Background to the topic

Empirically based studies in Australia, Hong Kong, England and Kenya are used in our paper to emphasize the relevance of shared learning experiences, reflection time, peer coaching, and a policy of professional learning that is constructivist and reality based. Geographically, culturally and economically diverse though these settings may be we have been struck by the commonality of the elements involved in each of the case studies. Hence, our purpose for bringing these experiences together in this shared paper. Our methods for initiating change vary. However, the focus in each of the three techniques described is enhanced teacher competence and self-confidence to lead the learning processes in new and improved directions for learners. The centrality of teacher training and professional development as key elements for changing the quality of learning outcomes is repeated in each of the case studies – regardless of class size, available equipment and context. Ironically, or perhaps not surprisingly, issues of development and capacity building seem similar regardless of local context and existing levels of social capital. Whilst issues of agency and policy are part of the equation for bringing about change, the crucial element for sustained change in learning achievements and environments is capacity building of teachers (Hargreaves, 1993; Sergiovanni, 2005). Figure 1 is an attempt to represent the importance of the teacher role in this process. This representation applies the Vygotskian (1986) concept of scaffolding the learning process with a concept mapping of the diverse elements involved in the formal education context. Regardless of cultural and socio-political context the variables appear to translate into similarly complex arrays of interrelated interests for teachers to unravel and interpret. Our view is that this is an extremely difficult task requiring skilled advice, mentoring and support from multiple sources including administration, technical and professional agencies.

The mutual dependence of all these dimension highlights our shared belief that professional learning communities make teachers and their students the starting point for sustained change. Aimed at enhancing learning outcomes through increased student teacher interactivity in classrooms we demonstrate these dimensions through three innovative and complementary techniques. Specifically:
Case Study 1: The Australian experience
ICT capacity building through communities of practice (Wenger, 2002)

Case Study 2: The Hong Kong experience
Implementing Learning circles based on the Japanese tradition (Marton and Booth, 1997)

Case Study 3: The Kenyan and English experiences
Initiation-response-feedback (IRF) analysis of classroom discourse (Alexander, 2001)

Methods, techniques and modes of enquiry including data sources

The approaches we take while differing in approach are linked by the belief that teacher student relationships need to be socially constructed (Robertson et al., 2007; Galton and MacBeath, 2004; Hardman et al., 2003). We seek to ‘marry’ research and practice through socially embedded research that adopt open-ended approaches to our data gathering and a strong focus on professional learning techniques that contribute to building research communities (Somekh and Lewin, 2005). Curriculum changes imposed by systems in contemporary global society are not easily aligned with ethnically, socially and culturally diverse student behaviors (Galton and MacBeath, 2004). Building trust alongside managerialism is fundamental for implementing educational policy change (Olssen et al., 2004). Sustained teacher responses rely on open and supportive agency or leadership (Sergiovanni, 2005). The purposes for professional learning are similar in each of our three contexts. At the same time local needs have guided the research responses and modes of enquiry along with the specific outcomes to date.

In brief, there is no prescription for success so much as a set of guidelines for best practice that can augment the teacher learner relationship and the resultant effectiveness of the learning process. Each strategy relies on reflection and disturbing the traditional habits of teachers such as that adopted in the Action Learning approach adopted from Revans (1980). In this approach existing knowledge is challenged through questioning insights based on professional training and mentoring along with reflection and reinforcement of experiences (see Figure 2a and 2b)

Figure 2a: Action Learning: knowledge insight and experience (Adapted from Revans (1980): Learning = P + Q)

Figure 2b: Teaching as Scaffolding and Mediation.

All three illustrations have the financial support and backing of public systems. Aimed at systems wide improvements, especially in the core disciplines of literacy and numeracy, findings are, and will be,
used to develop systems wide recommendations for professional learning in schools within each of the respective educational authorities.

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**Case Study 1: The Australian experience of ICT capacity building through communities of practice**

Funded by the Australian Research Council the research reported explores whole school approaches to innovative pedagogies aimed at integration of digital technologies. The context is student motivation and enhancement of learning outcomes in relation to national testing standards related to literacy, numeracy and healthy lifestyles. Case study findings relate to observations collected over a five year period in 60 schools and classrooms located in the two Australian states of Victoria and Tasmania. There have been two major phases.

