

Walking the Talk: The Dynamic of Sustainable Team Relationships in Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the multi-dimensional phenomenon of team work as understood and experienced by the Faculty of Education team at Fraser Coast campus of the University of Southern Queensland. Anecdotal evidence from varied sources and over the past several years suggests that the education team is a highly successful unit that produces quality student learning outcomes. The main aim of this research was to investigate the essence of what makes this an effective higher education team, in order to develop a conceptual model for sustainable team relationships specifically in the context of teacher education, but which could have applicability more broadly to other higher education contexts. This paper begins by examining and evaluating the international and national literature with regards to teamwork in educational contexts. The phenomenon of reflective practice between and amongst team members has to date not been well researched. This paper seeks to provide a perspective on the phenomenon as it is experienced by this group of teacher educators. The study found that effective functioning of this team involved three main dimensions of activity: relaxed informality, dedicated professionalism and supportive respect.

Background to the study

For at least the last eight years, staff within the Faculty of Education at the Fraser Coast campus of USQ have enjoyed opportunities to work as a team when undertaking both undergraduate and postgraduate teaching activities. Lately this has included the planning and presentation of residential schools for post-graduate students and professional development workshops for beginning and returning teachers from state and private schools in the Fraser Coast region.

There are advantages and disadvantages to working in a relatively isolated satellite campus that provides an environment which enriches the identities and communalities of team members. Small numbers of staff (12 -14 full-time and sessional), relative isolation from the dominance of 'the main campus', regional and campus focus on 'who we are' and a clear agreement amongst all staff of the importance of a strong student centred view of the world, all contribute significantly and in varying ways to the solidarity of the team.

The core team is constituted of varying personalities, experiences, expertise and aspirations. Team members have come and gone as student numbers and programs have fluctuated, suggesting that the team has been capable of accommodating a range of personalities, experiences and expertise over the years.

The reality that our collective has managed to include successfully such diversity and remain functional and effective over the eight years of its existence, further suggests a level of sustainability that is difficult, if not impossible to achieve in many domains. It is the nature and the characteristics of these elements of our collective practice that informs this study.

Literature Review

Initial surveys of the literature revealed a limited body of knowledge relevant to the type of 'teamwork' that fits the existing Fraser Coast higher education model.

Discussions on team building in both a business environment and a school environment refer to stages of teams. The process of team development has been framed in the terms of life cycles through the stages of: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. (Certo & Certo 2006; Tyler, Kossen & Ryan 2005) The description of these cycles appears to require successful teams to have set goals, set member roles, leadership, achievement of set goals and a process that comes to an end. In the business world, according to Robbins, Millet and Waters-Marsh (2004, p. 286), "A[a] work team generates positive synergy through coordinated effort". Some common characteristics of a successful team include autonomy, task identity, roles and diversity, size, leadership, performance evaluation and rewards, specific goals and conflict resolution.

Certo and Certo (2006) indicate that corporate culture plays a role in providing a suitable physical environment, supporting teams through leaders modelling, teaching, coaching and providing incentives. Friend and Cook (2007) suggest that the administrators in a school environment could contribute to a collaborative culture by promoting social events to encourage staff to get to know each other. The implication is that a team needs the right environment to develop and grow.

Knackendoffel, Robinson, Deshler, and Schumaker, as referred to by Knackendoffel (2005, p. 1);

... described collaborative teaming as an on going process whereby educators with different areas of expertise work together voluntarily to create solutions to problems that are impeding students' success, as well as to carefully monitor and refine those solutions.

Another observation by Knackendoffel (2005) in regards to working collaboratively to develop successful educational programs seems to indicate the success of a good team as having something intangible when she asserted "Collaborative teaming probably can best be described as an attitude rather than a certain way of delivering services" (2005, p. 15) .

While schools and educational systems are being reconceptualised (Hargreaves 1994; Henry & Grundy 2004), in order to become effective and relevant contemporary organisational structures, universities are facing up to the task of overcoming the obstacles posed by their traditions. Many universities continue to function within historical structures and traditional operations but are under increasing pressure to adopt new organisational models in order to remain competitive. Within a world view of structural transformation and contemporary leadership in universities, the implementation of effective structures and operations is emerging through patterns of functional relationships and teamwork (Senge 2006).

