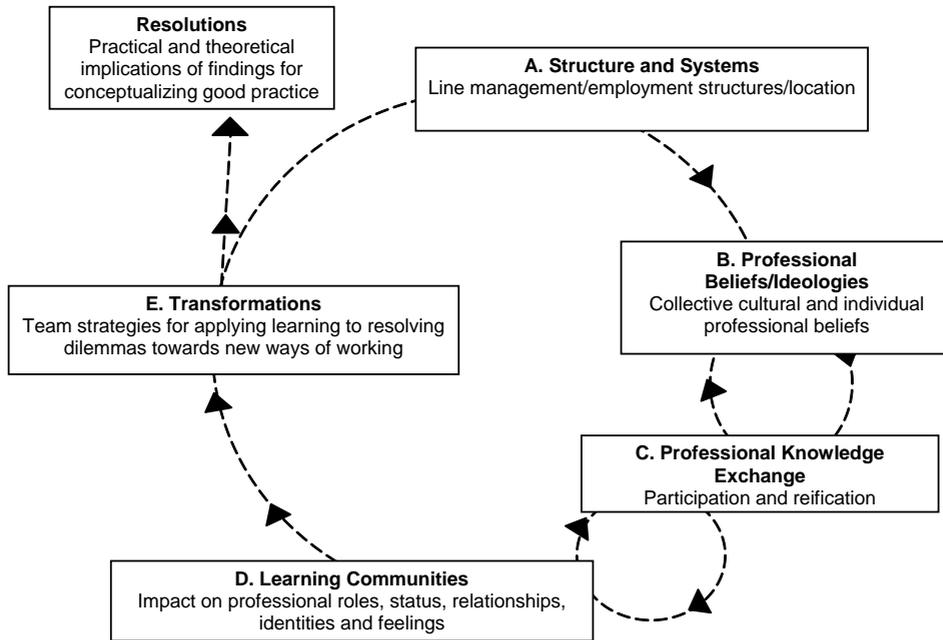
Figure 1. Influences on knowledge distribution and practice (arrows indicate flows of influence)

sionals' changing identities, within the cyclical model of influence. Finally, we discuss *resolutions*—focusing on the theoretical implications of our findings.

We will be exploring the evidence which led to the model within the body of the article.

Dilemmas of co-participation in activities involving professional knowledge exchange and their resolution

Professionals in the multi-agency teams faced complex procedural dilemmas in pooling or recombining their expertise in practice (as summarized in node C in Figure 1). This expertise derived from understandings about agencies and professionals, as well as profession-specific skills and knowledge for work with children and families. Professionals then brought conflicting forms of knowledge to shared activities in areas such as deployment of specialists and generalists at the user interface, reaching agreements about holistic interventions, reconciling profession-specific and generic training, and creating common protocols. For example, the team working with children with emotional and behavioural difficulties was transferring parenting skills to schools-based mentors. Yet one team member, a former classroom teacher, argued initially that school professionals are too fully engaged in containing difficult children while pursuing learning outcomes to take on this parenting work:

> I bring the knowledge of how school systems work to contain children. When these workers go in to work in schools they're going to teach the Mentors how to work with families and I'm saying and thinking, this isn't really what schools want. They want help. Those children are a nightmare in class and they get sent out and those Mentors are stuck with very disturbed children. They want help with that.

Teams tried to address such dilemmas of conflicting knowledge through provision of opportunities to explore different frameworks of understanding.

Participation in everyday work provided opportunities for knowledge exchange and redistribution among colleagues. The teacher in one team observed:

> we were asked to speak about what our role was so I have done it to the team on time out days. But I think you gain most knowledge actually through working alongside people.

For example, pairing up specialist workers for tasks such as home visiting provided opportunities for sharing knowledge in action. Working alongside people presented some teachers with initial anxieties that, as a result, boundaries of expertise might be dissolved rather than bridges built. This stress could be overcome partly through role clarification and through the experience of enhanced access to networks, channels and resources. At the youth crime team, the education officer would show the case-holders 'which way I can take young people if they've been permanently excluded'.