**Phase 1 (2002-05):** During this three year phase (2002-05) we conducted observations in 50 upper-primary school classrooms. Our interest was to assess the levels of integration of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) in schools and in their class based usage in particular. Data gathering instruments included survey questionnaires of ICT competence of students and teachers as well as literacy and numeracy standards. In addition we conducted class based observations and interviews with the teachers, school leaders, technicians and groups of students. Analysing the data our research team (Robertson, Fluck and Webb, 2007) established a repeating pattern on dissatisfaction of teachers with the reliability of the technology and of the levels of technical support. A commonly repeated teacher observation was “I have to prepare for the technology not to work”. Students displayed similar sceptical reactions related to the equipment by choosing only to use those machines installed most recently. Older machines were observed to sit idle in schools – often because they were not adequately serviced or were slow to respond. Our research findings were reported to the Education authorities with initial reactions of disbelief that the ICT infrastructure was inadequate and unreliable. However, given the breadth and volume of negative evidence the central administrative support agency was eventually persuaded to look closely at the data and reconsider their position. Outcomes from that initial phase have since been mediated by infrastructure upgrades including broadband and wireless access as well enhanced teacher competence. What remains from this initial project phase is a set of principles for integrating ICTs and curriculum innovation which we now implementing with some success in our Phase 2 project. These principles are:

- Recognition that local contexts differ – there is need to acknowledge the local context and its needs, capacities and weaknesses - or threats to change.
- Whole school approaches are crucial for sustained change
- There must be ongoing direct involvement of key change agents including the school principal, technician, discipline or subject coordinator, parents (if possible), class based teacher and students as well external authorities.

As shown in Figure 2 where all perspectives related to the issues or innovations being undertaken are included there is alignment of roles and positions. In the Australian cases study this is the theoretical position we have attempted to follow in the practical applications and research interventions in our more recent studies during Phase 2.

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### Figure 2. System alignment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reporting</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Purposes</th>
<th>Policies</th>
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<td>T&amp;L activity</td>
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Research evidence highlights the need for collaborative planning in relation to school based developments. Following Wenger’s (2002) views on communities of practice the success factors identified relate to teacher expertise and willingness to ‘unlearn’ traditional pedagogical approaches and work collaboratively towards acceptance of the need to learn together. Reflecting research elsewhere (Becta, 2007) trust, ICT competence and supportive leadership are key issues. These various aspects underlie the modified approaches taken in school during Phase 2.

Phase 2 (2006 ongoing): This second phase of our project work has adopted three-year whole school approaches from the outset. In each of the 10 schools involved to date the initial plan has been to add the effect of digital mobile technologies to existing and much improved computing equipment (compared with Phase 1). In each of the schools our target year groups have been Year 7 (12 year old) and Year 9 (14 year olds) in secondary schools. The experimental period has involved one class in each of the year groups having personal access to a handheld computer which is kept by the student for the duration of the project as an additional tool to assist their learning. Other classes in each of the year groups have access to the curriculum materials via an online Moodle site located at www.alwayson.net.au. Our approach has been to conduct initial meetings with the school Principal, technician and teachers who collectively determine timelines and content needed to teach the assigned unit of work (related to Healthy Lifestyles) and to administer pre and post tests of scaled assessment items for comparison between classes in each year group and also between schools and states. The research team assists with the practical aspects of helping the teachers develop their skills with the mobile devices as well as maintaining the web site. We add content to the Moodle site (and handheld computers) for individual classes and monitor logs for all online activity.

In this phase of the project the research team has emphasised the importance of briefing and debriefing sessions involving all members of the school community. This effectively means that the technician listens to the students and teachers as well as the curriculum leaders and schools managers including the principal. Each has a perspective of the class based experience but only the teacher and students can report on the successes, frustrations including interruptions and time on task lost through ineffective online access. The technicians who are key players in the process of integration of effective usage of digital technologies in schools have (like all of the participants) from this process and developed their own network for trouble shooting needs and making suggestions for improvements. Similarly the technical support people have been able to assess firsthand the gaps in teachers’ working knowledge of the digital devices and associated software. This has resulted in more positive and open channel communications between all the key agents of the learning process. Keeping this communication schedule has proved immensely valuable for the project and one of a number of key success factors. Our experience is that this process of sharing of participants is fundamental for the trust to develop and the benefits to flow from a genuine and responsive learning community. The following excerpts from teachers’ reflections appear to support the value of this more open and sharing approach.

