

**A LEARNING ECOLOGY FRAMEWORK FOR COLLECTIVE,
E-MEDIATED TEACHER DEVELOPMENT IN PRIMARY SCIENCE AND
TECHNOLOGY**

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP / ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student

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Table of Contents

Certificate of Authorship / Originality	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Abstract	xi
Chapter 1 Justifying and Preparing for this Investigation	1
1.1 A Network Dynamic: towards a contemporary zeitgeist?	3
1.1.1 The Amazon.com Recommender Network: a distributed learning system	3
1.1.2 The Shell Communities of Practice: a collaborative learning system	7
1.1.3 The World Health Organisation's Response to SARS: a knowledge-building learning system	11
1.2 Existing Network Approaches in Teacher Professional Development	17
1.2.1 Distributed Web-based Networks for Teacher Professional Development	17
1.2.2 Inquiry-based Networks for Collaborative Professional Development	30
1.2.3 Collaborative Knowledge Building: establishing shared knowledge networks	37
1.3 DESCANT- SciTech: a professional development context for the study of collective learning	44
1.3.1 A Participatory and Nested Context for Collective Learning	46
1.4 Chapter Summary: three challenges	47
Chapter 2 An Ethical Challenge: Democratic representation	48
2.1 Democracy: a guiding principle for knowledge building	48
2.1.1 Democratic Epistemology	49
2.1.2 The Representative Assembly	50
2.2 An Ethical Way Forward: the Political Ecology of Latour	51
2.2.1 Ensuring Genuine Collaboration	51

2.2.2 Undertaking Collective Experimentation	57
2.2.3 Enacting Political Ecology: tools for thinking about this study's research design and methodology	61
Chapter 3 A Theoretical Challenge: Establishing an ecological complexity orientation	69
3.1 Self-organisation: a basis for nested agency	69
3.1.1 Individual Learner Agency	70
3.1.2 Collective Learner Agency	71
3.1.3 Nested Agency and the Learning System	73
3.2 A Generative Theory of Learning: a starting point for identifying and describing collective learning	74
3.3 Theoretical Principles for Studying Collective Learning	76
3.3.1 Recognising Complexity	76
3.3.2 Recognising Continuity in Time	77
3.3.3 Recognising Dynamic Stability	77
Chapter 4 A Pragmatic Challenge: An integrated framework for research design and analysis	79
4.1 A Case Study Approach: capturing the dynamic complexity of collective learning	79
4.2 Design-based Research as Principled Case Studies	82
4.3 DESCANT (SciTech): a design-based case study of collective learning	85
4.3.1 Recognising Exogenous and Endogenous System Design	86
4.3.2 Exogenous System Design in Phase 1 DESCANT	87
4.3.3 Researcher as Participant-Observer	95
Chapter 5 Research Methodology	99
5.1 Research Questions: an emergent strategy	99
5.2 Participant Selection	100
5.3 Data Gathering within Professional Development: an integrated knowledge-building context	102
5.3.1 Sources of Data	103

5.4 Data Analysis	107
5.4.1 A Pragmatic Political Ecology Framework	108
5.4.2 A Pragmatic Complexity Framework	108
5.4.3 A Learning Ecology: an emergent analytical framework	110
5.5 Strategies for Ensuring Rigour and Ethical Compliance	111
5.5.1 Establishing Validity within a Political Ecology	112
5.5.2 Ecological Validity: articulating a proposition through multiple perspectives.	113
5.6 Data Selection and Dissemination	116
5.7 Possible Weaknesses of this Methodology	118
5.8 Ethical Protocols	119
Chapter 6 Describing and Analysing Learning in Groups I: Exploration in Phase 1 of the DESCANT project	121
6.1 Teachers enter the Generative Virtual Classroom	123
6.1.1 Can Teachers' initial contributions to the Generative Virtual Classroom be understood as contributions within a Political Ecology?	124
6.1.2 Can teacher's initial contributions to the Generative Virtual Classroom be understood as a learning ecology?	132
6.2 Teacher Webboard Discussions	136
6.2.1 Can online investigation in the Webboard be understood as a learning ecology?	136
6.3 Answering Chapter 6's Research Question: an analytical summary.	183
Chapter 7 Describing and Analysing Learning in Groups II: Designing in Phase 1 of the DESCANT project	187
7.1 Working up a Design Orientation	189
7.1.1 Can teachers initial design contributions be understood as a learning ecology?	189
7.2 A Prototype Environment	201
7.2.1 What implications might the e-learning design itself have for understanding collective learning?	201
7.3 Passing on Learnings: representing learning across project phases in DESCANT	215

