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Communities of Practice (CoP)

Annotated Bibliography

SSHRC Ideas Connect

Region of Waterloo, Ontario

A collection of summaries in the form of annotations on articles discussing Communities of Practice (CoP) intended to inform the community and inspire discussion.

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Title:

Creating Community: Strengthening Education and Practice Partnerships through Communities of Practice

Citation:

Berry, L. E. (2011). Creating Community: Strengthening Education and Practice Partnerships through Communities of Practice. *International Journal of Nursing Education Scholarship*, 8(1), 1-18.

Summary (highlights of the article):

Berry (2011) identifies some limitations and recommendations surrounding Communities of Practice (CoP) approaches. Berry (2011) explains that social interactions are important for nurses, and for people serving in public and community services. Social interactions provide nurses with knowledge through interactions and strong relationships with peers and colleagues.

The CoP model Berry (2011) offers proposes that creating environments that engage students in CoP settings helps increase their skills in social interactions. CoP are informal groups of people that bring together participants to learn, work together to develop and share knowledge, and apply this new knowledge to their own settings of practice. The CoP model presents the formation of community as an essential part of the learning to produce and transfer knowledge through community dialogue, reflection, and negotiation (Berry, 2011, p. 7). CoP exist as learning opportunities for reflection in order to challenge present circumstances within the field or sector that may need to be changed.

CoP can consist of face-to-face or virtual interactions. CoP connects individuals who are focused on gaining knowledge about issues or ideas within their field. Some benefits of CoP include: improved communication, balance between individual and group learning, effective utilization of time, pooling resources, a breakdown of cultural barriers, sharing of knowledge, and creating a sense of ownership (Berry, 2011, p. 8).

Through CoP, the role of the learner is described as new participants, such as students or new graduates, collaborating with members of greater experience (field experience or

educational experience). Many students reported the CoP model promotes accountability, as they function as a part of a team with increased responsibility appropriate to their level of education and experience. In terms of cost for additional time, Berry (2011) offers that the model is offset by new ideas and perspectives that members bring to the setting. Staff viewed the time spent with students as an investment for the future, growth, and improvement of the profession. CoP models allow members to be active participants in improving their learning environments by working together to improve curriculum designs and determine positive outcomes for their programs. CoP are able to create meaningful interactions between participants. These interactions contribute to the development of positive professional identities for students.

Berry (2011) concludes that in order to be effectively involved in CoP in health care organizations, nursing educators and practitioners must jointly commit to “creating education-practice partnerships that promote meaningful, integrated, reflective, dialogic participation of students in practice” (p. 12).

Key Messages:

- An informal group of people that brings them together to learn, work together, develop/share knowledge and in turn apply new knowledge to their own settings of practice.
- Exists as learning opportunities for a reflection, to challenge present circumstances in the field.

Title:

What is a Community of Practice and How Can We Support It?

Citation:

Hoadley, C. (2012). What Is a Community of Practice and How Can We Support It?. In D. Jonassen and S. Lund (Eds.), *Theoretical Foundations of Learning Environments* (2nd ed., 286–300). New York, United States: Routledge.

Summary (highlights of the article):

Hoadley (2012) explains that the meaning of community of practice (CoP) has evolved over time from a descriptive to a more prescriptive concept. A CoP provides opportunities for members to engage in the co-construction of knowledge by sharing practices. This occurs through sharing information or experiences, and through collaborative problem solving. Hoadley (2012) explains that through the lens of CoP, learners must have access to experts as this is how the learners will collaborate. Furthermore, CoP that form naturally may not necessarily have a common learning goal. However, their goal will develop as they find their role within society.

Hoadley (2012) suggests that technology plays a large role in CoP, as technology supports both the community and the practice. Technology enables participants of CoP to be able to represent and reorganize information in several ways. This allows participants with different learning styles to benefit from the information being offered because the information is presented in a way that is understandable to that learner. Technology can also be an avenue to virtually connect participants of a CoP. For example, individuals that cannot meet in person can create a CoP online by corresponding through various social networking databases. This allows individuals who have similar practices to connect together and form a CoP on a global scale.