The significant difference between business and education is their product(s). Most businesses can physically manipulate the quality of their product, whilst education can only influence and not necessarily determine the quality of its product. According to Senge (2006) building a shared vision, team working, personal mastery and the development of more sophisticated mental models is emphasised through the notion of dialogue. Dialogue has the potential of allowing workplaces to be more convivial and creative. Conceptually, this view is applied in an educational context through the work of Crowther, Hann & McMaster, (2001) which explores notions of team functions such as parallel leadership and teacher leadership which evolve through professional conversations and the creation of a learning community.

Thus, while there are no clear themes in the current literature in relation to the factors that enhance teamwork specifically in teacher education or higher education contexts such as those at Fraser Coast, there are emerging themes from the wider literature suggesting that dimensions related to team goals, member roles, leadership, achievement, team process, autonomy, task identity, diversity, team size, conflict resolution, environment and even something “intangible” which have the potential to impact on the success of the team.

Biggs and Moore (1993) utilised a 3P systems Model to manage a range of dimensions similar to those stated above when they investigated quality performance in an educational setting. The 3P Model identified three major groups of factors that impact on successful learning outcomes: Presage, Process and Product variables. The Presage dimensions related to the characteristics inherent in the learners and the teaching context, the Process dimensions related to the way in which the learning process was enacted and the Product dimensions were the outcomes of the learning and teaching processes.

As described by Biggs and Moore (1993), the three components (3Ps) are interconnected. They also stress that the 3P model represents a relational system where what you do to one part of the system affects the other parts. Further, no one dimension is more important than either of the others in their 3P model however, without a concerted effort to optimise both Presage and Process attributes the resultant outcomes would be limited. The research team agreed that this theoretical model was appropriate for use in categorising the themes that were extracted from the data.

This study investigates the unique factors that comprise the Presage, Process and Product components that in combination enhance the effectiveness of the Fraser Coast education team. Further, the study identifies a conceptual model that describes the interrelationship of the specific dimensions identified in the data analysis that are fundamental to teamwork as it is experienced at Fraser Coast.

Method

The focus of this first stage of a larger research project was to unpack and describe the dimensions of sustainable team dynamics that underpin the way the Faculty of Education academics work as an effective team to deliver high-quality learning outcomes for students. A survey instrument was developed collaboratively by team members as an efficient method by which to gather data from three main participant groups: (1) the 6 full time members of the team (Core Team); (2) other campus academics and administrative staff who have witnessed the team in operation and who might also from time to time work as members of the team (Campus Staff); and (3) undergraduate students who have been taught by the Core Team (Students). The paper-based surveys were colour coded for the three groups to simplify the data analysis process. The surveys were provided to all Campus Staff via their mailboxes and to the final year undergraduate education student cohort. All responses were anonymous and each groups responses were transcribed separately for analysis.

The surveys asked all three groups, and therefore all participants, to think of a time when they had witnessed the Core Team working together and they were then asked to respond to the same 8 questions about their perceptions of the worth of the team and its outcomes for students, the campus and the university at large. The survey questions are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1:

List of questions asked of each respondent.

Questions asked
Q1. Describe the dynamics of how they work from your perspective.
Q2. What elements or attributes of their team approach do you think <u>don't</u> work well and why?
Q3. What elements or attributes of their team approach <u>do</u> you admire and why?
Q4. What do you perceive to be the “glue” that holds this particular team together?
Q5. Do you consider yourself to be a member of the team? Yes or No
Q6. If you circled Yes in the previous question, describe how you feel about being a member of this team.
Q7. Is the team approach as demonstrated by the team sustainable in your opinion and why?
Q8. Is the team approach as demonstrated by the team more broadly applicable in your opinion and why (e.g. to other faculties at USQ or other higher education institutions)?

The survey's open-ended questions were analysed for each group using a thematic analytical technique (Patton 2002). As Byrne (2001, p. 904) notes, “thematic analysis is a way of seeing, as well as a process for coding qualitative information” A cross-case approach is taken in this paper, that is, the analysis involved a search for “patterns and themes that cut across individual experiences” (Patton 2002, p. 57). The thematic analytic process was employed as follows. The initial thematic analysis was undertaken with the Core Team's completed surveys and by 3 members of the Core Team working in consultation, in order to determine the themes that emerged from that group of participants based on their responses to each of the survey questions. Each of the questions were analysed separately. As the themes emerged, they were used as headings and all subsequent responses were categorised according to these themes. As new themes emerged they were added to the list of headings.