7.3.1 Can Culminating Tasks be understood as (part of) a learning ecology?	216
7.4 Answering Chapter 7's Research Question: an analytical summary	232
7.5 Exogenous System Design in Phase 2 DESCANT	235
7.5.1 (Collective) Agent Proximity	235
7.5.2 (Collective) Agent Activation	238
Chapter 8 Describing and Analysing Learning in Groups III: New cohorts explore the DESCANT Colony in Phase 2	242
8.1 The Phase 2 Population Investigates the Culminating Tasks of Cohort 1	242
8.1.1 Can teachers' contributions to the DESCANT Colony in Phase 2 be understood as a learning ecology, and if so, as one that transcends the boundaries between Phases 1 and 2?	243
8.1.2 Can school-based contributions to online investigations be understood as a part of a learning ecology?	255
8.1.3 Of what importance, if any here, is the proximity of agents in the DESCANT learning ecology?	276
8.2 Answering Chapter 8's Research Question: an analytical summary	282
Chapter 9 Describing and Analysing Learning in Groups IV: School-based contributions in DESCANT's Phase 2	285
9.1 Final school-based conversations as windows on group learning in Phase 2: Did collective learning occur within local, school-based groups?	286
9.1.1 Excerpt 1: The Pattonsvale final discussion.	288
9.1.2 Excerpt 2: The Tallerack final discussion	296
9.1.3 Excerpt 3: The final discussion with Cohort 2 participant Jack	305
9.2 Did these school-based collectives contribute to the DESCANT Colony, and if so, how?	313
9.2.1 Can a Culminating Task, as a contribution to the DESCANT learning ecology, incorporate the learning of school-based collectives?	314
9.2.2 Can participant ratings and evaluations be interpreted as contributions to a learning ecology, and if so, how may they articulate	320

the learning of school-based collectives?	
9.2.3 How may collective learning, including that of school-based collectives, be represented on the Learning Landscape as part of the DESCANT learning ecology?	332
9.3 Answering Chapter 9's Research Question: an analytical summary	336
Chapter 10 An Analytical Summary- From Collectivity to Systemic Renewal: Making sense of this study's findings as an Adaptive Landscape	338
10.1 Phase 1: Cohort 1 teachers' investigation	339
10.1.1 An Initial Adaptive Landscape	340
10.1.2 Traversing the Valley: population shifts on an adaptive landscape	342
10.1.3 DESCANT's Emerging Culture: utilising uncertainty for transformative learning	346
10.2 Phase 1: The selections of Cohort 1 teachers	349
10.3 Phase 2: Cohort 2 and 3 teachers' investigation	353
10.4 Phase 2: The selections of Cohort 2 and 3 teachers	362
Chapter 11 Implications	373
11.1 Democratic Professional Learning: responding to the ethical challenge	373
11.2 Re-conceiving Collectivity: responding to the theoretical challenge.	377
11.3 Designing Collective Teacher Professional Development and Research: responding to the pragmatic challenge	380
11.3.1 The unifying power of an ecological account of learning	381
11.3.2 The simplicity of an ecological account of learning	382
11.3.3 The internal coherence of an ecological account of learning	383
11.3.4 The external coherence of an ecological account of learning	385
11.3.5 The fertility of an ecological account of learning	387
11.3.6 The predictive accuracy of an ecological account of learning	390

Figures

Chapter 6

6.1 Online Immersion	121
6.2 Data Excerpts: Chapter 6 Timeline	122
6.3 Locating GVC Excerpt 1	124
6.4 Locating Webboard Excerpts 1 to 4	136

Chapter 7

7.1 Various Design Events	187
7.2 Locating Design Excerpt 1	189
7.3 Locating a Design Vignette	202
7.4 Locating the Design of Culminating Tasks	216
7.5 Cohort 1's Learning Landscape	218

