Tools for the Study and Design of Collaborative Teacher Learning:
The Affordances of Different Conceptions of Teacher Community a nd Activity Theory

By Thomas H. Levine

Has Teacher "Community" Lost its Meaning?

Teacher educators need tools to help them think about teacher learning, to design activities and programs that foster it, and to assess the results of their work with pre-service and in-service teachers. In this article, in order to improve the conceptual tools available for the design and study of teacher education, I tease apart distinctions among several popular notions of teacher community, clarifying how each can make a distinct contribution to the research and practice of teacher development. I also suggest how activity theory in general, and writing about third spaces in specific, might compliment the contributions and limitations of various notions of teacher community.

An impressive array of scholars and reformers have called for teachers to overcome their historic isolation through the development of "teacher professional community" (McLaughlin &Talbert, 1993), "professional learning communities" (Dufour, Eaker, & Dufour, 2005), "inquiry communities" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992a), schools as "communities of learners" (Barth, 1984), "instructional communities of practice" (Supovitz, 2002), and similar variations on

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the theme of "learning communities" (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Sergiovanni, 2000). Some call for teachers to work as part of a larger community beginning in pre-service teacher education (Dinsmore & Wenger, 2006; Koeppen, Huey, & Connor, 2000; Kosnick & Beck, 2003).

This profusion of community-oriented reforms has led Grossman, Wineburg, and Woolworth (2001) to observe that "community has become an obligatory appendage to every educational innovation" (p. 492) and to conclude that the word community "has lost its meaning" (p. 492). DuFour (2004) similarly concludes that the concept of professional learning community is "in vogue" (p. 6) but worries that so many have leapt onto the bandwagon that the phrase now describes "every imaginable combination of individuals with an interest in education" (p. 6). DuFour also fears that the concept of community is "in danger of losing all meaning" (2004, p. 6). Westheimer (1998) found the literature on teacher community "disappointingly vague" (p. 3), and warns that without richer and more careful conceptualization, "the rhetoric of community is rendered ubiquitous and shallow" (p. 148).

It would be a shame if different notions of community blurred together to loosely connote some important kind of collegial learning and comradely spirit that can occur among teachers. Different conceptions of teacher community have been essential in helping me to understand how a group of preservice teacher education supervisors learned their craft (Levine, 2009), and to explore what groups of in-service teachers learned from their collaborative work (Levine & Marcus, in press). I have not only used the conceptions in research. My departmental colleagues and I want to improve how we prepare our preservice teachers to teach specific subject matter to English language learners (ELLs), suffusing understanding about ELLs across many different aspects of teacher preparation rather than asking just one professor and course to address the topic. As my colleagues and I try to improve what we know and can do, we're combining insights regarding how inquiry communities and communities of practice promote learning; having distinct models has helped us think about the role of inquiry and deprivatized practice as we conceptualize our work together and assess our progress.

As suggested in the top five rows of Table 1, most conceptions of teacher community do have a common core, i.e., the notion that ongoing collaboration among educators produces teacher learning, and this ultimately improves teaching and learning for K-12 students. Different constructs, however, can also focus us on different aspects of teacher learning from collaboration. As suggested by the bottom two rows of Table 1, some additional theorizing regarding how individuals may act and learn together offer even more affordances for studying collaborative teacher learning.

In this article, I first explore the unique affordances of "inquiry communities" and "teacher professional communities." I show how these constructs can help frame the core activity and the supporting conditions, respectively, for collegial learning. Next, I describe how the term communities of learners has been applied

to teachers or whole schools. I show how this construct lacks the theoretical or practical affordances of other terms. I then show how the construct "communities of practice" contains notions of learning that make it particularly promising for studying some—but not all—kinds of learning that teacher educators seek to foster. For each of these four constructs, I consider:

- what individuals do or create together;

- the degree to which the construct specifies a mechanism of learning, i.e., some theoretical factors or pathway that we could expect to produce learning;

- limitations;

- implications for the practice of teacher development; and

- illustrative suggestions for research using this construct.

At the end of this article, I address activity theory and the "third space," theoretical approaches which are not specifically used to describe teacher communities, but which could address some of the limits of extant conceptions of teacher community.

Table 1:
What Different Conceptions of Teacher Community—
and Two Additional Bodies of Theorizing—Bring into Focus

Conception of Community	What This Conception Brings into Focus
Inquiry Community	How teachers learn from asking questions and finding answers together
Teacher Professional Community	How shared norms, beliefs, and routines affect teachers' work with colleagues & students
Community of Learners	How schools can promote learning for adults as well as students
Community of Practice	How people learn from seeing, discussing, and engaging in shared practices
Common to these four conceptions of teacher community	That ongoing teacher collaboration helps achieve learning that improves schooling
Activity Theory	How individuals engage in the joint production of material or non-material outcomes; how human activity is mediated by culturally-transmitted tools
Third spaces	How discourses and activity structures that are usually invisible or devalued may co-exist with dominant discourses and activity structures; how the resulting "hybrid" spaces can create generative tensions and learning

I have chosen to focus on these four types of teacher communities because they allow me to highlight differences while also considering affordances and limitations of currently popular notions of community. I note how these constructs can be understood to subsume or relate to other popular ways of talking about teachers learning together. It is not my intent to argue that these constructs are entirely distinct from each other, but rather, to show how each can make distinct contributions to the study and practice of teacher development. I close suggesting how some broader theorizing from the tradition of cultural-historical activity theory compliments these conceptions of teachers working together.

