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Developing a Community of Practice



Developing a Community of Practice

A Guide for Educators

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Introduction: Communities of Practice

Increasingly, around the world, Communities of Practice (CoPs) are seen as an extremely valuable means of support for the continuing professional development of teachers, trainers and Teacher Educators. A Community of Practice involves practitioners with similar backgrounds, roles, goals and aspirations coming together, collaborating in productive ways, reflecting on challenges and achievements and taking charge of their own learning.

The principles which underpin this focus on the Community of Practice as a channel where effective learning takes place stem from the model of Situated Learning presented by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger in the late 1980s and early 1990s. They identified professional communities 'with shared concerns or passions for something they do who learn how to do it better as they interact regularly'.¹ As members of this community interact, they engage in collective learning in a 'sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise'.² Foregrounding the Community of Practice represents a new conceptualisation of how we learn. Rather than looking at learning as something that can be measured based on what is contained within the head of an individual,

*[Here] learning is in the relationships between people. Learning is in the conditions that bring people together and organize a point of contact that allows for particular pieces of information to take on a relevance..... Learning does not belong to individual persons, but to the various conversations of which they are a part.*³

The learning which accrues from the engagement in Communities of Practice therefore has considerable impact both on the skills and knowledge of the practitioners themselves and the organisations from which they come.

In Myanmar, the TREE (Towards Results in Education and English) project of which the British Council is one consortium partner, helped Teacher Educators from English Departments in twenty five Education Degree Colleges to begin and participate in Communities of Practice over the year 2020 to 2021.

Participation by Teacher Educators was exemplary and feedback was very positive. Here are some comments from some of the participants:

- *I have found our COP sessions so useful because we can get many teaching techniques and much knowledge from these.*

¹ Wenger-Trayner, E & B (2015)

² Lave, J & Wenger, (1991) Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation

³ Murphy, (1999) p17

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- *I can get other people's ideas from the group and I can find out more ways to continue my teaching well and I can share my ideas and experience in this group.*
- *I have learned so many things from the Community of Practice and it has been so useful for me. I hope it will be useful for my Student Teachers through sharing my experiences.*

This guide to developing a Community of Practice is based on experiences of working with these Communities of Practice in Myanmar. It aims to provide hands-on guidance to initiating and managing an active Community of Practice (in the context of an English Department, although we hope principles and suggestions might equally be of use to practitioners of other subjects), either face-to-face or online or a blended version of both. It includes a brief description of the principles which underlie the concept of a Community of Practice (links to sources of academic discussion are provided in further reading), advice on the choice of channels and some suggestions on how to design and provide content for Community of Practice sessions. It outlines the role and qualities of a facilitator and ways in which progress made by the Community of Practice can be identified and celebrated. It is designed for Teacher Educators in Myanmar themselves to enable them to build on their achievements so far but we hope it will be of interest to anyone in any context interested in the practical application of the principles of learning and enhancing knowledge and skills through engagement with a Community of Practice.

There is also a companion handbook to this guide which contains materials and resources which supported the Communities of Practice which were set up for English Teacher Educators in Myanmar in 2020 – 2021.

The TREE Project would like to thank all our Myanmar counterparts for enabling our Communities of Practice to operate so successfully and especially Leadership Teams, other Education Degree College staff and of course the English Teacher Educators themselves who formed them. We would like to thank Local Facilitators from the British Council Romania *English for the Community* project for their contributions to Unit 9.

In particular, we would like to thank Teacher Educators from Lashio and Taunggyi who played such a significant role through their involvement and participation in providing ideas for this guide. Thank you so much for your endless enthusiasm and creativity. We will miss you very much.

TREE Project

May 2021

Using this guide

This guide has been developed for you, as Teacher Educators, to help you in initiating and developing Communities of Practice. Perhaps you have come across the term 'Community of Practice' (CoP) before. Perhaps you have already participated in a Community of Practice yourself.

We hope this guide gives you the tools to help you and your colleagues to begin and manage a Community of Practice yourselves. Many of the practical examples in the guide are drawn from the world of English language teaching and training but we hope the principles and suggestions presented here will be of use to you whatever your specialist area or whatever your interests. Although the context is that of Education Degree Colleges in Myanmar, we hope this guide will be useful to anyone working with Communities of Practice wherever you work.

You will find detailed learning outcomes for each unit in the next section of this guide. There are ten units in total and you can expect to spend between two and three hours on each unit. Decide how you want to work with these Units. How much time do you have? How much can you cover in each unit in this time etc. How flexible can you be or do you need to have a structured timetable to work through the units?

The units will help you think about what we mean by a Community of Practice, how we can organise the Community (face-to-face and online), how we can design sessions and provide content and how we can measure and celebrate success. Two units also discuss the roles and qualities of a facilitator.

Each unit has three sections.

Section 1: *Before You Read* asks you to share your ideas on specific topics and is therefore an example of a pre-reading activity.

Section 2: *Key Information* presents a short article on an essential topic for a Community of Practice, with questions which follow the article to help you think about what you have read and how it can be applied to your own context.

Section 3a: *Video watch* directs you to an online video to consolidate your learning.

Section 3b: *Over to you* provides you with guidance in planning your own Community of Practice, including planning the organisational logistics for your Community, selecting topics and planning activities for input and output for your sessions.