Open and exploratory dialogues around cases at team meetings also provided rich opportunities for 'horizontal' knowledge sharing (Engestrom, 2001) without the constraints of immediate decision making. One teacher observed:

> we agreed let's do a business part first and anything that we need to reflect and sort out and argue is given a separate slot.

According to the teacher, separate discussion sessions allowed for reflective learning. Specific expertise was acknowledged through having different leads:

> Different people will lead depending what we want to look at. Reconstituted families was a topic we looked at. There's a huge amount of professional reflection and learning in those groups.

The child development team worked together on real case assessments, with parents present, each contributing their own specialist knowledge and expertise. After case work they held debriefing sessions, using video-taped evidence, to reflect on how their roles and skills were deployed. These dialogues provided powerful opportunities for developing a community of practice.

Within formal *supervision and appraisal* procedures opportunities were offered for individuals to train in specialist knowledge and expertise, as their roles or preferred career paths changed. However, dilemmas occurred for some teachers who were professionally supervised outside their teams within the employing agency, where their understanding of their professional development needs clashed with their supervisor's. For example, a teacher in a hospital-based team experienced it as 'like a physical blow' to be told by her new line manager in education that her specialist

work of 'reintegrating children into school following [neurological] injury' involved no particular specialist expertise or needs: 'someone else can do that'.

At informal levels, *coffee and corridor chats* were a source of inter-professional knowledge exchange. *Sharing buildings and office spaces* facilitated such opportunities for core team members: 'you don't have to be on the phone to different agencies'.

However, peripheral, often part-time members, with bases outside the centre, were less likely to benefit.

When distinct professional knowledge and beliefs converged on a key activity *reified in documents*, sometimes disputes were evidenced. For example, conflicting practices in medical, social services and educational approaches to confidentiality crystallized around the design of referral procedures, assessment instruments and information-sharing protocols and related documentation. In one team meeting of the child development team which the researchers observed, the team voiced clashing opinions over systems for recording case closures, but later addressed these differences through collaborating to produce new written guidelines for recording and exchanging information.

The practical implications of our findings concerning dilemmas of participation and their resolution through specific activities which facilitated professional knowledge exchange were validated by the multi-agency teams at Phase 3 of the project and are summarized below:

- setting aside time for team building and open discussion;
- establishing joint activities for members from different agencies;
- developing shared protocols and documentation;
- providing ongoing support and training for staff undergoing changes in work practices.

Our findings find support in Engestrom's Activity Theory. In Activity Theory, systemic aspects of multi-agency teams present key constraints and affordances for professionals, and in this view, the reflexive *transformation* of key aspects of an emerging *system* (e.g. its *community*, '*rules*' and *division of labour* aspects) is crucial to developing new solutions. Professionals in the teams articulated conceptual dissonance about their system (for example concerning record-keeping) in focus groups and in open discussion in meetings, in ways which appear to support reconceptualization. Team members at times explored different explanatory concepts comparatively (across system dimensions, e.g. structural/procedural/inter-professional) indicating ground-clearing reflection on the activity systems. According to Engestrom (2001, p. 151), 'expansive' learning involves cycles of: *questioning* and *exploring contradictions*; *modelling* frameworks for analysis and resolution; *examining* an agreed model; and *implementation*. An enabler of knowledge creation in teams prior to effective professional decision making may be that there is *no* immediate collective attempt to merge possibly incompatible key concepts, pre-empting 'expansive' learning (ibid., p. 154), i.e. learning through reflection on dissonance and formation of higher level concepts. Conceptual ground-clearing discourse was

observed in team meetings involving routine open-case discussion, which allowed for exploring differences by focusing on a shared 'boundary object', (the case), while preserving the practical autonomy of case-holders. However, Engestrom has less to say about the messy realities of inter-professional relations and professional identities within the systemic 'community'.

