

THE NETWORKED SCHOOL LEADER

It will come as little surprise to anyone who has ever worked in a school or who has read anything about teacher CPD that providing opportunities for teachers to collaborate and undertake professional learning together can lead to increased teacher job satisfaction, more effective teaching practice and improved pupil outcomes. But the keyword here is CAN – we also know that many forms of professional learning, including collaborative professional learning, fail to have a meaningful or long-term impact on teaching and learning. The devil is in the detail, in the implementation – and that is why this latest book from Chris Brown is so powerful. It offers key insight into the role of school leadership in harnessing the power of professional learning networks, and through a combination of theory and case studies of two professional learning network (PLN) approaches helps us begin to understand how such principles might work in practice. Picking up on often-neglected elements of the process – including how the learning from PLNs is shared and mobilised through the wider school – it highlights the conditions for success in collaborative professional learning (and the inhibitors of it!), providing a detailed view of not just the potential benefits of developing and engaging in PLNs but also the substantial challenges for school leaders in doing so effectively.

— *Cat Scutt, Director of Education and Research,
Chartered College of Teaching*

The great strength of *The Networked School Leader* is its comparative aspect. Chris Brown explores his ‘formalise, prioritise and mobilise’ advice to school leaders who want to harvest the full potential of professional learning networks by drawing on his studies of networks in England and Germany. These diverse examples help to illuminate how and why networks can be powerful mechanisms for supporting learning and innovation within and across schools, but also why their leadership is challenging and why they so often fail to achieve their full potential.

— *Professor Toby Greany, Chair in Education,
University of Nottingham*

This timely book is essential reading for school leaders looking to engage and collaborate with others. Written with a focus on lived experiences, Chris offers a compelling case of the benefits when leaders support learning networks in their schools, offering sound and realistic recommendations for how to do so.

— *Ruth Luzmore, Head teacher – Primary, St Mary Magdalene Academy, London*

This page intentionally left blank

THE NETWORKED SCHOOL LEADER

How to Improve Teaching and Student
Outcomes Using Learning Networks

CHRIS BROWN
Durham University, UK



United Kingdom – North America – Japan
India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2020

© 2020 Chris Brown
Published under exclusive licence by Emerald Publishing Limited.

Reprints and permissions service
Contact: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without either the prior written permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying issued in the UK by The Copyright Licensing Agency and in the USA by The Copyright Clearance Center. Any opinions expressed in the chapters are those of the authors. Whilst Emerald makes every effort to ensure the quality and accuracy of its content, Emerald makes no representation implied or otherwise, as to the chapters' suitability and application and disclaims any warranties, express or implied, to their use.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83867-722-0 (Print)
ISBN: 978-1-83867-719-0 (Online)
ISBN: 978-1-83867-721-3 (Epub)



ISOQAR
REGISTERED

Certificate Number 1985
ISO 14001

ISOQAR certified
Management System,
awarded to Emerald
for adherence to
Environmental
standard
ISO 14001:2004.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*For my good friend and colleague, Alan Daly, who first
introduced me to the power of networks*

This page intentionally left blank

In there [the labyrinth], Minos walled up the twin form of bull and man, and twice nourished it on Athenian blood, but the third repetition of the nine-year tribute by lot, caused the monster's downfall. When, through the help of the virgin princess, Ariadne, by rewinding the thread, Theseus, son of Aegeus, won his way back to the elusive threshold, that no one had previously regained, he immediately set sail for Dia (Naxos), stealing the daughter of Minos away with him...

— Ovid *Metamorphoses* Book VIII lines 152–182 translated
by Anthony S. Kline

This page intentionally left blank

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>List of Figures and Charts</i>	xiii
<i>List of Tables and Boxes</i>	xv
<i>List of Pictures</i>	xvii
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xix
<i>About the Author</i>	xxi
<i>Foreword</i>	xxiii
Introduction	1
1. The Current Context for Professional Learning Networks	7
2. The Labyrinth	29
3. Connecting PLN Learning with What Happens in Schools	51
4. How Can We Learn from PLNs in Germany and England?	79
5. Research Learning Networks in England: What Do Teachers and School Leaders Say?	113
6. Research Learning Networks in England: Exploring Social Networks, Cultures of Trust and Innovation	137
7. <i>Pess</i> Networks in Germany: Hearing the Voices of Teachers and School Leaders	163

8. <i>Pess Networks in Germany: Examining the Use and Value of Networked Learning</i>	185
9. <i>Conquering the Labyrinth: Lessons Learned from Cases in England and Germany</i>	203
<i>Notes</i>	217
<i>References</i>	229
<i>Index</i>	251