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You will also find out more about the roles, responsibilities and qualities of an effective facilitator and assess your own personal strengths and areas which you can develop in order to become an effective facilitator.

Although you can complete these tasks individually, you are strongly encouraged to work with colleagues on all the tasks. Perhaps the most essential features of a Community of Practice are the facts that no one person dominates, everybody collaborates and learns from each other and new knowledge and skills are 'constructed' together. These features are just as important for everybody involved in the planning, delivery and evaluation of your Community of Practice.

Developing your Community of Practice will take time, there may be challenges along the way which take effort to resolve, but the result will be an immensely rewarding experience which will benefit everybody you work with and yourself.

We would like to wish you the best of success with developing your Community of Practice!

A map of this guide

Unit	Key question	Learning Outcomes
1	What is a Community of Practice?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify and discuss the different types of community you belong to and define the term 'Community of Practice'. • identify and discuss the advantages and limitations of conventional forms of training. • identify and discuss the benefits of working in a Community of Practice and the types of activity a Community of Practice might include.
2	How can the members of our Community of Practice interact together?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • compare the advantages and disadvantages of face-to-face and online ways of working. • identify and discuss a range of platforms and tools for online delivery of Communities of Practice. • identify and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of synchronous and asynchronous ways of working. • select modes of delivery which are most appropriate for your context.
3	How can we organise our Community of Practice?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discuss a range of questions related to the logistics of organising a Community of Practice. • select ways in which a Community of Practice can be organised in your own context.
4	What topics can we select for a Community of Practice session?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discuss a range of ways in which a topic can be selected for a Community of Practice. • comment on the relevance of some possible topics for a Community of Practice. • select five possible topics for your own Community of Practice.
5	What do participants do in session 1 of a Community of Practice?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify and discuss that there are many different ways in which we learn, including teaching ourselves and learning informally from others. • identify and discuss a range of ways for providing input for a Community of Practice session • evaluate some typical sources of input for a Community of Practice session. • select one or more sources of input for a Community of Practice session you will design.

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Unit	Key question	Learning Outcome
6	What do participants do in session 2 of a Community of Practice?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify and discuss the different types of output a Community of Practice might include. • identify and discuss activities which can be included in a Community of Practice session including creative, collaborative lesson planning, use of video, poster/PowerPoint production and demonstration. • evaluate some examples of output from Community of Practice sessions. • select one or more output activities for a Community of Practice session you will design.
7	How can we organise and sequence activities in a Community of Practice session?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • read and discuss a sample session plan for a Community of Practice session. • identify learning outcomes for specific steps in the session plan. • identify which steps might be of greater or lesser relevance and interest to participants. • design a session plan for your own selected Community of Practice session.
8	What are the roles and responsibilities of a Community of Practice Facilitator?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify the roles of a facilitator in terms of organising, designing, facilitating, communicating and evaluating the Community of Practice. • discuss which of these roles might personally be most important /interesting/ challenging to you. • discuss why giving guidance is an important role for the facilitator.
9	What makes an effective facilitator?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify personal strengths and areas for development as a facilitator. • discuss essential qualities of a facilitator and what makes them important. • assess which qualities you feel you have already and which qualities may require further development.
10	Celebrating success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assess what makes an effective Community of Practice. • discuss how simple methods of evaluation of Communities of Practice can be implemented. • discuss how Community of Practice achievements can be celebrated and shared with others.

Unit 1: Communities of Practice

What is a Community of Practice? How can it benefit its members?

1.1: Before you read: you and your community

Discuss these questions with your colleagues:

1.1a Communities

We are all part of a **community**. For example, we might share a nationality, a culture, lifestyles, interests or hobbies.

Answer these questions:

- What types of **community** are you a member of?
- Have you ever come across the term 'Community of Practice' (CoP)? What do you think this term means?

1.1b You and your training

Think about a training course you have attended in the past.

Answer these questions:

1. What did you enjoy about the training you undertook?
2. Was there anything about the training you undertook which you did not enjoy?
3. Here is a set of criteria for effective Continuous Professional Development (CPD). Did the training you undertook meet all these criteria? Why/why not?

Effective continuing professional development

- acknowledges and challenges teachers' prior beliefs, knowledge and experience
- provides opportunities for active experiential teacher learning
- is seen by teachers to be relevant to their needs
- promotes collaborative teacher learning
- takes place within the college and is linked to teachers' direct work
- is aligned with the broader system teachers are part of
- promotes inquiry-based learning through reflection and teacher research
- takes place over time rather than a one-off training event. Borg, S. (2015)

4. What do you think are the advantages of training?
5. What do you think are the limitations of training? What **can't** you do in a training session?

You can find some suggestions about the advantages and limitations of training in *Appendix 1*.

1.2: Key information:

Read the article and discuss the questions which follow.

What is a 'Community of Practice?'

Everybody is part of a community! For example, we might share a nationality, a culture, lifestyles, interests or hobbies. As Teacher Educators, we all form a community of practice – we all share concerns and passions for the things we do. The more we interact with each other, the more we can learn how to do things better. Within a community of practice, we can all take part in – and help other people to take part in – our continuing professional development.