On pedagogy

*I am not from a really strong IT background but I wasn’t overawed by it or anything…I learnt what I had to and managed it pretty well. Got some help from H… or even the kids or there were plenty of people around to help out…*

Future advice

*Probably more planning.*

Discussion and Summary: Our observations suggest that where teachers began with a deficiency of skills most were prepared to experiment in different ways to produce learning environments they knew students enjoyed. Through reflecting on their own learning, these teachers recognised that they were transforming their own ‘habit zones’. Instead of being handicapped by deficiencies in skills, positive beliefs outweighed negativity. They faced considerable challenges where students forgot to bring the PDAs to school or had forgotten passwords and access codes. They saw these as solvable. Like the students, the consistent feedback message was reflected in their positive attitude to problem resolution that maintained their commitment to the project. In Phase 2 of the project many of those ‘teething’ problems have been overcome or minimized. Moreover, there is now more capacity for helping one another. Shared planning and problem resolution is one of the most positive outcomes of the project. Embedding a culture of communities of practice has been a crucial element in the success. Furthermore, tentative statistical findings suggest that students with access to the online...
course and mobile technologies have slightly better learning outcomes than their peers who studied the same content with traditional methods.

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Case Study 2. Hong Kong reforms using Learning Circles approach (Galton)

Background: The Hong Kong reforms related to class size remains controversial. Whilst most researchers accept that reducing class size leads to improvements in pupils’ attainment, attitudes and behaviour (Pritchard 1999; Biddle and Berliner, 2002) especially in the early years of schooling there are concerns about the magnitude of these effects and their long-term sustainability. Hattie (2005) concludes that the effects are, at the most, of low to medium size and that more effective ways of improving pupils’ attainment can be brought about by the increased use of certain teaching strategies such as peer tutoring and group work, improved questioning and the provision of feedback which is evaluative rather than merely corrective. In this part of the paper we examine an attempt to change classroom practice in the context of reducing class sizes from around 40 to 25 in Hong Kong Primary Schools.

The development of the Hong Kong education system is a remarkable success story. Starting from a low base at the end of the Second World War and, until recently, with an ever increasing expanding population it has managed to provide universal education up to the age of 16 including kindergarten for most children up to the age of six. Initially this was accomplished by the use of ‘double shift schooling’ (Bray 1999) where half the school population attended in the morning and the other half in the afternoon, but this arrangement has now ceased to operate in most establishments.

In 1997 the island of Hong Kong and its associated New Territories were returned to China. Hong Kong now exists as a Special Autonomous Region (SAR) with complete control over its education system and with its own Curriculum Development Institute (CDI) which is similar to the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in England. Reform of the system for training teachers was late in starting and it was only in the last two years of British colonial administration that teacher training colleges were merged into a national Institute of Education with a view to creating an all graduate profession, a move which had taken place some thirty years earlier in England and Wales and had existed for an even longer period in Scotland.

Despite the problems of providing mass education for a large population, Hong Kong pupils have done extremely well in various international comparative studies, such as PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) and the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), especially in mathematics where they regularly occupy one of the top five places out of around forty countries at both primary and lower secondary levels. Schools are large in comparison with those in the UK. For example a typical primary school can have a seven form entry with classes of 35 pupils or more, starting at the age of six in P1 and going through to P6. Teachers generally teach their specialist subject across the entire age range, unlike the UK pattern of having a class teacher who covers most lessons.

At the beginning of the millennium the Education Commission instituted a series of government backed changes in the curriculum starting in the primary phase in 2001. The Hong Kong Government’s commissioned a study whose objective were to assess the benefits of small class teaching (SCT) in the local context and to identify the teaching strategies and support necessary to optimize its benefits. The Study was launched in 37 primary schools in the 2004/05 school year. Alongside the evaluation of the effectiveness of the class size reduction was a program of in-service professional development based around Hattie’s (2005) meta-analysis of the most effective pedagogical strategies in terms of effect size on student attainment. The basic premise was that there was no special set of small class teaching strategies but that small classes offered better opportunities to put general principles of effective teaching into practice.

A particular intervention consisted of Learning Circles. Based on the Japanese tradition of ‘lesson studies’ and supported by the ideas of Marton and Booth (1997) the learning study model was initially introduced into Hong Kong (Lo et al. 2005) as a way of helping teachers cater more effectively for
individual pupils’ learning needs. In the lesson studies version each teacher takes a turn at adapting and then teaching a lesson or sequence of lessons following reflection of what has previously been observed in a colleague’s class. Learning circles do not have such a rigid, formal structure but embrace the crucial ideas of joint planning and then reflection on each other’s practice. A total of 26 out of 37 schools participated in forming 15 circles (6 Chinese; 4 English and 5 mathematics). Most have chosen mainly to focus on cooperative learning and improving questioning techniques. The theme of the first phase was cooperative learning and activities included workshops covering (i) theories and practices of cooperative learning, (ii) engaging students in class activities through cooperative learning and (iii) devising teaching plans for cooperative learning. There were also lesson observations followed by review sessions.