LIST OF FIGURES AND CHARTS

Figure 1.1	A Graphical Depiction of PLNs.	15
Figure 1.2	Factors Affecting the Likely Formation and Success of PLNs in Improving Teaching and Learning.	25
Figure 3.1	Factors Affecting the Knowledge Brokerage Journey.	55
Figure A1.1	Coding Structure Following the RLN Interviews.	96
Figure A1.2	Coding Structure Following the <i>Pess</i> Network Interviews.	97
Figure 5.1	The Four Workshop Model Used in the RLN Process.	120
Chart 6.1	Relationships Involving Just Conversation about RLN-related Teaching and Learning Approaches (Schools 'C', 'N' and 'S').	141
Chart 6.2	Relationships Involving Just Conversation about RLN-related Teaching and Learning Approaches (School 'M').	142
Chart 6.3	Relationships Involving Conversation, Professional Development and Collaboration about RLN-related Teaching and Learning Approaches (Schools 'C', 'N' and 'S').	142
Chart 6.4	Relationships Involving Conversation, Professional Development and Collaboration about RLN-related Teaching and Learning Approaches (School 'M').	143
Chart 6.5	Type of RLN Innovation Use by School.	148
Figure 7.1	Configuration of the <i>Pess</i> PLN.	171
Figure 7.2	The Four Key Stages of the <i>Pess</i> Project.	172

Chart 8.1	Formalisation and Prioritisation in <i>Pess</i> Schools.	187
Chart 8.2	Mobilisation in <i>Pess</i> Schools.	189
Chart 8.3	Mobilisation and Formalisation in <i>Pess</i> Schools.	189
Chart 8.4	Relevance and Perceived Benefits of <i>Pess</i> .	192

LIST OF TABLES AND BOXES

Box 1.1	Examples of Education Networks.	11
Box 1.2	The 'Dark Side' of Collaboration.	18
Box 1.3	Four Types of Collaboration.	21
Box 2.1	Instructional and Transformational School Leadership.	35
Box 2.2	Distributed Leadership.	46
Box 3.1	The Characteristics of Effective PLCs.	57
Box 3.2	The Characteristics of High Quality Learning Conversations.	60
Box 3.3	The Neocave as Boundary Object.	66
Box 3.4	The Concept of Opinion Formers.	73
Table 3.1	Five Attributes That Affect the Adoption of Innovations.	62
Table 3.2	Adopter Types.	70
Box 4.1	Research Learning Networks and Developing Potential Learning Networks.	81
Box 4.2	A Brief Explanation of the Case Study Approach.	83
Box A1.1	PLN Interview Questions (<i>Pess</i> Network and RLN Participants).	90
Box A2.1	RLN Survey Questions.	100
Table A3.1	<i>Pess</i> Survey Questions Employed.	109
Table 5.1	Research Learning Network Participants Listed by School.	122
Table 5.2	A Summary of Key Findings for Each School.	133
Table 6.1	To What Extent Are School Staff Using the New Approaches to Teaching and Learning Relating to the RLN?	145

Table 6.2	General Agreement in Relation to Culture of Trust Statements.	153
Table 6.3	General Agreement in Relation to the Environment of Innovation Statements.	153
Table 6.4	Formalising and Prioritising RLN Activity.	155
Table 6.5	The Relative 'Centrality' of RLN Participants.	158
Table 7.1	<i>Pess</i> Network Participants Listed by School.	175
Table 8.1	A Comparison of Perceived Benefits by Different Respondents.	194
Box 9.1	The Elements of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory.	209

LIST OF PICTURES

Picture 1	George Fredrick Watts' 'The Minotaur'.	31
Picture 2	France de Ranchin's Labyrinth 1.	31
Picture 3	France de Ranchin's Labyrinth 2.	32
Picture 4	France de Ranchin's Labyrinth 3.	32
Picture 5	Laurentius de Voltolin's 'Henry of Germany Giving Lecture to Students at the University of Bologna'.	65
Picture 6	Great Hall of Polychromes of Altamira.	66
Picture 7	Miró i Artigas a les coves d'Altamira.	67

This page intentionally left blank

ABBREVIATIONS

KMK	Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs
NRW	North Rhine-Westphalia
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (England's school inspectorate)
<i>Pess</i>	The developing potential – empowering schools project (Germany)
PLN	Professional learning network
QUA-LiS	Quality and Support Agency of the State Institute for Schools
RITP	Research-informed teaching practice
RLN	Research learning network (England)

This page intentionally left blank

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chris Brown is Professor in Education at Durham University, UK. He has a long-standing interest in how research evidence can and should, but often doesn't, aid the development of education policy and practice. In the past few years he has sought to drive forward the notion of Professional Learning Networks (PLNs) as a means to promote the collaborative learning of teachers, and to ultimately improve student outcomes. He has written and edited multiple books and papers on this topic, and is the co-founder and co-convener of the *International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement's* Professional Learning Networks research network.