Inquiry Community

The concept of an "inquiry community" encompasses teacher research communities, teacher research groups, and critical friends groups. This conception of teacher community foregrounds the role of systemic inquiry conducted with the support of colleagues as a means of improving teaching and learning in schools.

What Individuals Do Together in Inquiry Communities

Inquiry communities rely on teachers talking about their teaching and using other tools to investigate or reflect on it, as described below. The purpose of such inquiry is to spur changes in what teachers know and do. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1992a) concluded that groups of teachers who engage in such activity critique common practice, expose and examine underlying assumptions, and find other ways to make the language and conceptions they use problematic.

Teacher research generally involves observations in classrooms or analysis of student work and teachers' own practices (Hubbard & Power, 1999). Some groups of teachers engage in inquiry by adopting a more formal "cycle of inquiry" model. As conceptualized by Sagor (1992), teacher researchers go through recursive stages of formulating problems, collecting data, analyzing data, reporting results, and planning for action. This work unfolds in groups that provide scaffolding and encouragement for the process of doing research and for more thoughtful teaching (Sagor, 1992). Such groups also create a venue in which teachers jointly engage in reading, writing, and discussion which enlarge their sense of the possible and desirable in their work (Fairbanks & LaGrone, 2006).

Rather than engaging in all phases of research, some teacher communities develop group capacity for engaging in protocol-guided discussions as a means of inquiring into practice. Protocols are conversational tools that provide prompts and permission to push beyond privacy norms and jointly inquire into the teaching and learning that unfold in their classrooms (Curry, 2008; McDonald, Mohr, Dichter, & McDonald, 2003). For instance, the critical friends protocol calls for one teacher, in a first phase, to spend 12 minutes explaining a teaching dilemma and its context in detail. Other teachers in the group are then given several minutes to ask clarifying

questions, and are then instructed to spend a set amount of time talking about the presenter's dilemma while the presenter listens.

Mechanisms of Learning

The mechanism of learning in such communities is "systematic intentional inquiry" into all of the decisions, dilemmas, and kinds of knowledge that comprise the act of teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992a, p. 317). How do inquiry communities promote such learning? First, whether teacher inquiry communities engage in full teacher inquiry or episodic, protocol-guided discussions, talk within these groups makes teachers "agentive constructors of…knowledge" (Fairbanks & LaGrone, 2006, p. 10) as they jointly create or revise theoretical constructs that guide their work. Secondly, inquiry communities can help teachers identify elements of their practice that are unexamined, and portions of their professional knowledge which had previously been tacit (e.g., Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992b; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). A joint process of moving from tacit to explicit knowledge, and from unexamined to conscious assumptions and beliefs, allows for more explicit choices. This joint process of knowledge construction or revision allows individuals to learn from others who are similarly formulating explicit, public statements about what they know and believe. One can imagine a teacher questioning her own practice and assumptions alone, i.e., being a reflective practitioner; however, in talking with others, it seems much easier to develop and sustain routines for *systematic* inquiry, to take multiple perspectives, to deeply question existing knowledge, and to jointly construct more contextualized "knowledge in practice" (see Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Stokes, 2001).

Limitations

Of the four concepts addressed here, the concept of inquiry community is clearest in suggesting what counts as learning and in specifying the mechanisms accounting for that learning. This construct's strength also suggests its limitation: It is a particularly good fit for the design of study of teacher collaborative groups that explicitly engage in inquiry, including critical friends groups, data study teams, and teachers engaged in cycle of inquiry. It might not be as helpful when used with teachers ostensibly engaged in other types of joint work, such as rewriting curriculum together, co-teaching, mentoring, or peer-observing. In such cases, this construct could help us attend to the degree or types of systematic data collection and analysis that teachers use to inform their work. To the extent that teachers engaged in other activities do not engage in systematic inquiry, however, and still succeed in constructing new understandings, attitudes, or practices, this construct would not help us to understand all of the ways in which teachers may learn.

Implications for the Practice of Teacher Development

This construct can focus teacher educators on the importance of helping educators formulate their own questions and acquire various tools that facilitate systematic individual and joint inquiry. To the extent we do not accomplish these outcomes at all levels of teacher development, teachers may be passive consumers of others' ideas, and unreflective implementers of their own and others' curriculum (Bransford, Sherry, Berliner, & Hammerness, 2005; Schön, 1983). Thus, whether teacher educators are designing pre-service teacher training, induction, or in-service professional development, they might describe, model, and give teachers scaffolded opportunities to practice asking generative questions, engaging in relevant data collection and analysis, and participating in the kinds of dialogue and critical colleagueship essential to this enterprise.