Impact of belonging to new learning communities on professional roles and identities

Participation in multi-agency teams presented professionals with new, complex practice- and team-focused roles. Professionals discussed their workplace roles in relation to a number of factors including: bridging roles between agencies, redistribution of knowledge and skills, changes in specialist and generalist roles, and their positional roles within team structures. They expressed tension between learning new roles assigned within team structures and forging professional identities, building on what they brought to multi-agency teamwork from their previous work in single-agency settings, and reconstructed through participation in novel work activities as demands for multi-agency team work took precedence (Wenger, 1998). Some of these tensions are summarized in Node D of Figure 1.

Many team members described their new role as bridging between teams and agencies. They brokered connections, introduced practices, and passed knowledge related to work with clients across boundaries both between members within the multi-agency team and agencies and professionals outside it. Dilemmas concerning the duality of bridging roles arose from unacknowledged conflicts of accountability and affiliation, particularly where new bridging roles conflicted with traditional professional/agency boundary maintenance.

For example, the teacher whose opposition to transferring parenting skills to schools-based mentors (described in the previous section) reflected on tensions between beliefs and values she now shared with colleagues in her multi-agency team and those retained from her past history as a participating member of a school-based community. Her reconstruction of a new professional identity within the team had been mediated through participation in team activities such as open discussions, freed from the immediate pressure of case decisions. During these discussions, her multi-agency team's corporate beliefs and values were based on a historically situated family-systemic mental health view. This prioritized partnership with parents and developing parenting skills. In school, her beliefs and values had prioritized the learning outcomes and behaviours of individual children.

Teachers, social workers and health professionals in multi-agency teams also underwent changes in definitions and perceptions of their specialism. Staff were expected to learn new team-specific generic skills as they assumed responsibilities. These skills frequently centred on liaison with other professionals and agencies, holistic aspects of child assessment, and facilitating multi-faceted interventions. The recasting of specialisms generated anxiety among professionals about their identities. For example, in the youth crime team, all team members were expected to carry out

work previously assigned to health specialists, such as basic-level mental health assessments, and anger management. The team nurse had to reconsider the nature of her specialism. She recognized a shift to a focus on skills transfer to other professionals: 'sometimes I have sort of had to reflect on other members of the team taking on things that I might have found to be my role'.

Teachers who choose to leave mainstream teaching to work in multi-agency teams liaise with teachers and schools but no longer participate in a community of teachers. Some teachers may experience isolation from professional peers and isolation within their teams. For example, the hospital teacher did not share a location with health professionals. As she said: 'I am in a school room and I don't often mix out of the team meetings . . .'

The teachers' professional identities are reconstructed in contexts where their professional status may be questioned by other team members or service users. Status issues arose when agencies were perceived as 'peripheral' to team core functions. Health professionals, for example, traditionally set a high cultural value on professional status differentials. This could affect the prevailing team approach to members of different professions. Boundaries of expertise were questioned as roles were redefined. These challenges could discomfort teachers who traditionally worked in a more individual way in their classrooms, perhaps less directly exposed to peer accountability. Such status issues threatened to undermine the hospital teacher's identity within the team. As she explained:

> A therapist came on to the team, who spoke to me in quite a disparaging way. I think she thought I wasn't doing the reintegration to school properly but I think the longer she has been in the team she realises the difficulties with high school . . .

The metaphor of the 'tall hat' was used by a hospital-based social worker to express values around status:

> I think a lot of people with tall hats are overawed by their own status.

Cultural status could be perpetuated in meetings by use of professionally exclusive, 'expert' language:

> what is daunting is we don't even speak the same language . . .

However, there were many positive aspects of reshaping a professional identity. There was general consensus in our sample of workers that working and learning in a multi-agency team had enhanced their professional sense of identity. Any reported loss was associated with loss of specialist status.

A sense of enhanced identity could come from expanding awareness not only of clients' needs but of other agencies' and professionals' systems, beliefs and practices. A teacher also reported how much she had learned personally and professionally from observing the interaction styles of counsellors and therapists in her multi-agency team:

> There is a gentler, another way of doing things.