Some initial Findings: So far it has not proved the case that pupils taught by teachers attending Learning Circles have outperformed their peers in other classes where teachers have not joined. But informal observations in 8 schools over two years by the consultant suggest that slowly differences in practice are emerging. The following account of Miss Lee’s reaction before and after attending the Learning Circle help to explain the process.

### Miss Lee’s English lesson (before attending Learning Circle) P3 class of 24 pupils in November 2006

The target language is for pupils to ask the question “When is?” and to respond, “It’s on” using birthdays as the theme. The teacher has spent time making stickers. She distributes these to the class (some get 2 because there are 31 days in some months and only 24 pupils). The teacher calls out a number and child with a sticker comes out and sticks it on the board. It takes 7 minutes of this 30 minute lesson to get the 31 numbers posted up. The class then recite the dates in unison from the black board on which the teacher has written the target language.

“When is your birthday?”

“It’s on the (day) of (month).”

Pupils are then called out to the front of the class to fill in the day and month of their own birthday. They first practice this in pairs in front of the class but there are problems about some months having 31 and some 30 days etc. There’s another activity in pairs but time is up before it can be completed. Each pair is given two cards with a picture of a birthday cake on it. They ask their partner when it’s their birthday and when the other pupil responds they have to write this information onto the card. Then they exchange roles. They are also supposed to decorate the cards but run out of time.

**Evaluation**

This is a lesson which might have been seen in Year 1 of the study. It’s as if none of the workshops, feedback, establishing the 6 key areas for change had been undertaken.

### Miss Lee’s English lesson (after one year in Learning Circle) P1 class (6 year old) consisting of 27 pupils, November 2007.

Miss Lee produces a pencil box and shows the contents to the pupils. The target language is, “These are my pencils,” and “This is my ruler.” (i.e. using singular and plural). Pupils then play a game in pairs. Each child has a worksheet with pictures of various objects (pens, ruler, crayons etc). They put their name on the top (Kitty, Bobo etc) and then a ring around his/her. There are a pack of cards with pictures of pens, ruler etc. In each pair a pupils selects a card and asks “Is this / Are these your ruler/pencils/pens etc. The partner in the pair replies “Yes this is/ these are my ruler” and so forth. The first pupil fills in the sheet by circling the appropriate phase (This is/These are her/his pencils etc) The partner does the same but now they are my pencils etc. Then they swap roles. At the end the teacher tries to get some of the pupils to read out their answers but finds it difficult to gain the attention of the class, partly because she didn’t collect the cards and children were still playing with them.

**Evaluation**

Lots of things had been taken up since last year. Miss Lee used simple familiar things so that the target language was in a meaningful context. She did pair work, both pupils had to write and she reinforced the target language by having pupils alternately take the role of questioner and owner of the objects on the card. She also made use of the potential ‘wasted’ time during the change over to the pair work. Instead of pupils sitting waiting while she organized the pairs and handed
Discussion: In most Hong Kong primary classrooms the text book forms the basis of the lesson. Many Principal insists on every page being covered and regularly inspect pupils' books to see that this instruction is being followed. Parents will accuse a teacher of being lazy if some parts of the text are missed out. Lessons in teaching English as a second language tend to follow the text book even more closely because teachers are less confident in their own use of the language. Because the publishers wish to sell their texts in as many countries as possible the stories and the pictures illustrating the text tend to be very general. Consequently changes in practice tend to be small because of the primacy of the text although in the case of Miss Lee (not her real name) there is a genuine attempt to break away from the given lesson format and introduce more pupil involvement either in the initial discussion or during work in pairs. Thus 'learning circles' have the capacity to bring about significant changes in practice but they need to be fully integrated within each participating school's professional development program if they are to realize their full potential.