In practice, teacher educators may support pre- or in-service teachers' inquiry without actively collaborating with school-based professionals; the Holmes Group, however, calls for teacher educators to formalize ongoing collaboration with Professional Development Schools to promote teacher education and school renewal (Shroyer, Yahnke, Bennett, & Dunn, 2007). There is some evidence that collaborative inquiry among teacher educators, pre-service teachers, and in-service educators in Professional Development Schools can spur learning and improved practice for all involved (e.g., Galassi et al. 1999; Shroyer et. al, 2007; Yendol-Hoppey, Jacobs, Gregory, & League, 2008).

Suggestions for Research on Teacher Development

What kinds of research foci and methods may be particularly appropriate while studying inquiry communities? It is impossible to offer an exhaustive or definitive answer here, and the complex practice of teachers may best be understood by combining one or more constructs; nevertheless, some illustrative suggestions may clarify the affordances of this concept for teacher educators.

Researchers can explore what kinds of new knowledge are created by teachers' joint inquiry through single or comparative case studies: Observations of one or more groups' work and interviews with individual teachers allow one grounded means of determining what teachers learned. Discourse analysis of teachers talk is particularly promising as a means to explore how such talk may produce new understandings and shift teachers' confidence, positionality, and tone in addressing key issues. Line-by-line analysis of transcripts—with attention to what each utterance contributes or produces in the next line—can also help teacher educators and teachers to see the kinds of questions and conversational moves which open up or close down opportunities for teacher learning (e.g., Levine & Marcus, 2007; Little, 2003).

The impact of teacher research on classroom practice remains unclear (Curry, 2008). Researchers can learn about the impact of teacher inquiry on classroom practices by matching the approaches described above with observations of par-

ticipating teachers' classrooms and self-report surveys on changes in practice. This additional data could clarify whether and how such groups influence teachers' work with specific kinds of students, subject matter, or pedagogy. While one can never "prove" that changes in practice resulted from collaborative work with teachers, causal attribution by teachers and colleagues can strengthen the reasonable relationships that may emerge between the content of collective inquiry and the nature of any teaching changes. Finally, stimulated recall, with teachers viewing videos of joint work and reflecting aloud on them, may be particularly valuable for helping researchers understand the process and impact of inquiry communities (Curry, 2008).

Teacher Professional Community

For the past two decades, scholars have contributed to a sociological line of research on teacher professional communities. This conception of teacher community is unique in focusing on the social norms, practices, beliefs, and degree of shared trust that teachers develop together. It also explores how these shared resources impact how teachers work with fellow colleagues and with students. Norms comprise shared and often unstated expectations that guide behavior. The norms that groups develop can have a powerful impact on what individuals will and will not do. The seminal sociological work on teachers' professional work showed teachers' relationships being governed by norms promoting autonomy, privacy, and non-interference among colleagues (Lortie, 1975). Further work on professional community has reinforced this picture (Little, 1990; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001) while clarifying how teachers also tend to develop shared norms valuing collegiality at the expense of open conflict regarding the means and ends of education (Achinstein, 2002). Recent work has shown how some departments or schools have moved beyond these norms to foster generative collaboration (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005; Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; Stokes, 2001).

The defining characteristic of a *professional* community comprises concern for the client (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001); thus, what teacher professional communities do together must improve their ability to serve students, i.e., their clients. Some scholars believe that teacher professional community emerges as teachers work together to improve their own professionalism and opportunities for student learning (Louis & Marks, 1996). McLaughlin (1993) and McLaughlin and Talbert (2001), however, do not reserve this phrase only for such positive exemplars of teachers' work together. McLaughlin and Talbert find that professional communities exist wherever teachers work together; they can be "weak" or "strong" in developing shared conceptions of students and teaching and can be found at the level of department and/or whole schools in secondary schools.

What Individuals Do Together in Professional Communities
In any of these cases, writing about professional community does not seek to

privilege one specific mode of collaboration. This line of work suggests the ways in which shared norms affect—and are shaped by—the quantity and nature of teachers' collaborative work. One can thus talk about the professional community that develops when teachers engage in inquiry communities or communities of practice focusing on improving math instruction. Thinking in terms of professional community, however, focuses on sociological phenomena—shared norms, beliefs, attitudes, and trust—and their influence on teachers.