Identities could be reshaped, galvanized by team membership, while building positively on past experience. For example, a teacher told us:

> it implies being comfortable with your own past, the stuff you're bringing from the past, being comfortable with when that's needed ...

However, some professionals who tried to develop an identity grounded in past experience struggled not to be 'overwhelmed' by the pressure to conform to the team culture if it was historically dominated by a different, non-educational professional model. As the teacher commented:

> planning what we are going to do in schools, I found it a bit overwhelming hearing a Psychology view or other people's views, and it was quite challenging for me to say it's not going to work.

To 'gel' in a multi-agency team implies flexibility, as practitioners reconcile 'various forms of membership into one identity' as a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). One manager described the positive aspects of reconciling individual professional differences for the greater good of the team as the 'heady brew' of the collective.

In this section we have outlined aspects of the influence of participation in multi-agency teams on team members' professional identity. For teams to develop as learning communities, tensions arising from team members adopting new roles and responsibilities, and reconstructing professional identities, had to be resolved. Where teams worked towards blurring boundaries of responsibilities, changes in roles and responsibilities could threaten professionals' sense of themselves as specialists. Peripheral (i.e. part-time, seconded, or not employed by a dominant agency) members expressed greater uncertainty about their professional identities.

On the other hand, individuals within teams spoke of the creative energy released by forging enhanced, or even multiple, identities within multi-agency teams. Misgivings could be overcome where the culture and management of the team accorded value to everyone's professional expertise regardless of their structural position/label within team activities.

It appeared easier for founder members of teams, permanent rather than seconded staff and those whose career prospects were felt to be enhanced, to embrace changes in their professional identities.

Our findings concerning individual identities within teams as learning communities have implications for the everyday practice of managers, policy makers, trainers, and practitioners. The practical implications were validated by the multi-agency teams at Phase 3 of the project and are summarized below:

● achieving role clarification around defined work-flow processes;
● addressing barriers related to status;
● acknowledging the contribution of peripheral team members;
● working towards 'specialist' skills retention;

- understanding the impact of changes in roles/responsibilities on professional identities;
- recognizing professional diversity whilst nurturing team cohesion.

Important theoretical issues are also raised by our findings. The teachers in our project faced dilemmas of reconciling belonging to new identity-ascribing multi-disciplinary communities with retaining past identities, values and specialist expertise. The individual play of resistance to and affiliation with social ascriptions is not captured in Wenger's model. These dilemmas are usefully theorized in terms of situations of conflict and plurality where multiple strands of individual identity are held in balance (Rhodes & Scheeres, 2004), and they may perhaps be illuminated on a broader scale by drawing on Bourdieu's work on socially structured sets of individual 'dispositions' (Bourdieu, 1990). Professionals' identities come into question when their values and specialist expertise are problematized in team negotiations which engage competing discourses about practice. Dissonance often connects down to underlying, unarticulated contradictions between different individuals' identity-bound expectations, values, and understandings. Our evidence suggests a need for further situated work to illuminate how professional identity is discursively grounded, shaped, and transformed, so that teachers can be prepared for the re-grounding and reshaping which joined-up practice involves.

We now summarize some potentially transforming strategies within teams' activity systems which the professionals in our study used for resolving dilemmas of co-participation (node E). We tie the main themes of our discussion together to consider how participating in shared workplace activities might enable or constrain professionals when consolidating their professional identities.

Transformations

We found that participation in specific team activities which can enable professional knowledge exchange and support team building can also support professionals in renegotiating identities. Such potentially transforming activities (node E in Figure 1) include, for example, case discussions at team meetings without the constraints of immediate decision making; and joint work around developing information-sharing instruments. Painful disagreements may erupt but underlying values can be clarified, and inter-professional relations can be developed. However, tensions between encountering dissonant versions of knowledge, nurturing team cohesion and respecting individual identities need to be worked through.