This thematic analytical technique revealed a pattern of themes that related strongly to three major theoretical dimensions described by Biggs and Moore (1993) as Presage, Process and Product in their 3P model of a classroom system. It was felt by the research team that this model could be applied to provide a structure with which to classify and align the themes that were related to the personal attributes of each team member (Presage); to the activity of the team when working together (Process); and to the outcomes achieved by the team (Product). The research team agreed that this theoretical model was appropriate for use in categorising the themes that were extracted from the data. The themes that had previously been extracted were then grouped into the appropriate 3P dimension.

The same approach was used to analyse both the Campus Staff and Student survey responses. These responses were placed under the existing headings derived from the Core Team respondents and within the 3P dimensions and, when a new theme emerged, a new heading was created in the appropriate dimension. The previous transcripts were then perused again for reference to the new theme (the cross-case approach). This process allowed analysts to sort the responses to each question according to the identified themes and dimensions. The allocation of themes was thus data driven, in a bottom-up manner, rather than imposed on the data in a top-down approach driven by the analysts (Johnson 1999).

Finally, a distillation of the data categorised under the 3P model (Biggs & Moore, 1993) was conducted by clustering and coding to extrapolate the interrelationships and dynamics that were inherent in the data to provide insight into the development of a conceptual model. The process of distillation gave rise to three dimensions that seem to form the basis of the culture of the team's successful functionality. From these three dimensions the conceptual model was developed. This model defines the lived experiences of the Fraser Coast education team.

Results

Completed surveys were received from the 6 Core Team members, 7 Campus Staff and 21 Students. The 6 Core Team members comprised 1 Associate Professor, 3 Senior Lecturers and 2 Lecturers. Four of the Core Team are male, three female. All Core Team members have worked together for 12 months or more. The two longest serving members of the team have worked together for 8 years. Thus, the 'team' has been in existence for 8 years and has grown gradually, accepting new members as they were appointed to the campus. The Campus Staff participants comprised 2 Administrative staff, 3 Casual Academic staff, and 2 Fulltime Academics from other faculties on the campus.

The surveys returned from each group were analysed separately. Tables 2-4 contain representative responses to each of the survey questions obtained from each group of respondents, organised into themes within each of the 3P dimensions (Presage, Process or Product). These responses are examples only. More complete analysis of the data can be obtained by approaching the authors.

Table 2:

Representative Responses to the Survey Questions from the Core Team, Grouped by Themes and 3P Dimensions (n=6)

Core Team	Presage	Process	Product
Question 1: <i>Describe the dynamics of how they work from your perspective.</i>	<u>Individual Personalities</u> <u>Theme:</u> enthusiastic; supportive; inclusive; respectful <u>Environment/Context</u> <u>Theme:</u> coffee & lunch together; informal spaces	<u>Group Process Theme:</u> student centred and common goals <u>Team Roles Theme:</u> shared tasks & responsibility; ill defined roles	Useful ideas 'emerge'
Question 2: <i>What elements or attributes of their team approach do you admire and why?</i>	<u>Individual Personalities</u> <u>Theme:</u> ability and willingness to cooperate; to accept responsibility,	<u>Social Relationships/ Collegiality Theme:</u> friendship; collegiality; <u>Group Process Theme:</u> no power struggles; no hierarchical structure;	Effective, open communication
Question 3: <i>What elements or attributes of their team approach do you think don't work so well and why?</i>		<u>Group Process Theme:</u> high expectation of involvement;	
Question 4: <i>What do you perceive to be the "glue" that holds this particular team together?</i>		<u>Group Process Theme:</u> balance calm & chaos; professionalism; common focus & direction on what is best for students; <u>Social Relationships/ Collegiality Theme:</u> group 'culture'; collegiality; humour;	Sense of fun and achievement
Question 6: <i>If you circled Yes in the previous question (6/6), describe how you feel about being a member of this team.</i>	<u>Environment/Context</u> <u>Theme:</u> unified effort	<u>Group Process Theme:</u> enjoy production of plan & then throw most out with little grief, opposition or sense of loss; trust implied; democratic; collectively supportive;	What emerges is always more responsive to learners and better than what was originally planned;
Question 7: <i>Is the team approach as demonstrated by the team sustainable in your opinion and why?</i> 4/6 answered Yes; 2/6 gave a conditional response	<u>Environment/Context</u> <u>Theme:</u> small school setting; work together & share responsibility; <u>Individual Personalities</u> <u>Theme:</u> supportive nature of everyone <u>Team Roles Theme:</u> leadership & focus are important;	<u>Group Process Theme:</u> group dynamics based on good humour and respect; essential to include everyone from outset to function effectively; social justice focus; rights of students foregrounded;	Everyone strives to improve; synergies produced; strengths of individuals grow
Question 8: <i>Is the team approach as demonstrated by the team more broadly applicable in your opinion and why? (e.g. to other faculties at USQ or other higher education institutions)</i>	<u>Environment/Context</u> <u>Theme:</u> small size of group and meet informally; <u>Team Roles Theme:</u> collegial focus; desire to share equally; team ownership of tasks, successes & failures; diversity of expertise,	<u>Group Process Theme:</u> regular, informal meetings; devolved responsibility & leadership; planning is a social act	Results are emotional - appreciate opportunity to grow & learn from each other; applying & synthesising ideas into unique workshops & papers;