Mechanism of Learning and Limitations

Writing in the tradition of teacher professional community helps us see the role of social norms in affecting what teachers can and can not say or do together, with clear implications for what individuals can learn or do. Beyond this, however, this line of research has not yet explored deeply just what goes on "inside" professional communities which accounts for learning, though recent work starts in this direction by bringing "communities of practice" and other sociocultural theory to the study of professional communities (Little, 2002; Little, 2003; Horn, 2005; Horn, in press). This body of work might be better understood as sociological description of professional contexts and the ways in which such contexts shape teachers' work. Though this construct suggests the importance of teacher educators considering the role of organizational culture in the act of teaching, this construct does not bring into focus any specific mechanism of learning, i.e., a specific account of what will produce teacher learning. It also does not offer much guidance regarding what kinds of interventions teacher educators should initiate and study. (As noted below, the related notion of "professional learning community" offers more proscriptive advice but has its own limitations.)

Implications for the Practice of Teacher Development

For pre-service teacher educators, thinking in terms of professional communities provides language and foci that can help us attend to broader contexts that influence preservice teachers. As we develop individual clinical placements or professional development partnerships, we can include data about departmental—or schoolwide—norms of collaboration or privacy, or the nature of shared beliefs about students. This way of viewing teachers' collegial learning also suggests the value of teacher educators making pre-service teachers aware of departmental or schoolwide norms which will shape them during and after their induction period. Such knowledge could inform candidates' choice of first positions, their sense-making as they develop relationships with colleagues, and their desire to seek out opportunities for generative professional collaboration both within and beyond their school.

When working with in-service teachers, talking in terms of professional communities can help us recognize aspects of a professional context that will support or

inhibit our professional development initiatives. Explicitly identifying and working on shared norms, beliefs, and trust appear to be a precondition for helping groups of teachers to engage in and sustain specific educational innovations (Platt, Tripp, Fraser, Warnick, & Curtis, 2008).

Suggestions for Research on Teacher Development

The concept of professional community may be particularly useful to researchers asking questions about: the influence of school and departmental contexts on student teachers or teachers just entering the profession; factors that mediate professional development; or the impact of school reform initiatives on teaching practices. Research on teacher professional community often occurs within or across whole schools; thus, surveys of whole school faculties may produce descriptive statistics and qualitative analysis of open-ended answers in order to: identify the norms, beliefs, and trust that exist within a research site; compare these factors across different kinds of schools; and/or measure changes over time as a result of some intervention by teacher educators or school leaders.

Ethnographic methods of observation, including participant observation, can create richer, nuanced portraits of the norms, routines, beliefs, and trust fostered in specific professional communities. Such methods can also be used to explore the impact of interventions on teachers' professional contexts. Where such research looks across a large number of schools and teachers, mixed methods approaches may use qualitative data to illuminate the meaning of the differences, changes, or continuity revealed in surveys and scales.

PLCs, a Related Concept and an Approach to In-service Teacher Development

Early writing on professional community was more descriptive than prescriptive. For instance, this line of research found that teachers who indicated that they work in cohesive and highly collegial professional communities also report high levels of commitment to teaching all students, high levels of energy and enthusiasm, and high levels of innovation (McLaughlin, 1993). Writing about professional learning communities, or PLCs, grows directly out of earlier writing about teacher professional communities, and cites such work; however, it offers more prescription for what schools should do. Those who describe PLCs seem to offer an idealized version of a professional learning community. Indeed, the first sketch of a PLC in action turns out to be a scenario created by an author rather than an actual case of a specific, extant PLC (Dufour & Eaker, 1998). Writing about PLCs does bring into focus the importance of shared values and vision. It suggests practical strategies that may foster shared vision. Writing about PLCs often integrates tried and true strategies for staff development and school leadership with research on professional communities (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Dufour, Eaker, & Dufour, 2005; Hord & Sommers, 2008) rather than aiming to produce a theoretical account of how communities of teachers learn and change.

Community of Learners

What Individuals Do Together in Communities of Learners
Compared to "inquiry community" and "teacher professional community," the concept of "community of learners" offers less clarity regarding what teachers should do together. It appears that Roland Barth was the first to use the term "community of learners" as something with conceptual significance (Barth, 1984). Barth, writing about the newfound interest in professional development for principals, offers a rationale for why principals too must experience learning. He concludes that a school is "above all a community of learners. Principals are members of that community and entitled to engage in its most important enterprise" (Barth, 1984, p. 94). When I worked in a comprehensive high school in the late eighties and early nineties, this notion of a "community of learners" was translated to mean that teachers—and not just students—should experience themselves as learning in schools.

Mechanism of Learning & Limitations for the Practice of Teacher Education
The concept of a "community of learners" does not help one see how teachers learn together. Thus, on its own, it does not provide theoretical or practical guidance regarding how one designs programs or redesigns schools to foster such learning. This concept's main contribution is to highlight a problem and an aim identified by Seymour Sarason: How can we expect teachers to promote learning and intellectual growth when they work in sites which stifle their own learning and growth (Sarason, 1971)? Talking about schools as communities of learners reminds all involved of the importance of valuing and supporting ongoing learning for all levels of staff as well as students.

