

# Learning and professional identity: An ECE supervisors' professional development network

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*Te Whare Wānanga  
o te Ūpoko o te Ika a Māui*



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# Networks in the Wellington ECE PD context

- unique to VUW previously WCE
- Ministry funded PD increasingly structured around outcomes, particularly for children.
- but networks :
  - are participant driven and all ECE teachers are welcome (therefore networks don't meet Ministry selection criteria)
  - provide opportunities and conditions for grass roots collaboration, informal and distributed learning



# 2009 Research questions

- How is knowledge and learning created and shared in professional development networks?
- How does participating in professional development networks influence teachers' practice in their early childhood centres?

*Note the focus on the adult learner in the setting.*

- Survey, Focus group interviews, Observation

# 2009 Research Project on ECE PD Networks

- Multi-method case studies of three networks:
  - Infant and toddler teachers
  - Wellington regional supervisors
  - Assessment in the real world



**Mediating Artifacts:**  
environment, policies,  
photos, forms, articles,  
readings, words

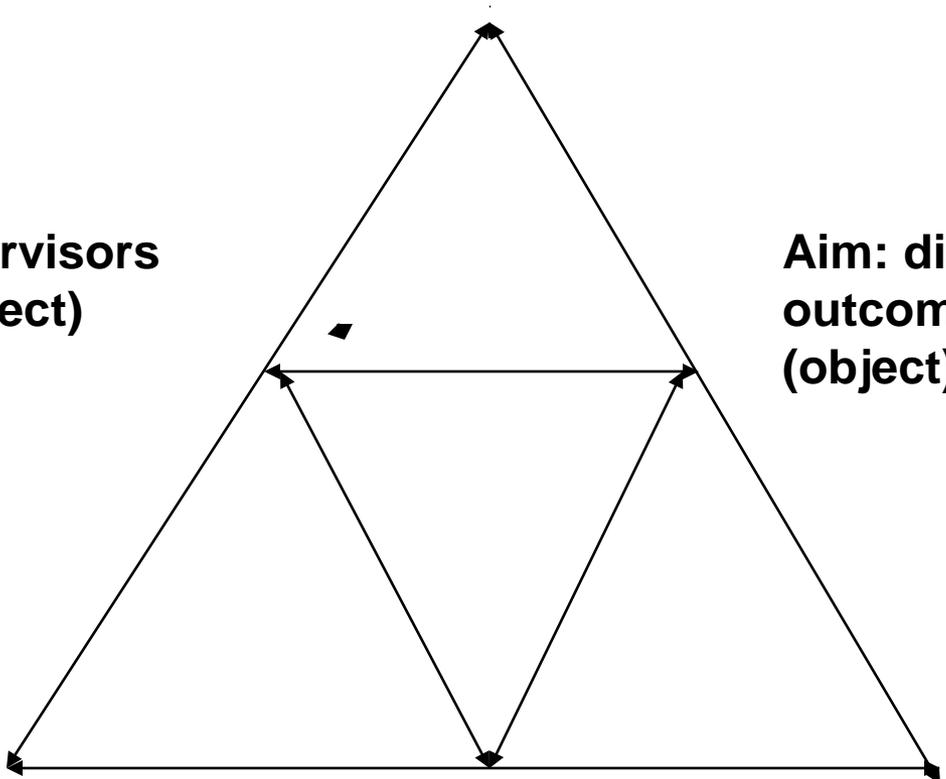
**Supervisors  
(subject)**

**Aim: dialogue,  
outcome: change  
(object)**

**Roles:**  
supervisors,  
leaders

**Rules,  
language**

**Community:Network/ ECE centre**



**Figure 1 Activity theory in context**  
(adapted from Engeström, 1987/1999).

# Facilitating change: All activity is mediated

- Mediating artifacts (symbols, tools & signs, material & non-material)
- Journals, powerpoints, policies. Regulations, documentation & articles which stimulate
- Dialogue
- Venue ( SW centre/cafe)



# Revisiting the research

Aware supervisors network was different. Supervisors were different to teachers.

Struck by:

How participating in the network appeared to be pivotal in developing confidence and sense of identity – shift in “ I am a supervisor” to “I am leader”





**FIGURE ONE: COMPONENTS OF A SOCIAL THEORY OF LEARNING:  
AN INITIAL INVENTORY. SOURCE: ETIENNE WENGER.**

# Learning as participation

“Legitimate peripheral participation” provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artefacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. A person’s intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a socio-cultural practice. This social process, includes, indeed it subsumes, the learning of knowledgeable skills.” (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 29)



# Community of Practice

Features of learning in a Community of Practice (Lave & Wenger)

- Mutual engagement
- Joint enterprise
- Shared repertoire



# The Supervisor's Network

- Started 1999
- 46 participants with 25-30 at each meeting
- 4 times a year
- Community meeting room
- Friday 9.15 -11.45
- Lunch @ local café after
- Communications between meetings



# The meetings

- Flexible agenda
- Whakatauki/Reflection/Hot topics/  
Planned topic
- The Journals
- Time for networking



# Why did they come?

- *JA The network is something I wanted to go to for a long time (6 years), it took me a long time to get there... the isolation in this role can be huge, you're responsible for lots of things and can become quite isolated so this network, in particular for people with similar responsibilities is useful.*



# What did they do?

- *JS I'm a new supervisor and feeling quite isolated in a new role and needing support. For me it motivated me too, without the network I would have just ignored the B-4-5 stuff, it's all a big confidence builder for me, I found out about appraisal and forms from other supervisors. I don't think I'm good at keeping up with things like the new regulations. It's more comfortable to listen and discuss rather than on my own reading a computer .*



# Learning through conversation

- “well it changes your perspective because you add your thoughts to theirs”
- “ I think the diversity of the group means you have to learn, you’re dialoguing in a professional format and learning just happens. We’re all there to network, to learn, to get ideas



# Peripheral participation

In the focus group two supervisors discussed how talking helped in finding solutions to daily problems and a third added:

*JS: I also learned from that because I was sitting near you. I hadn't heard the term **guardianship** before...After listening to discussions that morning I learned and it gave me food for thought for the future.*



# Identity, learning, community

All powerfully connected and  
interdependent.

VICTORIA



# References

- Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated Learning. Legitimate peripheral participation*, Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press.
- Wenger, E. (1999) *Communities of Practice. Learning, meaning and identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