Table 3:

Representative Responses to the Survey Questions from the Campus Staff, Grouped by Themes and 3P Dimensions (n=7)

Campus Staff	Presage	Process	Product
Question 1: Describe the dynamics of how they work from your perspective.	<u>Environment/Context</u> <u>Theme:</u> coffee & cackles; <u>Individual Personalities</u> <u>Theme:</u> collaborative, engaging, informative and knowledgeable; respect of others	<u>Group Process Theme:</u> collaboratively problem solve; value input of all; <u>Social Relationships/ Collegiality Theme:</u> include each other using other's strengths;	Fun and much laughter; staff are friendly, approachable and care about students!; genuinely enjoy working together
Question 2: What elements or attributes of their team approach do you admire and why?	<u>Individual Personalities</u> <u>Theme:</u> respect for each other as colleagues;	<u>Group Process Theme:</u> positive & enthusiastic approach; work to member's strengths; all contribute <u>Social Relationships/ Collegiality Theme:</u> always checking to see if everyone is OK;	All flows easily; communication; all members approachable; obviously love their profession; continually strive to improve; staff go the extra mile for students
Question 3: What elements or attributes of their team approach do you think <u>don't</u> work so well and why?		<u>Group Process Theme:</u> occasions when a member does not want to be informed or involved	No evidence that this is not working; casual & friendly could equate to ineffective; even when things are low they have an ethic that transcends the uni system!!
Question 4: What do you perceive to be the "glue" that holds this particular team together?	<u>Environment/Context</u> making time to meet regularly & making it a priority; non-threatening <u>Individual Personalities</u> <u>Theme:</u> Respect each other; great love of teaching; never too busy to help;	<u>Group Process Theme:</u> Help each other through change & difficult times; <u>Social Relationships/ Collegiality Theme:</u> friendly outgoing personalities; knowledgeable; people who care about students;	
Question 6: If you circled Yes in the previous question, describe how you feel about being a member of this team. 2 no comment			Positive; valued; would be great to work with them; accepted, able to talk to anyone about concerns and issues; other members interested in what I have to share
Question 7: Is the team approach as demonstrated by the team sustainable in your opinion and why? 5/7 answered Yes; 1/7 gave a conditional response (Yes but...)	<u>Environment/Context</u> <u>Theme:</u> sustained through number of staff changes <u>Individual Personalities</u> <u>Theme:</u> need a similar mix of personalities; as long as everyone cares about each other	<u>Group Process Theme:</u> practice what they preach	They have proven by example it is sustainable; should be model for other faculties!
Question 8: Is the team approach as demonstrated by the team more broadly applicable in your opinion and why 6/7 Yes;	<u>Environment/Context</u> <u>Theme:</u> a good team will always ensure success;	<u>Group Process Theme:</u> here more "than just in body"; shared ownership and responsibility ; valuing people who work with you	Great ideas come through discussion; this model should be the standard

Table 4:

