Tool nr. x –

Developed by: Catholic Education Flanders, inspired by Gene Thompson-Groove

Name of the material

communities & dimensions of practice

Sources

Porter Kuh, L. (2012), *Promoting Communities of Practice and Parallel Process in Early Childhood Settings*, Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education, 33:1, 19-37 http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10901027.2011.650787   Wenger, E. (1998), *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity*, Cambridge University Press,

Purpose of the material

Participants get more information about communities and dimensions of practice

Material

See here below

How you can use this material in your practice

You can use the jigsaw protocol to delve deeper into this information: You can divide the text in three parts: 1. Communities of practice, 2.1 reflective practice and 2.2 dimensions of practice

Debrief – reflection and metacognition

Feedback on the use of the tool

Communities & dimensions of Practice

1   Communities of practice

In *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, Etienne Wenger argues that communities of practice are different from teams (or committees) and networks in a number of ways. Networks are typically made up of people who simply have an

interest in a topic or domain. Communities of practice are made up of people who actually *do the work*.

Teams and committees (like communities of practice) have common work to accomplish, but the structure and the process of that work differs from that of communities of practice. Teams are typically task-oriented, with clearly defined roles and goals. Typically, a team has a supervisory element: one or more people are in charge. They oversee the work of the rest of the group (or oversee the work of a portion of the group, who oversee the work of others, etc.).

Communities of practice typically have a broader, more ambiguously defined — but absolutely essential — goal: the creation and management of knowledge, a goal that teams are not particularly well suited for. Communities of practice may exist within organizations or may draw people together from across organizations. The structure is looser than that of a team. People may assume leadership roles within the community of practice, but the leadership is facilitative rather than supervisory. The members are drawn together by their commitment to understanding the particular practice in which all the members are engaged. The result, Wenger says, is knowledge and expertise that grows out of the experience of the practitioners. And because the generation of knowledge is coming from the practitioners themselves, this new knowledge gets put to use in their practice, and they are more likely to avoid the "idea-action gap" that researchers and practitioners alike have written about.

2   reflective practice & dimensions of practice

2.1   reflective practice

From a sociocultural perspective, a reflective practice is not simply a solitary, mental endeavor aimed at one's students; individual development constitutes and is constituted by the activities and practices of one's context (Rogoff, 2003). "Thus, individual and cultural processes are mutually constituting rather than defined separately from each other" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 51). Reflective practice that neither isolates nor obscures individual teacher growth, but places it in the sociocultural context of the school community has promise for promoting and sustaining the work of teachers (Bransford, 2000; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Little, 1999; Osterman, 1990; Weibaum, et al 2004; and Zeichner & Liston, 1996).

Reflective practice can be further theorized from Wenger's (1998) notions of communities of practice that exist in settings from industry to corporate institutions. Wenger asserts that organizations can develop a "shared practice" within which group members share their capacity to create and use knowledge in a collective process. For Wenger, it is within the context of shared practice that learning takes place. According to Wenger,

"The repertoire of a community of practice include routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence, and which have become part of its practice" (Wenger, 1998, p. 83).

2.2 Dimensions of practice

Wenger (1998) identifies three dimensions of practice as vital to the development and sustainability of a community--mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. These dimensions frame what schools and educators need to consider as they form communities of practice.

2.2.1 Mutual engagement

People continually develop their practices with each other, a process rife with social complexities and personal relationships. Implicit in this dimension is the idea that transformation of mutual engagement into a community of practice requires coherent and consistent work (Wenger, 1998). Key to mutual engagement are the interpersonal relationships people form with each other in the process of their participation in the community of practice. Mutual engagement requires people to ask the question, *How will we interact with each other in order to sustain our community of practice and improve our work?*

2.2.2 Joint enterprise

Individuals engaged in a collaborative endeavor continually negotiate the meaning of their practices with others--explicitly or tacitly. The notion of joint enterprise can keep a community of practice together and includes group goals, negotiated enterprise, mutual accountability, and group definition. It is demarcated by the participants in the process of pursuing it, and it creates a sense of mutual responsibility that becomes a part of the practice (Wenger, 1998). In the context of collaborative teacher groups, the intention and focus of teacher meetings would need to be negotiated by the group and used as a foundation for subsequent work. Teachers must ask, *What is the goal and intention of our work and do our goals serve to improve our practices?*

2.2.3 Shared repertoire

A shared repertoire includes routines, words, tools, concepts, and discourse that have become part of practice and by which members express membership and identity (Wenger, 1998). Shared repertoire complements the dimensions of mutual engagement and joint enterprise. In planning for their work together, teachers in a community of practice must ask themselves, *What do we do and how shall we do it so that our group functions efficiently and our process supports reflective practice?*