One means for inter-professional teams to address tensions and effect potentially transforming relationships between co-participation and knowledge creation in team activities, and professionals' changing identities (nodes C and D in Figure 1) involved team members seeking a common basis for practice in core professional values. By seeking to articulate a common basis at the underlying level of core values for practice with children and families, while acknowledging specific individual differences, team members appeared to facilitate co-participation, knowledge

creation, and respect for diverse professional identities. By supporting this, teams perhaps facilitate space for 'personalization' within the development of a positive organizational climate (Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998), and enable members to develop a 'feel' for participation. In one hospital-based team, a teacher and an occupational therapist reasoned that the value of offering 'informed choice' to families underlay their shared practice, even where this might result in decisions which they otherwise questioned. Clarifying core professional values helped multi-disciplinary team members ground their identity. In another team, members said that they would address problems of integrating team new members from different professions by developing a common language for co-working in meetings or case work that could also be understood by children and families: the underlying core value concerns user-focused practice. This practice prevents de-personalization of professionals in teams which might otherwise be dominated by the values and exclusive jargon of another profession (a dilemma at the level of node B in Figure 1).

Professionals' values in multi-agency teams were potentially modified by participation in shared activities. Opportunities for members to be influenced by each other occurred through joined-up case work. For example, social workers and probation officers in the youth crime team held respectively to a strong client-focused application of a social causation model of offending and a more victim-centred application of a public safety model. This divergence underlay two different sets of attitudes to the treatment of offenders, for example over how to manage young people's breaches of court orders. Yet their attitudes were softened and modified through critical reflection on joint case work. As a Youth Support worker reflected:

> Having to question their beliefs and explain why they're doing it ... One's hardened the other one up and one's softened the other one up over the period of time.

Sharing building space and joint activities helped professionals over time to strengthen and re-ground their professional identities and learning on the basis of critical reflection on core professional values, whilst also engaging and learning with others.

Status barriers that impede participation and stifle professional identity, like those outlined in previous sections, could be addressed, in part, through potentially transformative team-building activities, including role clarification and shared goal planning. The experience of 'joined-up' co-working helped professionals to replace perceptions of status and power with relations of respect for expertise and understanding, and provided a sound basis for professional learning.

Structural choices and team choices about activities which involve exchange of knowledge had implications for team building and recognition of individual identities. Our research has indicated some practical enablers of positive inter-professional collaboration based on shared positive attitudes to participation in teams. Nurturing a positive organizational climate requires *both* team sustenance (involving co-operation and respect for diverse values) and team transformation and inter-professional learning (involving challenge). In multi-agency teams, ongoing

tensions between sustaining an emerging team 'community' and encountering different professional models and understandings are inevitable. Teachers in multi-agency teams may struggle to retain a professional identity grounded in specialist skills, alignments and core values, whilst engaging in a developing community, negotiating common ground with team colleagues, and re-grounding their expertise in new contexts. The professionals in our research addressed such tensions creatively in shared activities through their respectful engagement with diversity while developing inclusive team values.

Resolutions—theoretical implications

The project findings have implications for theorizing the resolution of relations between knowledge creation and the professional identity of teachers in multi-agency team work (node F of Figure 1). Engestrom's model of expansive learning was useful in framing our understanding of how dilemmas might be resolved at systemic levels to support knowledge exchange. We observed evidence of 'expansive' learning cycles (Engestrom, 2001, p. 151) prior to implementation of new practices. However, our evidence suggests that more emphasis might be given in the model to nurturing inter-professional relationships and rituals to sustain emergent models of new ways of working as activity systems collide and merge. In a context where, for example, teachers in multi-agency teams could be cut off from reassuring staff-room cultures, and yet more visibly accountable than ever in their daily practice, positive workplace relations were highly valued, in activities which generated new stresses and interdependences. Sustaining rituals and relationships facilitate professionals' appropriation of shared cultural values. Practice community development is modelled within Wenger (1998), but neither the occupational and positional *diversity* of team membership, nor the latent *tensions* between rituals of cohesion and renegotiating knowledge in multi-agency teams are well captured.