Traditionally, when we talk about our continuing professional development, we often think about attending training talks, workshops or courses. These training events are often useful and enjoyable – perhaps you have participated in training such as this yourself. But training is not the only way to help us develop as Teacher Educators and training can be quite limited. Training events tend to be quite short and it is easy to forget what we have learnt during them and there is often no chance for us to try out new ideas in our own classrooms until the training event is over. It takes time and lots of experimenting until we feel comfortable with less familiar ways of teaching or learning.

Communities of Practice (CoPs) involve people who do the same job working together. Imagine a group of Teacher Educators collaborating to form a Community of Practice. Maybe all members of your Community of Practice come from the same Education Degree College as you do. Maybe you have the opportunity to include Teacher Educators from other Education Degree Colleges, which gives you the chance to find out how things are done elsewhere.

This means that everybody in your Community of Practice is familiar with similar contexts, similar challenges and similar sources of satisfaction in helping Student Teachers to learn in Myanmar. Communities of Practice are an example of *peer learning* and they do not require an 'expert' to direct their members. They have a shared purpose as everybody is working towards a similar goal and everybody can learn from their colleagues.

Developing a Community of Practice

In your Community of Practice, you can share ideas and opinions and support each other's development. Participants talk about challenges, issues, ways of teaching and learning and to share questions you have on a specific topic. You can discuss, plan, practice, research activities connected with the topic. This is a chance for you and your colleagues to work together and share ideas! You can share ideas, plans or techniques and include these in the next sessions you give to Student Teachers.

As the writer Tony Wright has said: 'talk is the fuel of teacher development'. The most important people in the Community of Practice are the Teacher Educators who form it – you! Everybody has a part to play in the Community of Practice and the more everybody is involved, the more learning will take place.

Communities of Practice have become popular in countries around the world including Egypt, India, Jordan, Nepal, Palestine, Romania and Spain. They sometimes have different names and in many locations they are known as Teacher Activity Groups but many of the principles are the same. In Myanmar, the TREE project supported Teacher Educators in participating in Communities of Practice over 2020-2021.

Your Community of Practice Is for YOU – to help YOU develop your skills and awareness. Its success is powered by YOUR interest, participation and enthusiasm. We hope you enjoy your Community of Practice!

Text prepared by Andy Keedwell, TREE Facilitator



A Community of Practice in Taunggyi (photo: Taunggyi Teacher Educators)

Discuss these questions together:

1. How does the article define a Community of Practice?
2. What do the members of a Community of Practice have in common?
3. What are the differences between being involved in a Community of Practice and participating on a training course?
4. Who are the members of a Community of Practice?
5. Do Communities of Practice have a leader? Why/why not?
- 6 What types of activity can you do in a Community of Practice?

Notes:

1.3: Unit 1 tasks

1.3a Communities of Practice: video watch

This video gives an introduction to Communities of Practice:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XS1OhxXhOEM>

Watch the video and complete the tasks below.



1. Match the term on the left to the definition on the right.

term	definition
Domain	Members interact, help each other, share interests and build relationships.
Community	Practitioners share resources and experiences.
Practice	The COP has an identity because its members share interests.

2. The video describes some possible aims of a Community of Practice. What are the aims? Which of these aims are most important to you?

1.3b Over to you

After completing this unit, how would you define a Community of Practice?

Write your definition here:

Unit 2: Modes of delivery

How can the members of our Community of Practice interact together?

2.1: Before you read: your experience

Discuss these questions with your colleagues:

1a Modes of delivery



Here are some examples of online modes of delivery.

1. Which of these online modes of delivery (if any) have you used?
2. Which do you think would be most useful for your Community of Practice?
 - Sharing PowerPoints through email or Facebook messenger
 - Posting on Facebook and sharing information with others
 - Connecting with others through WhatsApp
 - Participating in a Zoom session
 - Leading a Zoom session
 - Participating in a Skype session
 - Making a Loom presentation
 - Using Google Classroom
 - Using Kahoot

1b Advantages and disadvantages

Around the world, some Communities of Practice meet regularly face-to-face. Other Communities of Practice meet only using an online mode of delivery. Others mix face-to-face and online modes.

1. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of face-to-face delivery?
2. What do are the advantages and disadvantages of online delivery?

2.2: Key information:

Read the article and discuss the questions which follow.

Modes of delivery: What's best for you?

The most important feature of your Community of Practice (CoP) is its membership. An effective Community of Practice is open to any practitioner who has a shared professional interest. For example, you may want to think about developing a Community of Practice which includes all the Teacher Educators who teach English at your Education Degree College. You may want to include Teacher Educators of other subjects so you can discuss wider educational issues, not just about your subject. You may want to build bridges with other Education Degree Colleges so there are participants in your CoP from more than one college.

Whoever your members are, you will want to make sure that they all communicate easily and regularly. Traditionally, the way to organise this would be to organise a face-to-face meeting which all members attend, once a week, once a fortnight or once a month, for example. Face-to-face meetings have the advantage of bringing everybody together and give everybody the chance to interact. However, maybe it is not possible for everybody to meet at the same time in the same place and travel can often present challenges.