Representative Responses to the Survey Questions from the Students, Grouped by Themes and 3P Dimensions (n=21)

UG Students	Presage	Process	Product
Question 1: Describe the dynamics of how they work from your perspective.	<u>Environment/Context Theme:</u> informal; cafe	<u>Group Process Theme:</u> ; solve problems through communication; making time available for reflection & reiteration <u>Social Relationships/ Collegiality Theme:</u> work & communicate collaboratively with all	Work together for students' best interests
Question 2: What elements or attributes of their team approach do you admire and why?	<u>Individual Personalities Theme:</u> professional manner; approachable, fair, innovative and understanding of student needs;	<u>Group Process Theme:</u> Team work; listen and consider opinion of students <u>Social Relationships/ Collegiality Theme:</u> collaboration; opinions valued and shared;	Committed to each other and their students; committed to their profession;
Question 3: What elements or attributes of their team approach do you think don't work so well and why?	<u>Environment/Context Theme:</u> not being own boss & able to run own courses;		
6/21 no answer given			
Question 4: What do you perceive to be the "glue" that holds this particular team together?	<u>Environment/Context Theme:</u> the students (5/21); admin staff (3/21); stick together or sink; best interests of students	<u>Group Process Theme:</u> Communication, flexibility & common goal; all members collaborate equally;	
Question 6: If you circled Yes in the previous question (4/21), describe how you feel about being a member of this team.			Feels good knowing I can talk to any member of FoE and get advice and feedback; students are referred to by name - not just a number;
Question 7: Is the team approach as demonstrated by the team sustainable in your opinion and why?	<u>Environment/Context Theme:</u> only if a grounded team of committed members are employed; because of small campus size	<u>Group Process Theme:</u> need to ensure everyone is on same page;	
6 gave no answer; 5 No; 1 Yes; 3 Yes but...			
Question 8: Is the team approach as demonstrated by the team more broadly applicable in your opinion and why (e.g. to other faculties at USQ or other higher education institutions)?	<u>Environment/Context Theme:</u> too many lecturers have left; campuses don't work as a team!!!		
13/21 no answer given			

The picture that emerged from the analysis of the three sets of respondents displays a very similar understanding of the way the Fraser Coast education team work together, and perhaps the reasons why the team are successful in their core business of educating future teachers. Table 4 summarises the results of the study and highlights the key themes and ideas underpinning the team phenomenon experienced at Fraser Coast, as derived from the three sets of survey respondents.

Table 5:

Key Themes and Ideas Underpinning the Success of the Team (N=34)

Presage	Process	Product
<p><u>Environment/Context Theme:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small campus, small team • Close links with student body • Meet often informally • Non-threatening environment • Common issues and concerns 	<p><u>Social Relationships/ Collegiality Theme:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoy each other's company • Friendship • Collegiality • Comfort and feeling of safeness • Trust • Supportive 	<p><u>Products related to the team:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Useful ideas emerge • Effective, open communication • Sense of fun & achievement • <u>Emotive outcomes</u> - thankful, privilege, pleasure, fun, valued & respected, • <u>Cognitive outcomes</u> - learn from each other, higher order thinking, intellectual stimulation, never bored, enjoy challenges/diversity of thought • <u>Social outcomes</u> - Acceptance of differences as a positive force that strengthens the group
<p><u>Individual Personalities Theme:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accepting of each other • enthusiastic • supportive • inclusive • respectful • attentive • cooperative • willingness to contribute • articulate • responsible • openness • awareness of other's needs • professional respect • dedication to professional outcome • passion for profession of teaching • care for students 	<p><u>Group Process Theme:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared common goals • Brainstorming ideas • Iterative / reflective process • Noisy, boisterous & active • Focussed attention • Student centred goals • Humour, laughter & fun dominate • Informal process from which ideas emerge <p><u>Team Roles Theme:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared responsibility • Equal roles and sharing of tasks • No formal hierarchy 	<p><u>Products related to the students:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsive to learners • Quality outcomes • Friendly, approachable and care about students • Build relationships with students • Interested in student welfare

Discussion

An analysis of the similarities between the three groups is displayed in Table 5. A conceptual model was developed that attempts to describe the interrelationship of the 3P themes. It is envisaged that the interrelationship between the three components of the conceptual model is dynamic and reflexive. The three theorised components of the model are: 1) Relaxed Informality, as evidenced by conversation and socio-professional engagement themes; 2) Dedicated Professionalism, as evidenced by transformative learning themes; and 3) Supportive Respect, as evidenced by communities of practice themes. The model is depicted and its three components are discussed in more detail below.