Suggestions for Research on Teacher Development
With further development, this concept might be useful for making sense of some aspects of teacher learning. For instance, if researchers were interested in studying practices that position teachers as learners in schools, or the impact of such work on teachers' identities and practices, they might adopt phenomenological and narrative inquiry approaches. Interviewing, teacher journaling, teacher blogging, and recording of teachers' comments during joint learning could help to depict teachers' inner states, evolving sense-making, and self-reports regarding the impact of being a learner or co-learner in schools.

A Related Concept
As there has been no systematic development of the idea of "community of learners" as a way of conceptualizing teacher development, I note it here only to suggest how this popular phrase lacks the conceptual affordances of other terms. In the early 1990's, however, Brown and Campione used this phrase to describe their approach to fostering classroom learning—including the use of reciprocal teach-

ing and jigsaw activities—as building a community of learners (see, for instance, Brown and Campione, 1992). Their conception envisions new roles, discovery and inquiry activities, and more authentic assessment as a mean of promoting deeper understanding. This specific line of work was developed as a way to envision learning among students rather than teachers; thus, I do not draw on it for this article focusing on how some have talked about school staff learning together. The existence of different notions of learning in community under the same name highlights another way in which different notions of teacher community may blur and lose their meaning.

Community of Practice

Works by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger conceptualize communities of practice (CoPs) as sites where all kinds of people learn and develop shared practices while engaging in a common enterprise over time (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). CoPs are sites where newcomers may gain access to the shared practice and membership in the community that keeps the practice alive. Learning the practice requires the context of the communities where they are instantiated by specific groups of people. The construct of a CoP can be applied to different types and levels of organizations and to groups that do not seem "organizational." The accounting office of a small non-profit, chess players who gather informally at a café every Tuesday night, an elementary school staff, and Falungong practitioners doing martial arts together can all be understood in terms of communities of practice.

What Individuals Do in Communities of Practice

Rather than specifying specific collaborative activities—as the construct of inquiry communities does—writing about CoPs offers a broader and more theoretical description of what individuals might do in the company of colleagues. First, communities of practice are the sites where individual members may begin at the margins of participating in a practice, and may or may not move towards more central participation in the CoP's practices. Lave and Wenger worked from anthropological studies of apprenticeship to develop the concept of "legitimate peripheral participation" (Lave & Wenger, 1991), which conceptualizes how people learn to participate with increasing sophistication in a practice: the beginning Gai tailor in West Africa observes master tailors, and then works as an apprentice doing the simplest task with supervision and feedback; newcomers to Alcoholics Anonymous are not expected to say and do much, while "old-timers" increasingly master the rituals and "steps" that represent progress towards more central participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This work offers a provocative image of learning as a trajectory from novice at the periphery to an active participant in the shared practices at the center of a CoP.

Mechanism of Learning & Limitations

Wenger and Lave (1992) do not attempt to account for multiple modes of learning that might happen among peers. By sharpening our eyes only on a newcomer's trajectory into a CoP, we can see one important kind of learning more clearly. We may not see all the kinds of learning that could occur among peers sharing practices, and we do not see why practices may change over time. Wenger (1998), however, offers one more explanation for how communities may change their practices, and thus suggests a second mechanism for individual learning. Wenger (1998) views individuals as the nexus of multiple communities of practice, and thus, as potential conduits of new practices. For instance, as boundary spanners, student teachers may carry practices from university classrooms into their placement, and vice versa. Wenger foresees a tension between "competence" and "experience" which produces learning. Wenger believes that when the existing, shared competence within a CoP is higher than the capabilities of an individual, the community's competence can "pull" the newcomer up to the CoP's level of competence (Wenger, 2003). Individuals, however, may bring in new ideas or insights that can pull the competence of the community higher (Wenger, 2003). Thus, this construct may also be useful in making sense of how insiders or outsiders bring new ideas into teacher groups, and how these are or are not taken up by the group; the image of a trajectory of participation may also be helpful in making sense of individual teachers' changing participation in group work over the course of their career.

CoPs may not be as good a fit theoretically for studying experienced teachers who have already moved from the periphery to more central participation in practice. For instance, in many urban high schools that are converting into smaller learning communities, groups of veteran teachers are collaborating in an effort to help students who have not traditionally been successful in school. Almost by definition, existing practices are not sufficient to realize the shared goal of these teachers' joint work. Teachers may learn some useful practices from others, but they may also need to invent new practices, since there is not a clearly defined set of central or accepted practices for their desired outcome. When veteran teachers get together to do this joint work—aiming to achieve outcomes no individual could accomplish on their own—there may be no clear set of practices that individuals can seek to acquire, and thus, no clear sense of moving from periphery to center. There is also no clear conception of what skilled participation in these practices would look like, at least within this specific community.

Finally, Lave and Wenger's theorizing is not as successful as activity theory in envisioning how and why practices develop in unexpected directions; it also does not illuminate the inner contradictions of a practice which might lead teachers to either find new practices or develop them with others (building on Engeström, 1999). In such circumstances, authors might do well to work with elements of activity theory, as described below.