An alternative is to think about using one of a number of online modes of delivery. Throughout 2020, the TREE project made use of an online platform called Zoom to organise Communities of Practice. A facilitator led the session but everybody was able to meet online. Participants were able to share ideas as a whole class but also able to work in breakout rooms in pairs or groups. Before and after the Zoom session, participants completed tasks to help them discuss and share ideas and sometimes also met face-to-face. Other modes of online delivery through which participants are able to interact are Skype and Google Classrooms. One major advantage is that all participants are able to take part at the same time, wherever they are and whether they are at college or at home. We call this type of online participation in which everybody takes part at the same time a 'synchronous' way of working.

Using Facebook will give all the participants of your Community of Practice the opportunity to post ideas, comment on each other's ideas and message each other regularly. If a question or a discussion point is posted on Facebook, it can be the beginning of a whole chain of discussion in which participants share ideas, ask each other questions and respond to each other. We call this type of online participation in which everybody takes part in their own time an 'asynchronous' way of working. WhatsApp can also be a great way to share messages, texts, photographs and videos.

To make use of forms of online delivery such as Zoom and Facebook, participants will not need laptops or computers. It is easy to access these channels on a Smartphone. If you have not

used Zoom or Facebook before, you may need a little time to get used to using the new channel, but the TREE project has created IT guides which will make this process straightforward.

Text prepared by Andy Keedwell, TREE Facilitator

Discuss these questions together:

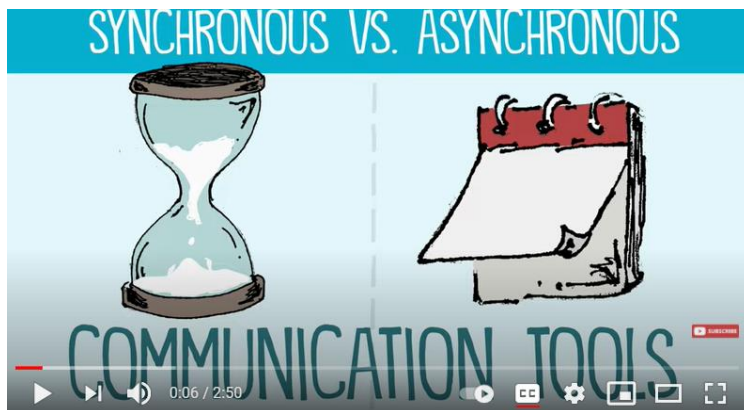
1 Which modes of delivery described in the text are synchronous? Circle the examples in the text.

2 Which modes of delivery described in the text are asynchronous? Underline the examples in the text.

2.3: Unit 2 tasks

2.3a Synchronous and asynchronous learning: video watch

There are advantages to organising a face-to-face Community of Practice. However, synchronous and asynchronous modes of delivery can be so useful too. This video talks about the advantages and disadvantages of synchronous and asynchronous online learning. You can find the video here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=dX_nZTiZRPE



Do you agree with all the advantages and disadvantages? Why/why not?

2.3b Over to you

Think about your Community of Practice. Answer these questions:

- Will your Community of Practice be mainly face-to-face or mainly online?
- Which sessions will be face-to-face and which sessions will be online?
- Which platforms will you use for online sessions?
- Do you have the skills you need to organise these sessions? What do you need to do to develop your skills further?
- How can you make use of Facebook to support your Community of Practice? What will you post? Who will post?
- Do you know of any other online channels which will be useful for your Community of Practice? How will you use them?

Notes:

Unit 3: Logistics

How can we organise our Community of Practice?

3.1: Before you read:

What do you need to do to organise your Community of Practice?

Make a list of tasks that you will need to complete in order to get started.

Which of these tasks do you think will be relatively easy?

Which ones are likely to be more challenging?

Communities of Practice: organisational tasks

3.2: Key information:

Read the article. As you read, think what your answers to the questions might be.

Communities of Practice: logistics

We use the word '*logistics*' to describe all the practical arrangements we need to think about so that something runs successfully. The logistics for your Community of Practice include thinking about the where, when, who and what of the Community of Practice you are planning and the context in which your Community of Practice will operate.

Communities of Practice are structured – they take place regularly at the same time, they have a fixed membership, meetings have a similar structure and often there is a facilitator. How can you go about organising your Community of Practice?

There will be similarities with the contexts in which other Teacher Educators at other colleges are planning their Communities of Practice but there will also be differences and one size does not always fit all! You will need to take some decisions yourself to help you decide how to organise your CoP.

Here are some key questions:

1 Where?

Which sessions of your Community of Practice will be face-to-face (if any)?

Where will face-to-face meetings take place? Where will the venue be?

What resources does the venue need?

What do you need to do to make sure the venue is available for your use?

Which sessions will be online?

What resources will your participants need in order to work online?

2 How many?

In your location, how many participants can you reasonably expect to join your Community of Practice?

Which subject areas will be included in your Community of Practice?

Are there any ways you can build relationships with Teacher Educators from other Education Degree Colleges?

3 When and how often?

What are the best days and times for you to hold your CoP sessions?

How often will you hold your sessions? For example, once a week may be too demanding for everybody but you will want to meet at least once a month.

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4 Who?

Who will facilitate your Community of Practice?

How will you choose your facilitator?

Will you always have the same facilitator or will you rotate the facilitator role? (You can find out more about the role of a facilitator in Units 8 and 9.)

Who do you need to speak to/communicate with to make sure the CoP runs well?