A reflexive tri-dimensional model of team dynamics

The main aim of this study was to investigate the essence of what makes an effective higher education team in order to develop a conceptual model for sustainable team relationships specifically in the context of teacher education but which might have applicability more broadly to other higher education contexts. The results of this study outlined in the previous section paint more or less a *multistructural* (Biggs & Collis 1989) picture of the dimensions that underpin the team work phenomenon as experienced by the Faculty of Education team at the Fraser Coast campus of USQ. However, there is more importantly a *relational* picture to be painted from an analysis of the amalgamation of the data sets. The relational story of the success of the Fraser Coast team, can be depicted in a 3 dimensional conceptual model, framed around the 3P model (Biggs & Moore 1993) initially identified to categorise the extracted themes.

Dimension 1: Relaxed Informality - Conversation and socio-professional engagement

The first dimension of Relaxed Informality emerged from key notions such as humour, fun, looseness, relaxed relationships, noise, laughter, café culture, open and free communication, enjoying working together and casual interactions.

The Fraser Coast team depicts a collaborative culture nurtured by a casual context which flows into all aspects of communication in a variety of formal and informal spaces. Corridor conversations, informal staff meetings, office chats and café get-togethers generate an open communicative environment. All staff are accepted, valued and supported and feel comfortable in offering opinions and contributing because the culture encourages their input. Considerable planning is achieved and information disseminated in a relaxed informal manner as against more traditional and regimented boardroom meetings and formal timetabled staff meetings. Quality, professional conversations are a powerful tool used to deepen understandings about one's own practice and can develop through coaching in reciprocal learning relationships which allow input critical to enhancing teaching and learning (Gerritson 2007; Robertson 2005). This dimension is linked to our extensive use of conversation and socio-professional engagement.

Dimension 2: Dedicated Professionalism - Transformative learning

Some key terms that clustered around the second dimension of Dedicated Professionalism included specific comments about the team's professionalism, knowledge, dedication, student-centredness, focus and enthusiasm.

The Fraser Coast team demonstrates a capacity to focus on achieving quality teaching outcomes and improved practice in the local teaching community. The team was identified as collectively aspiring to enrich and advance teaching and learning generally. The data indicated a willingness and enthusiasm for collective involvement in refining teaching strategies, providing professional development for local teachers and improving conditions for local university students. The willingness and involvement is underpinned by a professionalism of informed knowledge and willingness to contribute. All staff are encouraged to participate and contribute viewpoints. Studies that have sought to extricate the barriers and achievements of professional communities have indicated that one factor that contributes to the success of an organisation is the intensity of professional development (Ramsden 2003). The Fraser Coast team are in constant professional mode involving themselves in the betterment of the overall professional community and themselves. This dynamic highlights the importance of personal reflective analysis allowing team members to act as agents of professional change (Smit & McMurray 1999). This dimension represents the process of transformative learning practices.

Dimension 3: Supportive Respect - Communities of practice

Some key themes that clustered around the third dynamic of Supportive Respect included notions of inclusivity, cooperation, respectfulness, acceptance, willingness, delegation of responsibility, care for each other, no power struggles and collaboration.

The Fraser Coast team was identified as portraying a respectful supportive culture. Staff members are identified as being supportive of each other and generously providing friendship and collegiality. The team demonstrates a willingness to help each other and a climate of inter-dependence. An inclusive culture has formed whereby all staff are collaboratively informed, nurtured and accepted. Noddings (2002) argued that looking after one another is an ethic of care. Caring and helpful relationships underpin effective teamwork and group activity. Smith (2008) suggested that a respectful, supportive community develops a relationship between participants with a reciprocity of gain – everyone gains in different ways through a connectivity of support. This dynamic is clearly linked to developing communities of practice.