Implications for Preservice Teacher Education

Thinking in terms of CoPs can similarly be useful to teacher educators thinking about teacher induction or mentoring, where "old-timers" support newcomers who are on a trajectory into skilled participation in the practices of teaching (instruction, assessment, diagnosis of student needs, remediation, etc.). It helps justify student teachers gradually assuming responsibilities for teaching rather than being thrown in to "sink or swim," for instance. The construct of CoP may also help a teacher education program rethink the kinds of initial training and ongoing professional development activities it offers for its university supervisors.

Suggestions for Research

CoP theorizing is a particularly helpful theoretical lens for studying any kind of teacher development which involves more experienced or expert partners helping student teachers or novice teachers, or for studying cases where experienced teachers are learning a new practice on an "incoming trajectory" from more skilled others. Thus, it is particularly promising as a conceptual lens for making sense of work between cooperating teachers or supervisors and student teachers, or of student teachers' observations and learning in early field experiences.

Regarding research methods, the emphasis on the importance of being able to see, talk about, and then try a practice with support can help teacher educators consider how different types of pre- and in-service teacher development activities create such opportunities; ethnographic observation and content analysis of conversation transcripts can clarify whether—and how—specific types of joint work make teaching practice publicly available for collegial learning and discussion. CoP theorizing also has affordances for the design and study of experienced teachers adopting practices that are new to them; comparative case studies of summer institute participants, for instance, might use field observation and interviews to uncover how such professional development experiences create opportunities to observe, talk about, and try elements of writers workshop, positive behavior supports, or other new approaches that teachers are mastering.

As suggested in the text above and in Table 2, these four conceptions of community suggest different ways of thinking about what teacher collaboration produces for participating individuals and for a larger group or school. They also vary in their clarity regarding just how teacher learning occurs.

Some Limitations Regarding Extant Conceptions of Teacher Community

The Risk of Romanticizing Community

There is something intuitively satisfying about linking human beings to others for the sake of learning, and envisioning powerful learning as happening in the

Table 2
How Different Conceptions of Teacher Community
Help Us Understand Teacher Learning

Conception of Community	*What individuals learn or gain*	*What such communities produce as a result of their work together*	*Mechanism of Learning*
Inquiry Community (e.g., Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992a, 1992b; Curry, 2008; Fairbanks & LaGrone, 2006)	Local (i.e., contextualized) knowledge; Inquiring stance towards practice; Problematizing commonly accepted practices and categories	Shared body of local knowledge created in and for a local community of teachers; New or revised theoretical constructs to guide teaching; In some instances, texts reporting the results of teacher research; The potential for teachers to improve their own classroom practices and to impact wider school policies or patterns of practice	Teacher research, i.e., systematic inquiry about one's own school or classroom; Articulating questions, problems, and dilemmas; In response to these, developing knowledge via: (1) Structured efforts to gather and learn from data and/or (2) Conversations which generates new, revised, or more explicit understandings
Teacher Professional community (e.g., Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; McLaughlin, 1993; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001)	Knowledge & beliefs about students and teaching; Stance towards colleagues and traditional teaching practices	Norms of privacy and/or collaboration; Weak communities where individuals enact traditions or innovate alone OR Strong communities which may either enforce traditional teaching practices or promote collaboration to rethink practices	Unclear; perhaps the transmission of norms, values, and beliefs
Community of learners (e.g. Barth, 1984)	Intellectual renewal; Experiential understanding of learning	Unspecified opportunities for learning	Unclear
Community of Practice (e.g., Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, 2003)	Social practice(s); Possibility of membership in a CoP, or trajectories into or out of a CoP	Opportunities for newcomers to engage in legitimate peripheral participation; Meaning (i.e., ongoing negotiation of the meaning of a practice); Boundaries which clarify the community and the practice	Legitimate peripheral participation (and ongoing opportunities to engage in the practice, moving from peripheral participation to mastery of the practice); Tension between the community's competence and newcomers' experience, i.e., either the community or newcomers may pull up each other's level of competence in specific areas

company of colleagues. The very idea of community has special resonance for educators in the United States: It calls us to recognize "habits of the heart" which counterbalance our historically individualistic culture (Bellah, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985) and the historically isolating nature of teachers' work (Lortie, 1975). One possible limitation of using any conception of teacher community is thus the temptation to romanticize the work of communities.

Some may associate CoPs or teacher professional communities solely with desirable outcomes, seeing them as groups which prompt individual learning, improved practice, dialogue, inquiry, intimacy, confidence, the experience of more meaningful work, and similar outcomes. When thinking about student teaching placements in terms of CoPs, for instance, this optimistic view might envision much mentoring, intentional scaffolding for the acquisition of new skills, and a collaborative spirit of helping newcomers on a trajectory towards greater mastery of central "practices" of teaching.