Whose help do you need?

For example, you will need to make sure that your college leadership are fully aware of when sessions will take place and who is due to come and that they have given permission for activities to take place.

5 How?

How will you let teachers in your community know when your CoP will take place?

How can you encourage new members to join?

How can you prepare any necessary resources?

Activities such as a Community of Practice fail because not enough people know about them or because members are not sure when or how meetings take place. The more carefully we plan our Community of Practice, the more likely it is to be a success in the future!

Questions

Work in a group with colleagues who are interested in developing a Community of Practice.

Think about how you will answer each of the questions in this section about the Community of Practice you are planning.



Teacher Educators from Lashio planning their Community of Practice

3.3: Unit 3 tasks

3.3a Community of Practice experiences: video watch

In 2021, the TREE project made a video about Communities of Practice.

In the video, Teacher Educators talk about their experiences of being part of a Community of Practice. Watch the video if you have access to it.



Daw Su Han talks about her experiences

If you do not have access to this video, you can listen to some teachers from Romania talking about their experiences here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mrlu6Uo3XoAut

3.3b Over to you: Community of Practice: planning

Work together to design an action plan for organising your Community of Practice.

You can find an action plan template in *Appendix 2* of this guide.

Unit 4: Selecting a topic for your Community of Practice

What topics can we select for a Community of Practice session?

4.1: Before you read:

Discuss these questions with your colleagues:

One way in which we can select topics for a Community of Practice session is to think about which topics are included in the curriculum and in the Student Teacher textbooks.

The TREE project developed materials for the English Teacher Educators' Communities of Practice based on the textbook for Year 1, Semester 2.

Here are the topics which were included.

1. Phonics
2. Effective reading
3. Reading at word and sentence level
4. Reading texts
5. Recognising and forming letters
6. Writing for a communicative purpose
7. Looking at culture in the primary classroom
8. Developing young learners' cultural awareness
9. Telling stories
10. Formal assessment
11. Assessment for learning
12. Assessing Student Teachers

If you are an English Teacher Educator, you can refer to this list. If you are not an English Teacher Educator, create a new list based on the topics in your textbook. You can also include other topics you might like to discuss.

1. Which three topics do you think will be most interesting to you and your colleagues? Why?
2. Are there any topics which you think will NOT be interesting to you and your colleagues? Why?
3. Compare your ideas with your colleagues. Were they the same or different? What were the reasons for your choices?

4.2: Key information:

Read the article and discuss the questions which follow.

Communities of Practice: selecting a topic

There are many different topics we can choose for a Community of Practice session. Here are some important considerations:

- the topic needs to be connected to teaching and learning
- the topic needs to be relevant to all the members of the Community of Practice
- the topic needs to be engaging and interesting for all the members of the Community of Practice
- the topic needs to be of practical application to all members of the Community of Practice
- the topic can be new to all members of the Community of Practice and it can be explored by all participants during the CoP session.

Whatever topic we choose, a successful Community of Practice involves all members **cooperating** and **collaborating** to share learning so it is important to make sure everybody has agreed about the topics selected for your Community of Practice and that everybody will find them valuable. 'What I did on my Masters Degree' is often of very limited interest!

1. We can choose a topic based on a problem which we want to solve.

Members of your Community of Practice can identify an area which presents challenges or which you want to improve. For example, you might wish to look at how questioning techniques can be developed, how you can make sure that all learners are involved in interactive activities or how to increase levels of student motivation.

2. We can choose a topic based on the content of the Student Teacher coursebook.

We can base the topic of one of our CoP sessions on one of the topics from the Year 1 Semester 1 and Semester 2 Student Teacher textbook. For each topic, we can ask two questions:

- How can we develop our own skills in this area?
- How can we support Student Teachers in developing this area?

For example, if we are including a topic such as storytelling, we are thinking about our own ability to tell stories and that of the Student Teachers we work with.

3. We can choose a topic based around a new activity or technique which everybody wants to try out in the classroom.

We often come across a new technique or activity which we have not tried out in our own classrooms. A CoP session provides the opportunity to discuss the steps and benefits of a new technique or activity, plan how it can be implemented and share experiences of implementing it in the following session.

4. We can choose a topic based on a new procedure or process the college has been asked to introduce by the Ministry of Education.

Many aspects of the new curriculum and associated processes may be new to you and/ or members of your Community of Practice. In a CoP session, members can discuss these innovations, the impact on teaching and learning and how they can be integrated in regular practice. For example, the TREE project has produced sets of materials to support Teacher Educators in observing each other and Student Teachers and on making use of the Teacher Competency Standards Framework.

5. We can choose a topic based on our own professional development.

A CoP session can usefully target many aspects of our own continuing professional development. These could include thinking about our own progress and professional goals for the future, our own skills at reflection and ways in which we can develop our professional skills.

Successful CoPs involve everybody and the more opportunities members of your Community of Practice have to make suggestions, the more effective your Community of Practice will be.

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Discuss these questions together:

Here are ten topics which were selected for a Community of Practice in Romania. Some of the topics are specifically relevant for English Teachers, but other topics are appropriate for all subject areas.

Why do you think these topics were selected?