Hoadley (2012) summarizes that a CoP is an important method of learning because participants become invested members of a community with shared practices. CoP that are supported by technology can allow participants to develop knowledge through connections and conversations.

Key Messages:

- CoP shares practices through knowledge co-constructed by its member's
- Knowledge developed through connections and conversations
- Technology plays a huge role.

Title:

Learning Through Interactions: Improving Project Management Through Communities of Practice

Citation:

Lee, L., Reinicke, B., Sarkar, R., & Anderson, R. (2015). Learning Through Interactions: Improving Project Management Through Communities of Practice. *Project Management Journal*, 46(1), 40-52.

Summary (highlights of the article):

Lee et al. (2015) explain that communities of practice (CoP) provide opportunities for business professionals to learn and create new ideas within the workplace. Participants of a CoP select themselves rather than being forced or selected to be a part of the CoP. These participants are connected through their similar occupations, and exchange knowledge within the CoP. Through CoP participants can create, store, and transfer knowledge among themselves. Organizations that are involved in a CoP enhance their professional development by using collaborative opportunities as a tool in order to result in new or improved products and services for their organizations. Lee et al. (2015) explain that CoP allow participants to gain a wider range of access to colleagues in various occupational roles. Four outcomes identified as a result of CoP are:

- “Decreased learning curve;
- Increased customer responsiveness;
- Reduction in the amount of rework, and;
- Increased innovation” (Lee et al., 2015, p. 41).

Lee et al. (2015) continue to explain that there are certain motivators that prompt individuals to be a part of CoP. These motivators are individual rewards which include: “better promotion opportunities, work assignments, or job performance reviews” (Lee et al., 2015, p. 42). The importance an organization places on participating in CoP can motivate individuals to participate in them. Participating in CoP allows members to have the potential to gain better job performance reviews, or increased chances of a promotion.

Lee et al. (2015) also explain the benefits and advantages of using technologies within CoP, as certain technologies can “enable employee’s interactions, promote participation, improve communication skills, and strengthen relationships” (Lee et at. 2015, p. 42).

Key Messages:

- Business professionals can learn and create new ideas within the workplace
- Create, Store and transfer knowledge as an enhancement of professional development

Title:

The Meaning of a Healthcare Community of Practice

Citation:

Seibert, S. (2015). The Meaning of a Healthcare Community of Practice. *Nursing Forum*, 50(2), 69-74.

Summary (highlights of the article):

According to Seibert (2015) communities of practice (CoP) are used to create and administer knowledge in ways that will support change. Early on, the term CoP referred to a group of people working in the same environment. Through research, Seibert (2015) explains that CoP promote learning opportunities through collaborative approaches that develop opportunities for professional development. Seibert (2015) describes elements of a CoP by suggesting that the practice refers to the professional body of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that the community hopes to support and improve. The common objective of a CoP is to bring together the community and motivate the participants of the CoP to contribute to the important conversations that transpire through the CoP discussions.

Seibert (2015) highlights that community members must be willing to join the CoP and not forced, as this allows members to be self-motivated and fully contribute to improve the practice. Some core elements of a CoP include prolonged relationships and trust between the participants. According to Seibert (2015), it is important to have a supportive work environment; organizations that promote involvement in CoP must be willing to support members who participate. Physical resources are one example of how participants can be supported by their organization. These resources can include access to space and technology that the participants may need in order to have a successful CoP working environment. Benefits of CoP include improved effectiveness, knowledge, skills, and proficiency. Through these improved skills, the community is able to foster increased problem solving skills and improved decision making strategies in their working environments. Increased moral can also be generated between CoP participants by gaining satisfaction and value through the collaboration between inter-professionals participating in the CoP.

Key Messages:

- CoP used to create and administer knowledge in ways that support change, which supports learning opportunities through collaboration.
- Main objective is to bring together a community and motivate participants of the CoP to contribute to important conversation.
- Many benefits to a CoP.