Wenger (1998), however, does not reserve the notion of communities of practice only for vibrant and cooperative enterprises with desirable results. Communities of practice also stifle innovation and the renegotiation of the meanings and practices at the core of their joint enterprise. The most traditional, teacher-centered teacher education course or student teaching placement may still be seen as a community of practice, albeit one in which pre-service teachers or classroom students learn very passive and static patterns of participation. Even in these cases, teachers and students do a kind of work together to develop the practices which comprise their shared enterprise, such as lecturing and taking multiple choice tests. Similarly, the specific norms, beliefs, and relationships that develop among a professional community can explain the conservatism of teaching practice and the persistence of pedagogies or teaching attitudes that disadvantage specific groups, such as English language learners. Thus, an appropriate aim for teacher educators is not fostering communities of practice or professional communities, but fostering specific kinds of these communities; fostering community might better be understood as a means that requires teacher educators to specify ends.

The Risk of Seeking to Maintain Distinctions Between Overlapping Notions of Community

One can go overboard in trying to claim that the different conceptions of community I've addressed in this paper are distinct. Each of them, for instance, suggests the possibility of teachers learning through inquiry into their own practice. An inquiry community foregrounds inquiry as a mode of learning. Professional communities may develop norms of collaboration that encourage inquiring into practice, thus including inquiry as a mode of learning. The nebulous "community of learners" does not deny the possibility of inquiry, or offer much clarity at all regarding how people learn in groups. Wenger's later treatment of communities of practice includes the notion that different communities may be more open or closed to questioning practices and

their meaning (1998). Given my stated purposes, I have highlighted distinctions, believing that there are heuristic and theoretical advantages for researchers and designers who recognize the different emphases or foci inherent in the different terms. In practice, these conceptions of community can overlap as real groups of teachers engage in multiple and evolving forms of collaborative activity.

The Challenge of Designing Specific Collaborative Activities

With the exception of teacher inquiry communities, these notions of teacher community do not specify just what teachers should be doing together. The CoP is a rather open-ended concept that can be applied easily to a variety of levels; it is not particularly invested in the exact content, aims, and activity inherent in any practice or any community of practice. Teacher professional community assumes that what teachers do together matters, both for the maintenance or alteration of shared norms, and for ultimate impact on teaching. The larger construct, however, is agnostic regarding just what teachers do together.

What does or could go on at the heart of a teacher community, and what are the implications of different kinds of activities for individual learning and organizational outcomes? How might engagement in an activity, either in the classroom, in a pre-service course, or in an in-service workshop, be educational in and of itself? How might activity in a setting away from the classroom eventually influence a parallel "activity structure," classroom teaching? No one theory or construct should be expected to answer all of the kinds of questions we could ask. Scholars and practitioners seeking to look within teacher communities across different types of activities may need to draw on more specific theories of learning to make sense of what actually happens within a teacher community. Alternately, as described below, they might draw on the notion of "the third space" or other concepts emerging out of activity theory to make sense of the actual work that occurs within teacher communities.

Activity Theory as a Compliment
to Conceptions of Teacher Community

Activity theory does not comprise a conception of teacher community, but it offers conceptual tools that could be useful in studying ongoing teacher collaboration. Activity theory has evolved in myriad exciting directions in different nations, and thus is impossible to summarize in a simple way. Writing about the "third space" is one particularly exciting concept emerging from activity theory; this concept also draws on Vygotsky and Bahktin. As suggested in Table 3, these two areas have affordances that compliment the conceptions of teacher community described earlier. Given the complexity of both activity theory and the third space, this section aims to provide only a general introduction to each, clarifying their potential utility for the design and study of collaborative teacher learning. I include citations for readers who want to learn more.

Activity theory provides a theoretical account and set of tools for understanding goal-oriented, "collective, and culturally mediated human activity" (Engeström & Miettinen, 1999, p. 9). A fundamental insight of this body of theorizing is that all human activity is oriented towards producing either material or conceptual things. Activity can also be understood in terms of the interaction—or co-creation—of multiple components of human activity, including *rules*, *division of labor*, *community*, and the *artifacts* that mediate a *subject*'s ability to achieve the *object* (or intended outcomes) of their activities (Engeström, 1999). In other words, activity theory has heuristic affordances for parsing activity into pieces, and seeing how these pieces interrelate, even if, in reality, all of these components are mutually constitutive.

One of the most promising elements within activity theory for making sense of teachers' collaborative work comprises the role of tools in joint learning. Reflecting its roots in Vygotsky's thinking, activity theory conceptualizes tools as material or mental objects that mediate learning, i.e., that both facilitate and constrain what individuals and groups of teachers do together; using tools bequeathed to us from

Table 3

Some Aspects of Teachers' Collaborative Activity Brought into Focus by Activity Theory and the Notion of "Third Spaces"