1. Lesson planning: engaging learners
2. Helping learners with vocabulary
3. Developing learners' reading skill
4. Developing learners' listening skills
5. Developing learners' pronunciation skills
6. Managing the class
7. Peer observation
8. Developing learners' writing skills
9. Developing learners' 21st century skills
10. Assessing learners

Would these topics be of interest to members of your Community of Practice?

What other topics do you think will be of most interest to everybody?

Notes:

4.3: Unit 4 tasks

4.3a Selecting a topic: critical thinking

Members of a Community of Practice have decided that in their CoP meeting, they want to look at ways to develop learners' 21st Century skills. In particular, they want to find ways to develop Student Teachers' critical thinking skills. Nobody in the Community of Practice feels very confident about developing critical thinking skills, so they do some research.

They find a useful article about developing critical thinking skills. You can find the article here: www.britishcouncil.me/en/programmes/education/21st-century-schools/what/ctps

They find a useful video about developing critical thinking skills. You can find the video here: www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/critical-thinking

Read the article and watch the video.

Would this be a useful topic for your Community of Practice?



4.3b Over to you: choosing a topic

Work together with members of your Community of Practice.

Decide on **five** topics which you think will be of interest to your Community of Practice. Think carefully about why you have chosen each topic and decide on an appropriate order for the topics.

Units 5 and 6 will help you think more about the different types of activity you can include in your Community of Practice sessions.

Unit 5: Activities for your Community of Practice: input

What do participants do in a Community of Practice session 1?

5.1: Before you read:

5.1a You and your learning

Discuss these questions with your colleagues:

Think of an example for each sentence below.

Your example can be from your **professional life** or outside your **professional life**.

- something I learnt on my own
- something I learnt because I watched a more experienced person
- something I learnt which somebody else taught me because they had learnt how to do it themselves.

Is '**being trained**' the only way we learn?

5.1b How we learn professionally

Think about your own continuing professional development.

Can you think of an example of when:

- you read an article about teaching and learning (perhaps you found it online) and applied learning from the article to your own teaching or training?
- you studied a text or unit in the Student Teacher coursebook and adapted the unit so that your learners were able to learn more effectively?
- you watched a video online and applied learning from the article to your own teaching or training?
- you identified a problem or challenge you were faced with in your teaching or training and successfully solved the problem?
- you introduced a new technique or activity into your teaching or training and found it supported learning very effectively?
- you learnt from a presentation by someone outside your college, either in a face-to-face or online context?

Share your examples with your colleagues.

5.2: Key information:

Read the article and discuss the questions which follow.

Activities and resources: input

When we learn in a Community of Practice, we learn in different ways. Sometimes, we learn **from** each other because other people are more familiar with a topic than we are or because they have experience which we have not had. Sometimes we learn **with** each other: a topic or a process is new to everyone and everybody in the Community of Practice can work together to make sure that everybody is familiar with the new ideas involved.

Communities of Practice need **structure**: meetings need to be organised beforehand, with a clear aim and stages, and often resources. They also often need **input**: ideas and concepts from outside the Community itself which everybody can become familiar with, discuss, take on board and apply.

Imagine that we have decided on a topic for our Community of Practice and now we need some input. There are many different sources for this input. In this article, you will read about some of them. For each Community of Practice meeting, whether online or face-to-face, there is likely to be more than one source of input.

1. Group reading and discussion: online resources

This type of activity requires some research before the meeting takes place. A member or members of the Community of Practice look for and select one or more reading texts about a particular topic. Obviously, the best place to find texts of this kind is online - the British Council site www.teachingenglish.org.uk/ has lots of useful articles you can download. We can ask members of the Community of Practice to read the texts during the meeting but it is much more productive and time-effective to share the texts with members before the meeting so that everybody can read it first and then share their ideas. It can also be really helpful if we can prepare some questions about the texts to guide everybody's thinking and which members can think about before the meeting. An example is the text about critical thinking which you looked at in Activity 4.3a.

2. Group reading and discussion: coursebook analysis

In this activity, a member or members (quite possibly a decision by everybody involved) selects a text, a unit or part of a unit from the Student Teachers' coursebook. Everybody reads the text or unit before the meeting and thinks about the ideas involved, the challenges of teaching the text or unit to Student Teachers.

3. Group video watch: online resources

The steps of this type of activity are similar to that of making use of an online reading text. First, look for and select a video which is relevant to your session. You can Google the topic of your video or use the search engine in YouTube directly. You may want to share the video before (or sometimes even after) your session or you may feel it is better to ask everybody to watch the video during the online or face-to-face meeting. There are many videos that show real examples of teaching and learning taking place and these are often the most useful but you will also find many useful presentations and discussions on video. Always make sure that you have the chance to discuss the content of the video together after you have watched. There are examples of use of videos for learning throughout this unit.

4. A participant problem/case study

Input for your Community of Practice can also come from within the Community. An effective Community of Practice needs to be able to encourage participants to share problems. If one of the members brings a problem, a challenge or simply an aspect of teaching and learning to the meeting, everybody can work together on looking for ways to solve that problem and apply their thinking to their own classroom practice. In this way, we are reflecting about challenges and how they can be met.

5. A participant success

Members of your Community of Practice can also share their achievements. An effective meeting can include participants talking about a new technique or activity which they have tried out in their classrooms and why they think this is useful. Members can demonstrate these techniques and activities to their peers and everybody can decide how they can be applied to their own classroom practice. In this way, we are reflecting about achievements and their impact on teaching and learning.