In 2018 Chris was awarded a Siftung Mercator Foundation Senior Fellowship, which allowed him to conduct the research that forms the basis of this book. Each year Siftung Mercator identifies and invites just six people worldwide to apply for one of its fellowships. Potential Fellows are identified by a panel as 'exceptionally talented and outstanding researchers and practitioners', and recipients are offered the space and freedom to devote themselves to exploratory and unconventional research and practical projects.

Chris was also awarded with the 2015 American Educational Research Association (AERA) 'Emerging Scholar' award, the 2016 AERA Excellence in Research to practice award and the 2016 UCEA Jeffrey V. Bennett Outstanding International Research award. This is Chris' eleventh book; he has also published hundreds of articles and regularly presents at conferences all over the globe.

This page intentionally left blank

FOREWORD

Professional Learning Networks (PLNs) hold the promise of addressing many of the issues education faces now and in the future. Schools are expected to prepare *all* children for a fast-changing society, in an age of accountability as well as continuous (self-)improvement, while teacher turnover is a substantial problem in many countries. Teachers and school leaders feel PLN participation, for example: *broadens your view and sharpens your brain; is dynamic and inspiring, and helps to understand how students think*. PLN participation helps teachers to appreciate their job more and (finally) talk about their teaching again. It can help teachers rethink their practice to face the challenges of an increasingly complex society, together with teachers and school leaders from other schools, as well as researchers and other stakeholders.

In reality, the success of PLNs is not guaranteed, depending on a range of factors and processes that need to be in place before we can expect positive results. Since the launch of the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement PLN network in 2017, Chris Brown and I have worked with our members to further define PLNs, elaborate their theory of action and identify key areas of focus for further research. The first thing we agreed upon when talking about starting the network was to make sure we would have collaborative outputs regularly from the start, beyond Congress meetings and sessions. Our 2018 book *Networks for Learning* brought together insights into PLN processes, influencing factors and outcomes based on research by several PLN network members, and included an excellent discussion by Alan Daly and Louise Stoll to inspire us to take on further challenges in this important field. They identified several future directions to consider,

among which ensuring depth of learning as well as breadth; paying attention to the conditions to support relational space; and moving towards a systems perspective. In relation, school leadership is a vital factor. Teachers, and also school leaders themselves, often state that leadership support for PLN participation and sustainable implementation in schools could have been much better. *What* leaders should do *how*, exactly, is less clear. Facilitation is often mentioned as important, yet surely not sufficient.

The path from educators participating in PLNs to widespread application of PLN learning in their schools is not simple and linear. The positive quotes in the first paragraph are taken from interviews and questionnaires with participants in one of our own studies into 23 PLNs in the Netherlands, with participants from more than 90 schools across the country.¹ These same participants, however, including their school leaders themselves, reported little leadership support for PLN participation and further knowledge sharing within their school. Our data team research² also shows that school leaders can both hinder and enable the work of data use PLNs, and that good practices in this respect are still rare in general. This makes it hard to determine how school leaders can ensure meaningful PLN engagement and support their teachers with PLN participation, let alone ensure that other teachers engage actively in PLN products and outputs. More multilevel, mixed-method studies are needed to provide both detailed case information and multi-school generalisable information to show the extent to which PLNs are effective and why, and specifically into the school leader role. In the research conducted for this book, Chris Brown has used an extensive mixed-methods study to provide much-needed insights into the role of school leaders in making PLNs effective, and potential for improvement. As clearly explained by the in-depth case results and the final chapter reflections in this book, school leaders need to embrace distributed instructional ethical leadership, using prioritisation, formalisation and mobilisation as approaches to make sure that all school staff and students will benefit from the PLN in which their school participates. It is also acknowledged, however, that not all schools are in the most advantageous situations to do so, and what school leaders facing challenging circumstances need to be aware of.

Chris Brown has worked with teachers and school leaders from numerous schools in different countries to increase their use of research. With receiving the Mercator Fellowship and writing this book Chris shows to be a leading researcher in this exciting field, bringing together insights based on his long-standing interest in research use, educational leadership and PLNs. His keynotes, RLN workshops and books inspire me in my work with school leaders and teachers from primary to higher education.

Likewise, any school leader will be very inspired to *conquer the PLN labyrinth* to improve teaching and student outcomes after having read this book.

Dr Cindy Poortman
University of Twente