Conception of Community	Aspects of Collaborative Activity That This Theorizing Brings into Focus
Activity Theory	Outcomes enabled by engaging in specific collective activities.
	Stasis and change in the rules, roles, tools, participants, and other elements of collaborative activity over time.
	The role, acquisition, or refinement of material and mental tools for accomplishing objectives.
	The ways in which groups and individuals recreate and alter practices and activity structures.
	The tensions created by conflicts between multiple activity structures, i.e., the rules and objective of a teacher research group vs. those of a traditional department meeting.
Third space	The simultaneous presence of multiple discourses and activity structures in the same physical space, such as a classroom, teacher study group, or department of teacher education.
	Individuals' access or lack of access to discourses and practices that are not normally part of their everyday experience.
	New understandings, forms of discourse, and activity which result from hybrid discourses and spaces.

others also shows how history and culture come to shape individual consciousness and the nature of collective activity. A focus only on tools—just one element of activity theory—can illuminate the affordances of physical technologies, like the use of video in a student teaching seminar, or a protocol printed on a page referred to by teachers engaged in structured conversations. It can also help to conceptualize the role of conceptual tools teachers learn or create on their own to help them make sense of students, learning, or methods of teaching: When teachers adopt or develop conceptual ways of talking about students, for instance, such mental tools can also guide what teachers do and learn (see Horn, 2007). In this short summary, I have focused on how activity theory can either bring one or multiple components of human activity into focus as critical contributors to what human beings can produce together; activity theory has grown into a rich and sprawling set of ideas and approaches offering more affordances and insights than I can summarize here. Cole (1996) offers an accessible entry point to many key ideas of this exciting theoretical approach.

"The third space" is a particularly promising concept for the study of teacher education that draws on activity theory. It has not yet been used to describe groups of teachers, but has been used to conceptualize communities of K-12 youth in—and across—classrooms and other settings. The third space posits that classrooms—and many other spaces—are typified by dominant discourses and perspectives which seek to stifle competing voices and narratives. Gutierrez, Rymes, and Larson (1995) envision a particularly powerful "third" space, one that is neither typified solely by prevailing and oppressive traditional discourses nor by the counternarratives and viewpoints that often struggle to be heard. Building on Bahktin and others, this work envisions that dialogue and multivoicedness can be features not just of a shared space, among people, but of individuals' internal thinking; access to and engagement with multiple discourses in the external world will produce internal "dialogization" which reflects the multivoicedness of the world (Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995).

This work has exciting implications for teachers' collegial work, and how it can enrich the resources teachers can draw on as they design and deliver instruction individually. Scholars and professional developers might consult this theory as they explore whether—and how—learning is fostered by teachers' active participation in discourses and practices that are not traditionally understood in school settings. Thus, one might use third spaces as a construct to make sense of the multiple discourses and learning that arise from preservice teachers' engagement in youth participatory action research, which often asks teachers to engage with and make sense of perspectives and activities of students that may be quite unlike them. Similarly, the construct might help conceptualize service learning, which "allows pre-service teachers to work with and learn from local youth and adults in the process of doing something worthwhile" (Boyle-Baise & McIntyre, 2008, p. 309). Less powerful, but still a potential match to elements of this theoretical construct,

are teacher education experiences that create more limited access to new voices and practices. Examples would include: a professional development workshop where gay advocates explicitly identify and engage with harmful, mainstream stereotypes and beliefs; or an ongoing faculty reading group whose texts import discourses which would not normally be part of teachers' everyday world.

In practice, this construct can help teacher educators think about how they might design their pre- and in-service teacher education work to help teachers grasp the educative potential of allowing or promoting hybridity of discourse and perspective, and of seizing on the diverse perspectives, cultures, and linguistic resources that may exist among groups of pre-service and in-service teachers (and among students or others who influence teachers' learning). It would be interesting to explore whether—and how—preservice and in-service teachers can be taught to recognize, value, and promote the learning potential of such hybrid spaces. While some of the underlying theory can be challenging for those unfamiliar with them, Gutierrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejada (1999) provides a more accessible entry point to this concept, illustrated nicely with excerpts of actual classroom discourse to show how official scripts, counter scripts, and third-space intermingle, co-constitute each other, and together can create important opportunities for development. For more explicit treatment of how third spaces can promote learning and development, see Gutierrez (2008).

Conclusions

When we work with others, it seems that we are often capable of participating in practices and having thoughts that would be impossible for us if we were on our own. There are multiple ways to understand what we learn and how we learn when we work with others. This article has shown how different conceptions of community have their own strengths, limits, and underlying theory. Each offers complimentary ways of understanding teachers' learning from collegial work. For the sake of understanding and designing experiences which will develop pre- and in-service teachers, we should maintain and refine distinct terms that bring into focus different conditions, resources, and mechanisms which produce teacher learning. Where extant conceptions of teacher community are insufficient to help us identify or design for learning, we can augment specific notions of community with complimentary theories; writings on activity theory and the "third space" offer particularly promising examples of such compliments.

If we prevent teacher "community" from losing all meaning, we'll be able to use or combine conceptions of teacher community and other theory in more precise ways that strengthen our research and our practice. Our work is only as sharp as the tools we bring to it. Clarifying concepts regarding what and how teachers learn together will ultimately enhance our ability to improve schooling.

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