From these three dimensions a representational, theoretical conceptual model was devised that portrays the inter-relationships between each dimension and the reflexive, dynamic nature of the combined dimensions (Figure 1). The model implies that each dynamic is not independent but is interdependent. There is considerable overlap and interactivity between all three dimensions. The phenomenon of reflexive practice between and amongst team members has to date not been well researched, but the tri-dimensional model displayed in Figure 1 has the power to provide "...a new way of knowing, rather than merely the acquisition of new knowledge" (Ayo & Fraser 2008).

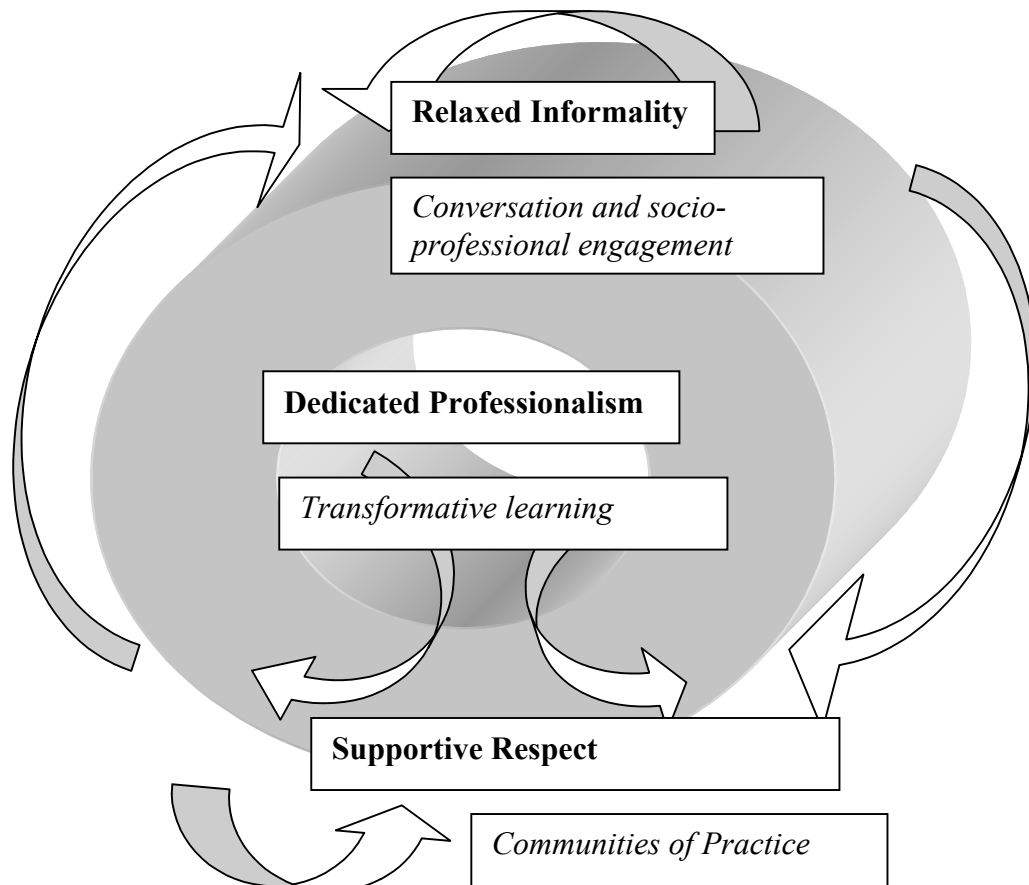


Figure 1: Reflexive tri-dimensional model of team dynamics

Conclusion

Whilst Ayo and Fraser's (2008) study of collegiality has a significant component related to institutional involvement, it seems to come very close to capturing the essences of our experiences. The fundamentals of conversation and socio-professional engagement lead directly into transformative learning which itself stimulates the emergence of various communities of practice. This process enables each member to integrate into the culture of the team and at the same time retain their own personal and professional integrity.

While the sum may be greater than the parts, the parts need to be identified first. What makes a successful teacher education team? At the Fraser Coast campus, success appears to be related to three essential dimensions namely: 1) Relaxed Informality, 2) Dedicated Professionalism and 3) Supportive Respect. From these essential dimensions of team work, a mode of operation has evolved that is recognised internally and externally as successfully contributing to the education profession. While the conceptual model that was developed portrays an interconnectivity between the three identified dimensions and is reflexive and dynamic, further research is required to explore precisely how each dimension contributes to the successes of the team overall.

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