Case Study 3: The Kenyan experience Initiation-response-feedback (IRF) analysis of classroom discourse (Hardman)

Background: Until quite recently, most research on classroom discourse has been conducted in the developed world principally in the United States, Western Europe and Australia. It therefore is questionable as to the extent to which the findings apply to other countries, particularly in the developing world. However, Brophy (1999) believes it is possible to identify universal principles in teaching and learning so as to improve the quality of education. He points to international research which suggests that schooling is more similar than different across countries and cultures because it is possible to identify generic aspects of formal schooling. For example, in schools around the world it is common to find the day divided into periods used for teaching and for a range of subjects covered in the curriculum; it is also common to find teaching to be made up of whole class lessons in which content is developed through teacher explanation and teacher/student interaction followed by practice and application activities which students work on individually, or in pairs or small groups. Brophy concludes, however, that such universal aspects of formal schooling still require adaptation to the local context, including relevant characteristics of the nation’s school system, and the students’ culture. This section of the paper is about work in progress exploring the relevance of a dialogic pedagogy to schools in both the developed and developing world. Research into formative assessment emphasises the power of feedback in aiding the learning process (Ackers and Hardman, 2001; Black et al, 2003; Hattie and Timperley, 2007). This case study investigates the quality of oral feedback given by primary school teachers in across a range of international setting and findings from a recent Kenyan-based study. It provides a description of what may constitute effective discourse feedback strategies for both teachers and teacher educators so as to identify an appropriate repertoire of interactive skills for subsequent professional development. The study draws on data Kenya which were analysed using a systematic observation system focusing on the teacher-led three-part exchange sequence of Initiation – Response – Feedback (IRF). The focus of the analysis was on the third part of the IRF sequence as it is here that research suggests teachers can enhance pupil learning through feedback which asks pupils to expand on their thinking, justify or clarify their opinions, or make connections to their own experiences.

The Kenyan experience: The policy of teaching through the medium of English is seen as exerting a powerful influence on the discursive patterns found in many of the classrooms in Kenya. Such a policy encourages whole class teaching as a safer option because of the control it affords over the language choices of pupils, particularly in the chorusing of responses (Abd-Kadir and Hardman, 2007; Arthur & Martin, 2007). By resorting to such forms of talk it allows for 'participation' without loss of face for both teachers and pupils, whether through language errors or lack of understanding. In order to improve the quality of classroom learning in Kenyan primary schools, The Ministry of Education supported by the UK Department for International Development ran a national, distance-led teacher education scheme for classroom teachers from 2001 – 2005 called the School-based...
Teacher Development (SbTD) program. The aims of the program which ran from 2001 - 2005 were primarily to improve the quality and cost effectiveness of teaching and learning in primary schools through teachers acquiring new skills that promote active learning. Alongside the teacher development program, schools received a large influx of textbooks and teachers were to be given training in using them promote more active and independent forms of learning, and to develop reading and higher levels of thinking.

Throughout the four year period, the SbTD program reached and successfully graduated over 47,000 primary school teachers throughout Kenya in the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science. As a result, three teachers from every school, called Key Resource Teachers (KRTs), were trained through the program to lead school-based professional development within their subject area in their school. The program was supported by a zonal-based teacher advisory system of over 1,000 Teacher Advisory Centre (TAC) Tutors. The TAC tutors were trained so that they could provide an effective group-based support service to the KRTs who were working with their distance learning materials while carrying a full-time teaching load in the schools. Head teachers also received training materials so that they could support the KRTs in providing school-based training.

SbTD was developed as a program of self-study using distance learning modules combined with regular face-to-face cluster meetings. Central to the SbTD training modules was the concept of the reflective teacher encouraging critical reflection on beliefs and classroom practice (Eraut, 1994). Through such critical reflection the training sought to change pedagogical practices so as to ensure a better balance of teacher-led interaction and pupil-centred activities (i.e. collaborative forms of learning, problem solving, learning by doing, independent research). The role of the KRT in training and providing critical feedback to other school teachers was seen as being central to develop a community of practice (Wenger, 2002). The in-service modules were designed to be strongly classroom focused, as reflected in both their titles and contents, so as to transform and improve the quality of teaching and learning by challenging teachers’ beliefs and classroom practices, and developing their skills in facilitating change.

