

Community of Practice Guidelines and Resources

What is a Community of Practice?

A Community of Practice (CoP) is a group of people who “share a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Etienne Wenger). The idea behind a CoP is that through the process of sharing experiences and knowledge with others, we enable dialogue among members and begin to explore new possibilities and new ways of doing something.

The hope for each Communities of Practice is to offer opportunities for self-reflection, a deeper understanding of our practice over a sustained period of time..

Communities of Practice in the Context of ECE

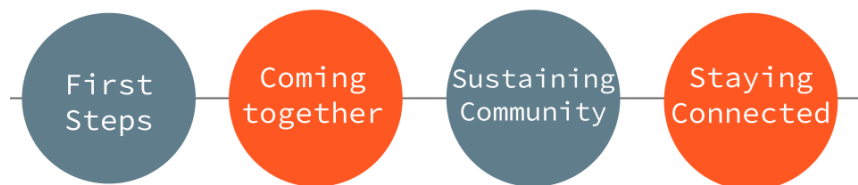
There is a correlation between reflective practice and long-term retention within the field. This provokes us to move towards “critical reflection that involves thinking individually and with others about fundamental beliefs and understandings, to consider how these have shaped how we view the world.” (Ministry of Education, Early Learning Framework pg.35)

Communities of Practice provide a unique and powerful invitation for Early Childhood Educators to:

- Connect with other educators
- Create a network of support
- Seek multiple perspectives from a range of educators
- Bring a collective together with a common shared understanding
- Offer opportunities for deep reflection on pedagogy
- Hold ourselves and each other to the shared commitment of growth and opportunity

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Building Community through relationships



Role of the CoP Facilitator - First Steps

This role is multifaceted but primarily it is all about relationships. You are the key contact for all participants who may be from very different backgrounds and experience.

- Determine the focus of the CoP (BC ELF, care practices, leadership, etc)
- Schedule the meeting dates (number of times, how often you will meet?)
- Create Flyer/post/email
- Invite educators (group size varies up to 20) - sometimes there is some pounding the pavement, reaching out personally. "Selling it" can be difficult when you don't know what it will be. This is okay as it models responsive practice. Remember this may be a new way of thinking about professional learning.
- Send a welcome email with all necessary details (time, venue, parking, to bring etc.).
- Provide journals to participants (including facilitator) to invite them to document their journey. Documenting traces of practice is *powerful*.

Role of the CoP Facilitator - Coming Together

A CoP is an opportunity to challenge ourselves, to explore new ways of thinking, to wonder about how we show up and to think deeply about our practice. Each session provides opportunities to learn, develop and put into action a new complex way of thinking and doing. This can only be done with purpose and intentionality; be sure to create a PowerPoint for each session to support this.

- Create your Powerpoint
- Set up the environment

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- Offer a light snack/meal if appropriate for the time of day and water/coffee/tea.
- Welcome and Acknowledgements
- Introductions to foster connections - Ask all to introduce themselves with a few questions – maybe what called them to sign up to this CoP? Even in groups that know one another well we encourage you to think about how they could grow their relationships into more meaningful / deeper space.
- Revisit the details of the CoP
- Create gathering intentions based on the CoP values; decide on a common set of values in the first session. Values hold us accountable on how we gather.
- Discuss confidentiality to support a safe space for discussion and vulnerability
- Facilitate the conversations. This can be trickier than it seems. In every group there are usually some people with a lot to say and some who have a harder time finding their voice. Your role is to ensure there is a balance of voices.
- Share the research for next time.

Role of the CoP Facilitator - Keeping Connected

Keeping Connected in a CoP is what makes this professional learning different. It's the building and revisiting of previous conversations, research/"homework" and the "putting into practice" what has been learned.

- Follow-up with everyone after each session with a follow up email
- Touch base between sessions – you will know your group and what they need.
- Connect with your mentor after each session. This is a valuable opportunity for all facilitators to debrief, ask questions, ask for guidance and support. Remember your mentors are here to support you.
- Maintain records of attendance and expenses and any data required for the project funders.

Role of the CoP Facilitator - Gathering Traces of Practice

Throughout the CoP and in between your gathering, you will begin the process of collecting traces of practice (ideas, materials, reflections, photos). Traces of Practice are the capturing of the moments that you have with children; with families; with other educators. It makes moments of practice, time, and thinking visible.

To support the gathering of these traces, you are required to keep a journal to capture traces of practice throughout the CoP.

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Facilitators will show traces of practice at Connect sessions.

Sustaining Community in a CoP

Sustaining a community of practice is what makes this professional learning different. It's the building and revisiting of previous conversations, research/"homework" and the "putting into practice" what has been learned.

- Stay in touch between CoP sessions. Remind participants of research and traces of practice.
- "Coming Back to Community"; time to touch base with how everyone is doing with the new work/exploration into deeper thinking
- Provide a poem/image to begin a deeper conversation of the session content
- Provide guiding question/s to begin the unpacking of reflections from research and the sharing of traces of practice.
- Read, reflect and research/traces of practice.

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B.C Ministry of Education. (2018) British Columbia Early Learning Framework Draft 4.

Retrieved from B.C Government website

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/early-learning/teach/earlylearning/draft_early_learning_framework_2018.pdf

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1998). Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity.

Book Review/Summary

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Mellony_Graven/publication/225256730_Wenger_E_1998_Communities_of_practice_Learning_meaning_and_identity/links/54747aee0cf245eb436de0ca/Wenger-E-1998-Communities-of-practice-Learning-meaning-and-identity.pdf