6. An invited expert

Lastly, there may be opportunities to invite an expert from outside the Community (from a local university, for example, or from an international organisation) to lead a session or part of a session. It's just as important, though, to think what the members of the Community of Practice can offer and for the Community to draw on its own resources as well as external resources.

Text prepared by Andy Keedwell, TREE Facilitator

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Match a source of input 1 to 5 to an example a) to f).

1. Group reading and discussion: online resources	a) A member of the Community describes difficulties with involving less able learners in the class and everybody makes suggestions.
2. Group reading and discussion: coursebook analysis	b) A lecturer from a technical college gives a talk on how IT can be used to support learning.
3. Group video watch: online resources	c) A member of the Community shows everybody how she has used a technique called 'loop input' in her last few lessons.
4. A participant problem/case study	d) Members of the Community read excerpts from an online guide to Assessment for Learning and choose one suggestion they can apply to their own classroom.
5. A participant success	e) Members of the Community look at Semester 1 materials about songs and rhymes and think of more examples of songs and rhymes.
6. An invited expert	f) Members of the Community watch part of an online webinar about reflection.

5.3: Unit 5 tasks

5.3a Sources of input: video watch

Here are three online videos, all on different subjects and all of which approach the topic in different ways. Watch the videos.

1. Using phonics: www.youtube.com/watch?v=x9Cd-CRbH6s



2. Telling folk tales: David Heathfield: teachers' workshop Nepal:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcswOfe_G-k

3. British Council: assessing young learners:

www.britishcouncil.org/exam/aptis/research/projects/assessment-literacy/assessing-young-learners

- What are the differences in the ways these videos approach the subject?
- Which video did you find most interesting?
- Which video do you think will be of most use for your Community of Practice?

Notes:

5.3b Over to you: planning your session 1

In Activity 4.3b, you chose **five** topics which you think will be of interest to your Community of Practice. Now choose the topic from your list you want to practice working with.

What **input** will you include in your session?

Work together with members of your Community of Practice and answer these questions:

- Will you use any on or offline reading texts? What are they? How will you use them?
- Will you use any examples from the Student Teachers' coursebook? How will you use them?
- Will you use any online videos? What are they? How will you use them?
- Will you or other members of your Community of Practice present a problem which you will solve together?
- Will you or other members of your Community of Practice introduce a new technique or activity? How will you demonstrate it?

Unit 6: Activities for your Community of Practice: output

What do participants do in a Community of Practice session 2?

6.1: Before you read: your experience

Discuss these questions with your colleagues:

6.1a Have you ever:

- planned a lesson with other Teacher Educators?
- created a poster with other Teacher Educators to summarise your learning?
- designed a set of PowerPoint slides?
- created resources to help Student Teachers?
- created a video of your teaching, individually or with other Teacher Educators?
- discussed and designed a set of criteria e.g. for assessing Student Teachers' proficiency?
- designed a test or other tool to assess Student Teachers' progress together with other Teacher Educators?

Compare your experience of taking part in one or more of these activities with your colleagues.

6.1b Effective collaboration

Can you think of an example when you collaborated with other Teacher Educators to produce something useful to Student Teachers or other Teacher Educators?

What did you produce? How did you work effectively together?

Notes:

6.2: Key information:

Read the article and discuss the questions which follow.

Activities and resources: output

In Unit 5, we looked at the input we can provide for a Community of Practice session. However, learning does not take place only because of input. Participants in our Community of Practice need to work together and collaborate and cooperate to produce plans, documents and demonstrations following extensive discussion. We call this **output**. While engaging with input is helpful and may lead to learning, the most important aspects of learning take place at this output stage.

What can members of a Community of Practice work together to produce? Here are some ideas.

1. Creative and collaborative lesson planning

Most Teacher Educators are aware of the importance of lesson planning but lesson planning is often undertaken as an individual activity. Teacher Educators often work on their own to produce a lesson plan which is seen by no one but themselves and occasionally a supervisor. However, lesson planning becomes so much more interesting, engaging and enjoyable if it is done collaboratively. Groups of participants can produce plans during or after the session, comment on each other's plans and take part in a constant process of drafting and redrafting.

2. Creating a poster or PowerPoint to summarise your ideas for other Teacher Educators

Good Communities of Practice are those in which lots of discussion takes place. However, without some way of recording this discussion, many of the most important ideas will be lost. During or after the session, members of the Community of Practice can create online or offline posters or PowerPoint slides to summarise what they have learnt or decided, their opinions and differences in these opinions and plans for the future.

3. Creating a poster or PowerPoint to help Student Teachers

We live in an age in which IT resources are becoming increasingly more important. Although most of your teaching at the moment may make use only of the blackboard, things are changing rapidly including the introduction of online teaching for Student Teachers. Following an input activity in which participants look at units in the Student Teachers' coursebook, they can develop posters or slides to adapt and supplement coursebook materials and share these with their peers.

4. Planning and demonstrating an activity to your peers (face-to-face)

Seeing something taking place can be a much more effective support for learning than reading about it and planning and delivering a demonstration of a new activity or technique to your

peers can be the most useful way to take on board a new way of doing things and practise it before you use it in class.