Evaluating the impact of SbTD on teaching and learning. The main conclusions of the NPB were that the absence of in-service training and adequate learning resources were contributing significantly to the overall poor pedagogical practices. The SbTD study sample included 12 districts (Bureti, Garissa, Kitale Municipality, Kajiado, Kitui, Kwaile, Lugari, Meru South, Mombasa, Nairobi, Nyeri) to be representative of high, medium and low potential areas and urban/rural schools. In each district an urban and rural school were randomly selected from a list provided by district education offices giving a total of 24 schools. Each school was visited for a period of 2 – 3 days and 6 teachers including, where possible a balanced mix of KRTs and non-KRTs were observed teaching English, mathematics and science, at Standards 3 and 6 giving a total sample size of 144 lessons. Interviews were also conducted with school management committees (SMC), head teachers, KRTs, non-KRTs and groups of pupils from each of the 24 schools. The interviews explored participants’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the SbTD program in terms of mode of delivery and impact on learning and teaching. The interaction analysis schedule analysed teacher-pupil interaction by recording the different types of discourse moves made by teachers and pupils. The coding system primarily focused on the initiation-response-feedback (IRF) structure by gathering data on the types of teacher questions, whether questions were answered (and by whom), and the types of follow-up given in response to answers. During the whole class sections of the lessons it was found that overall the discourse was made up of teacher initiated questions and answer sessions interrupted by periodic, brief lectures. The average length of time spent on whole class teaching across all 137 lessons was 17 minutes. Teacher explanation took up 57% of the time spent interacting with the whole class. The question and answer sequences took up 27% of the time and the rest was made up of reading from the chalk board or text book, pupil demonstration, silences and interruptions. Teacher follow-up accounted for less than 3% of the time.

Impact of SbTD training on whole class interaction: Of the 137 teachers observed, 50 (36%) reported they had been trained as KRTs. In order to investigate the impact of the SbTD training, the whole-class interactive practices and use of group-based activities by KRTs and non-KRTs were compared. The findings suggest that KRTs generally had a more interactive style in terms of their use of teacher questions, and participation strategies (cued elicitations and teacher checks). KRTs also used more teacher explanation and gave more praise in their feedback, encouraged more pupil questions and individual answers from girls and boys and offered more comments on pupil answers (i.e. rephrasing,
building or elaborating upon an answer). They also used more teacher direction which appeared to be mainly due to the greater use of group/paired work which necessitated the giving of directions in regrouping the class and setting up activities.

Overall, the findings of the Kenyan study support the view that whole school-based training offers the most potential for changing pedagogic practices, particularly in developing countries like Kenya where many teachers lack training or under prepared because of the quality of their pre-service training (Lewin, 2003; O’Sullivan, 2006). However, the findings from the observations and interviews suggest that the ‘cascade’ model of school-based training, whereby KRTs work with other colleagues in the school to pass on their training, was having less impact than had been anticipated by the SbTD designers. The main reason given for the lack of effectiveness of the KRT leading school-based training was the heavy workload of all teachers which left little time for systematic input. This suggests the need for all teachers to undergo KRT training and for more official time to be allocated to school-based training. It seems from the interviews that where SbTD was working well, classroom-based support was being provided to teachers to encourage them to reflect upon their beliefs and pedagogic practices.

In conclusion, while recognising that teaching is a cultural activity and acknowledging the influence of contextual factors on the teaching and learning process, it has been argued that universal principles based on a dialogic pedagogy can inform and transform the learning and teaching process. It therefore raises the possibility of pedagogic change being achieved within the cultural context in which teachers operate through more effective teacher training programs which are sensitive to the cultural assumptions, values and pedagogical principles which teachers bring to the classroom so as to judge how far the pedagogy can be accommodated in a different cultural context. By taking the socio-cultural context into account, school-based training can address the issue of transfer and move away from the imposition of a ‘top-down’ educational reform model (O’Sullivan, 2001). It can also ensure that the introduction of new pedagogic approaches takes into consideration the realities within which teachers work (O’Sullivan, 2006).

Final Comment

Figure 3 focuses on the strength of the ‘habit’ zone in the practicing behaviours of teachers.
All three case studies highlight the complex socio-cultural work contexts in which teachers operate. In the Australian case study the integration of new technologies into teaching practices depends on more than enthusiasm and motivation to engage with options. Adequate infrastructure and skilled technical support are essential for teachers to succeed. Communities of practice provide the local impetus for success. In the Hong Kong case study the introduction of the learning circles strategy has provided a powerful stimulus for changes in teaching practices. And, in the Kenyan experience a similar emphasis on school based training has provided the stimulus to teachers to collaboratively embrace changes in practice. Several key unifying features are apparent. They are:

- The importance of recognising local context and culture
- Imbedding the changes in the local context through negotiation, training and support
- Continuing support for development of new skills
- Time for reflection and absorption of the new ways of thinking and operating

In the final analysis there is evidence in each of these experiences to support the critical role of agency in terms of leadership and management practices. Motivation for change might come from diverse sources. This can ‘disturb’ habits. However, habits and beliefs need guidance and skills to bring about sustainable change. The affirming aspect of these three studies conducted in different continents and cultural contexts is the similarity in process and key elements for success. Relationships are central.

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