Chapter 8

8.1 Locating Excerpt 1	243
8.2 Locating Excerpt 2	255

Chapter 9

9.1 Locating School-based Conversations	286
9.2 Locating Culminating Tasks and Ratings/Evaluations	313
9.3 Phase 2 Ratings on the Learning Landscape	333
9.4 Floating Video Object	334

Chapter 10

10.1 Early Phase 1 Online Immersion Period: Two fitness peaks	341
10.2 Traversing the valley	344
10.3 Traversing a new valley towards a third fitness peak	348
10.4 The DESCANT Colony fitness peak	352
10.5 School-based fitness peaks	358
10.6 School-based emergent fitness peak	361
10.7 Expanded DESCANT Colony fitness peak	365
10.8 DESCANT Colony emergent fitness peak	369

Appendices

Appendix 1: Plans & Support Documents

1.1 Introductory Workshop Plan	394
1.2 E-learning Immersion Plan	395
1.3 1 st Design Workshop Plan	396
1.4 Professional Needs Support Document: three nested purposes.	397
1.5 2 nd Design Workshop Plan	405
1.6 Phase 2 Introductory Workshop Plan	406

Appendix 2: E-learning Environments

2.1 The Generative Virtual Classroom (GVC)	409
2.2 The DESCANT Colony	411

Appendix 3: Ethics Forms, Protocols & Participant Pseudonym / Titles

3.1 Teacher and Consultant Consent Form	417
3.2 Parent Information Sheet	418
3.3 Parent Consent Form	419
3.4 DESCANT Participant Names, Pseudonyms & Titles	420
3.5 Final School-based Conversations Protocol	421

Appendix 4: Teacher & Cohort Texts

4.1 Learning Legacy Texts	423
4.2 Angela's Accompanying Text	428
4.3 Cathie's Accompanying Text	430

Reference List	435
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Abstract

This thesis reports on the development and testing of a framework for making sense of the collective professional learning of primary Science and Technology teachers in an e-learning mediated context.

Web-based networks and collaboratories are playing an increasingly prominent role in private and public sector knowledge building and innovation. In Education, online communities now frequently support teachers' professional learning. However, despite the pervasiveness of this network zeitgeist, such studies rarely describe or analyse (let alone theorise) teachers' collective learning, focusing paradoxically instead on the learning of individuals, albeit in group contexts. Without a clear understanding of collectivity, the design of initiatives for systemic professional renewal is significantly impeded.

This investigation addresses this urgent need to describe, analyse and theorise teachers' collective learning. Serendipitously, an Australian Research Council Linkage Project, DESCANT (SciTech), provided a context that confronted those ethical, theoretical and pragmatic challenges necessary to make collective learning both possible and likely. Cohorts of primary Science and Technology teachers, supported by consultants, Education Department officers and University researchers, worked together, in networked ways, to conceive, prototype and trial an e-learning environment for the professional development of cohorts of their peer teachers. Democratic participation was assured, a generative theory of learning adopted and pragmatic steps taken so as to establish a principled, yet experimental, trial for studying collective learning. Group learning at every stage of this process was documented, and examined for ethical, theoretical and pragmatic evidence of collectivity. That is, judgements were made as to whether the learning that occurred at each stage of the project could be understood as a complex, dynamic learning ecology.

The study's findings reveal that collective professional learning did occur, to a greater or lesser extent, at every stage of the DESCANT process. Furthermore, the collective learning of these teachers could be well described and explained by considering how those ethical,

theoretical and pragmatic challenges - the pillars of the learning ecology framework developed here - were met. The account makes clear just how complex, dynamic, highly nuanced and ecological in nature collective learning is. It was then a small step to theorise systemic professional renewal in terms of collective conceptual movements on an adaptive (learning) landscape and, in the light of what occurred, to extrapolate, speculatively, from the generative theoretical pillar with which the study began.

Of course, this study has acknowledged limitations. Nevertheless, its successful small-scale piloting of a learning ecology framework for making sense of collective, networked professional learning demonstrates that the framework has a range of epistemic benefits - not least, internal and external coherence. As well, it provokes thinking about key characteristics of networked approaches to collective professional learning. Above all, this study suggests the worth of continuing to test and refine this learning ecology framework in those diverse settings where systemic renewal is critical.