

# ***Developing a Leadership for Sustainability Learning Network: Some theoretical, pragmatic and purposeful considerations***

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## **Abstract**

This poster session explores some of the ideas and practices we are working with in a project to develop a Leadership for Sustainability Learning Network (LSLN). The aim is to initiate and support an active and vibrant online Learning Network(s) for people across different sectors in the North West region of the UK. Our aspiration is to see how far we can take the possibilities and opportunities offered by the approach and ideas of networked learning to support individuals or groups who are seeking to take leadership and bring about change in respect to sustainability, operating at the local and regional level within a global context of concerns about climate change, peak resources, social justice and associated challenges.

We will explore the relationship between theoretical networked learning principles and processes (including how they are situationally privileged), an unfolding, reflexive sense of what we are trying to make happen (with reference to practical, ethical, pedagogical and political expectations), and the joint and several purposes of potential LSLN participants and their existing relational networks. Principles and practices of action research have significantly influenced our approach and the kinds of developmental engagement we are seeking to offer network participants.

We will explain how our informing considerations have been reviewed in the light of changing contextual circumstances. We will outline how these have become characterised in the design, testing and use of the learning network so far. And we will consider what ongoing considerations need to be embraced in the continuing development and coherence of the leadership for sustainability learning network.

The Poster at the conference will demonstrate in particular how we have begun to put a series of networked learning design principles into practice within a Leading on Sustainability programme and the key challenges and issues that we are meeting and working with.

## **Keywords**

Sustainability, Networked Learning, Participation, Learning Principles and Processes, Relational Theory and Practice, Social Networking

## **Research context**

The development of the Leadership for Sustainability Learning Network [LSLN] is funded by the UK Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) (2009-2011). It is a core aspect of the HEIF project which is contextualised by accompanying activities:

1. This initiative involves working in partnership with the membership based charity Business in the Community North West (BITC NW) to develop and deliver a pilot Leading On Sustainability Programme. This is being designed to enable future senior leaders to develop their capacities to take appropriate action in relation to climate change and sustainability for their organizations, and to craft their careers within the currently

changing landscape of business. Access to the LSLN will be offered to the participants of this programme as a support and resource for their learning. But the LSLN's purposes and activities are not limited to this territory alone. In many ways the programme provides a start up community with which to pilot the network.

2. The LSLN aspires to become 'the place to meet' for those in the public, private and 'not-for-profit' sectors in the North West of the UK who are addressing climate change and other sustainability issues. It has the intention of potentially bringing together greater numbers of organisations in the region to share and advance learning, knowledge and capacity to collaborate for change through on-line and off-line opportunities for engagement and the co-production of knowledge and practice.

### **Current Learning Design Principles**

The initial design concept for the LSLN includes the following network learning principles – drawn from previous projects and work (e.g. E-Quality Network 2002, Ponti and Hodgson 2006, Blantern, 2010) and based on a Social Constructionist or Relational frame. This is our current articulation of our intentions, and will be reviewed for presentation in May if appropriate.

- learning based on *participation* rather than *transmission* – i.e. processes are equally or more important than content
- dialogue, exchange of ideas, intrinsic & situational approaches to inquiry and engagement
- learning experience as intimate as face to face encounters
- collaboration and co-construction of knowledge and expertise between all network participants, fostering 'expert learners'
- practitioners' engagement in critical and reflexive evaluation of their own practice
- inclusion, democracy & accessibility
- forms of communication (e.g. digital media) that have cross boundary reach
- facilitation of movements and dialogues between cultures, contributing to open, non-oppositional notions of identity and communities

We are seeking in the project to create the kind of virtual spaces, milieu and resources through which such networked learning design principles can be enacted and at the same time to contribute to capacities for leading and bringing about change. To this end we are interested in exploring the integration of the role and function of 'Social Networking' within networked learning design theory and practice. In particular this will require working with issues of public & private space (and their control), face management and identity performance.

The Poster at the conference will demonstrate how we have begun to put these design principles into practice within the Leadership for Sustainability Learning Network and the key challenges and issues that we are meeting and working with. We will welcome Networked Learning conference participant's comments and feedback on what we are trying to achieve with the LSLN.

### **References**

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