Communities of Practice

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Today we will look at:

- Definition of a Community of Practice (CoP)
- Facilitators/facilitator training
- How we choose topics
- Topics we have covered
- Face to face vs online
- How we organize CoPs in Spain
- Measuring success
Quick poll

Have you participated in a CoP?
A definition

Characteristics of a CoP:

• a domain of interest
• a community
• shared practice

(Lave & Wenger)
Therefore in a CoP ...

- Participants are peers
- Learning is situated
- Learning belongs to the group
Poll: could these be considered a CoP?

If you like, add why in the chat box.

1. The teachers’ staff room.  “Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.”

2. A chat at the photocopy machine.

CoPs in British Council Spain

• A facilitator

• A topic

• Four meetings a term

• Teachers commit to attending all four meetings

• Classroom task after each meeting
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Facilitators/facilitating

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Why have a facilitator to run a CoP?

In the chat box, give me your opinions.

My suggestions:

• Conceptualises the CoP and gives it shape
• Not the expert in the room but the guide
• Creates the space for community to form
• Directs discussions
• Points to sources for reading/more information
• Sets up tasks for participants
• Summarises learning at end of CoP
Who?

• What I thought facilitators should be ...

And they have a ...

• Range of ages and experience

• Range of qualifications

• Commitment to collaborative forms of CPD
Training for facilitators

The training covered:

- Definition of a CoP and how it works:
- Peer group
- Confidentiality/safe space
- Sharing
- Reflecting
- Regular meetings
- Participants are both learning and teaching
Notion of best practice

“Professional teaching practice involves sensitivity, interpretation, judgement and a flexible repertoire of methods.”

(Lefstein & Snell, 2014:9)
Challenging teaching beliefs

“A proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held, is evaluative in that it is accepted as true by the individual ... [and] serves as a guide to thought and behaviour.”

(Borg, M., 2001:186)
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Topics
Framing a CoP

*Either*

- through a topic or classroom challenges

*Or*

- examining/reflecting on practice
Topics we have covered

Using literature with YLs
L1/L2 use
Vocabulary at C1/C2 levels
Motivation
Learner autonomy
Teaching pronunciation
SEN learners
Framing learning through stories
Differentiation
Assessment

Poll
Are these relevant in your context?

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Examining practice

Exploring our practice

Experience vs. expertise
(Teacher Development over Time)

Classroom events
(Critical Incidents in Teaching)
Your suggestions

If you have participated in a CoP or some form of teachers’ group, write in the chat box the topic, and if relevant the frame:

• Topic e.g. teaching vocabulary

• Frame e.g. teaching large classes
Examples of CoPs

Vocabulary for C1/C2 learners

• Presenting vocabulary (Nation’s definition of knowing lexis)

• Recording vocabulary (examples of learners’ work)

• Recycling vocabulary (questioning techniques)
A couple of example CoPs

Vocabulary for C1/C2 learners

• Presenting vocabulary (Nation’s definition of knowing lexis)
• Recording vocabulary (examples of learners’ work)
• Recycling vocabulary (questioning techniques)

Experience vs. Expertise

• Teaching beliefs
• Career path through a timeline
• Huberman’s life stages, where are we?
• Diaries
• Critical incidents
• Good practice
Tasks after each meeting

• Need to be manageable
• Experimentation with classroom practice

• Examples:
• Questioning techniques
• Using dictation
• Portable resources
• Prose/translation (L2 to L1 to L2)
• Peer assessment with criteria provided by learners
Sources of information for facilitators

Use articles, books, videos, blogs.

British Council: https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/
IATEFL: https://www.iatefl.org/resources
International House: https://ihworld.com
ELTJ: https://academic.oup.com/eltj (check Key Concepts in ELT)
Blogs: Simon Borg, Scott Thornbury, Philip Kerr, Leo Selivan etc.
Add any other useful sources in the chat.
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Practical issues
Face to face vs. online

Number of participants

Location of participants

Platform Zoom/Teams
Considerations

• Timetabling
• Choice of topic
• Participant commitment
• Participants completing tasks
• Number of participants
• Outcomes
How we run them

- Facilitators selected and trained
- Facilitators propose topics
- Teaching Excellence manager advertises, selects time etc.
- Facilitator receives support if needed

- BC Spain context (Ts, centres, CPD hours)
- Management support and commitment essential
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Measuring success
Measuring success

• Possible criteria:

• Borg’s (2015) successful CPD is relevant, teacher-led, collaborative and situated

• Walters & Briggs (2012) state effective CPD is concrete and classroom-based; collaborative but with guidance; sustained allowing teachers to embed practice
Teacher feedback

“I think this kind of training set-up is the way forward”

“Interaction with colleagues is rewarding”

“I felt more confident about what I’m doing”

“Tailored to our needs”

“CoPs provide a forum”
A valuable opinion

- CoPs provide a space to share issues, concerns and problems
- The discussion is as important as the solution
- Reasoning, explaining, exploring and interpreting
- CoPs model a process of critical enquiry

(Dr Helen Donaghue, 2018, personal correspondence)
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References

• Donaghue, H (2003) *An instrument to elicit teachers’ beliefs and assumptions*, ELTJ 57/4

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Thank you!

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