The evidence suggests that recognizing and responding to shifts in professional identities, featured in Wenger's (1998) model of developing CoPs, are particularly important aspects of developing effective multi-agency team work. However, the CoP model arguably fails to engage fully with historic processes of individual teachers' active resistance to and affiliation with social ascriptions of professional identity. The teachers in our project faced dilemmas of reconciling belonging to new identity-ascribing communities with retaining past identities, values and specialist expertise. These dilemmas are usefully theorized in terms of situations of conflict and plurality where multiple strands of individual identity are engaged and tested (Rhodes & Scheeres, 2004), and they might perhaps be illuminated on a broader scale by drawing on Bourdieu's work on socially structured sets of individual 'dispositions' (Bourdieu, 1990).

Professionals' identities come into play when values and expertise are problematized in team negotiations which engage competing discourses about practice (for example over autonomy, accountability and location). Dissonance often connects

down to underlying, unarticulated contradictions between different individuals' identity-bound expectations, values, and understandings. Our evidence suggests a need for further work to illuminate how professional identity is discursively grounded, shaped, and transformed, so that teachers can be prepared for the re-grounding and re-integration which joined-up practice involves.

The quality of workplace experience is everywhere central to professionals' decisions and organizational effectiveness in public services. Research in the United States has highlighted the importance of organizational climate (*service provider attitudes within a cultural system*) for positive service outcomes for children (Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998). A key finding of the Laming Report (Victoria Climbie Inquiry, 2003) following a child's death in the United Kingdom was that inter-professional relations and communication are crucial to the effectiveness of children's services. Our research also strongly suggests that a key factor underpinning positive professional attitudes, and hence organizational climate, in multi-agency teams is enhancement of individual professional identity.

A systemic model within Activity Theory can be elaborated that contains the distinct values of:

(a) enhancing professional identity;
(b) building inter-professional communities/cultures;
(c) creating new knowledge and practice.

The evidence suggests that multi-agency teams need to accomplish a delicate balance between *nurturing* positive *community* (and inter-community) relationships and *transforming* the system. How far teams' community engagement rituals (including styles of language; formats for interaction) facilitate trust-based knowledge creation rather than avoidance may depend, in part, on mutual recognition of diverse professional identities. For Activity Theory to capture the dynamics of system development, individual identity objectives and group inter-professional objectives need to be conceptualized in relation to external, service delivery objectives and underpinning knowledge and values.

Finally, the theoretical systems model may need modifying to take account of influences not fully accounted for by the research design. It was not within the remit for our research team to observe activities where children and their families expressed their views alongside different professionals. Nor did the research team observe professionals in their networking activities with representatives of the powerful agencies, including education. Such activities may challenge professionals to engage with more proactive rather than reactive aspects of the joined-up policy agenda, and with apparent conflicts within policy-led agency imperatives, strikingly that in education between standardization and inclusion. At the same time the networking which teachers in multi-agency teams do with education agencies and schools confronts them with their own histories. User-participatory and networking activities also offer further complex knowledge-creation and inter-professional development issues and opportunities.

Conclusion

Our research has explored the theoretical and practical complexities of implementing 'joined-up' policy in the interconnected areas of knowledge creation, professional learning, development of professional identities, and participation in shared activities in the workplace. This paper has addressed implications of multi-agency work for teachers' knowledge creation and professional identity, illustrating complexities that will have a major influence on the way teachers' practice will be reshaped in line with government initiatives on 'joined-up' thinking and working. All the policies in the UK government Green Paper *Every child matters* (DfES, 2003) and the Children Act 2004 have profound implications for the ways in which health, education and social services professionals will be expected to work, their career trajectories, their initial training, and continuing professional development. On a wider horizon there is a clarion call for new models of learning for multi-agency working. The scale of change sets an agenda for further research to illuminate how complex processes of professional redeployment and development influence the effectiveness of public policy towards improving service delivery to children and families, in which professional learning must play a central role.

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