Members of a Community of Practice can design and deliver a demonstration during the session itself, or they can use the session to plan how to use a new technique or activity, try it out in class and report back at the beginning of the session. Demonstrations do not always need to be individual: they can involve everybody.

5. Planning and demonstrating an activity to your peers (video)

We can also demonstrate our understanding of a new activity or technique to support teaching and learning through making a video. One example is for participants to work together during the session to plan a demonstration, video themselves trying it out and share it in the following session. Another way everybody can contribute to a Community of Practice session is to video themselves teaching a real class in a real classroom on a mobile phone, bring the videos to the (face-to-face or online) session and watch each other's videos while providing constructive feedback.

6. Creating and using standards and processes

In Unit 4.2, we looked at how we can choose a topic based on a new procedure or process the college has been asked to introduce by the Ministry of Education. Sometimes these procedures are based around standards which Student Teachers are asked to reach or criteria by which they are judged. For example, Teacher Educators are expected to assess lesson plans produced by Student Teachers during the practicum and to observe Student Teachers teaching. Assessment, including test design, is seen as an important part of the Teacher Educator's role.

Teacher Educators can work together during the Community of Practice session and design or adapt standards and criteria (for assessing Student Teacher lesson plans for example or reflective writing produced by Student Teachers). They can discuss and adapt processes (for observing Student Teachers for example) or identify practical ways in which Ministry directives can be implemented at the college. It's important though that Community of Practice sessions do not simply become 'extra work' and that there is always a very significant element of personal professional development to each Community of Practice session.

7. Creating other resources

Other resources participants can work together on creating include:

- making a padlet to present key ideas: <https://en-gb.padlet.com/>
- designing quizlets to test Student Teachers or others: <https://quizlet.com/en-gb>
- using Kahoot to design learning games for Student Teachers or for fun activities for peers: <https://kahoot.com/schools-u/>
- together, you and your CoP members can create Loom presentations: www.loom.com/my-videos

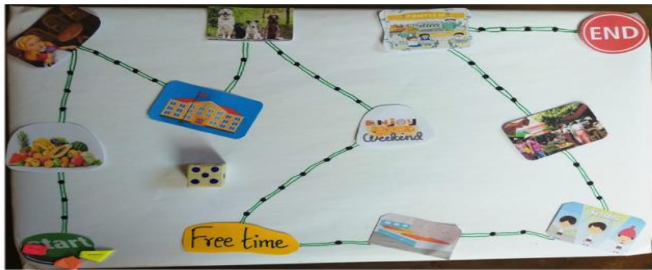
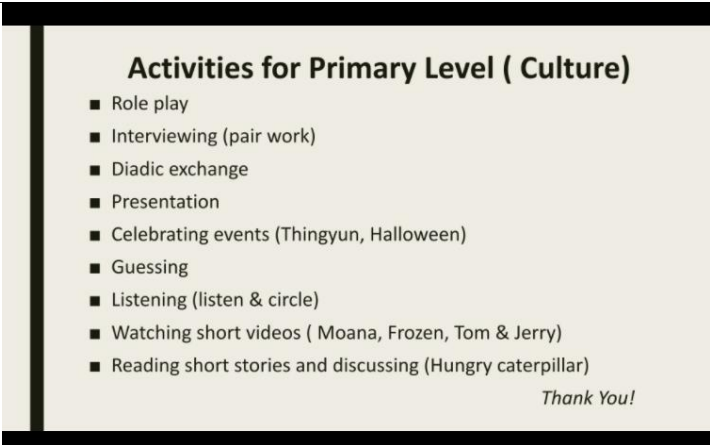
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Text prepared by Andy Keedwell, TREE Facilitator





Questions:

Look at the examples of some Community of Practice output. They were all produced by Teacher Educators from Lashio and Taunggyi.

1. Which activity types do you think will be of most interest and relevance to members of your Community of Practice?
2. Which activity types do you think produce the most learning?
3. Would there be any challenges for Teacher Educators you know completing these activities successfully?

1. Creative and collaborative lesson planning: design of a game for Young Learners	<p>The teacher explains how to play the board games.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• -Throw a dice• -Count the numbers• -Move the starters to the right place• -If a counter lands on the picture, the teacher asks questions and player responds by looking at it.• -If not, players doesn't need to respond and take turns. 
2. Creating a poster or PowerPoint to summarise ideas for other Teacher Educators PowerPoint: A summary of ideas: activities for developing Young Learners' cultural awareness	

<p>3. Creating a PowerPoint or poster for Student Teachers</p> <p>Advice on what makes an effective reader</p>	
<p>4. Planning and demonstrating an activity to peers</p> <p>Individual demonstration of an activity (letter formation)</p>	
<p>5. Planning and demonstrating an activity to peers</p> <p>Group demonstration of an activity (phonics)</p>	
<p>6. Planning and demonstrating an activity to peers (video)</p> <p>A video demonstration of a new technique (storytelling)</p>	

<p>7. Planning and demonstrating an activity to peers (video)</p> <p>A video demonstration of a new technique to a group (storytelling)</p>	
<p>8 Creating and using standards and processes</p> <p>A speaking test for Young Learners designed by CoP participants</p>	<p>Speaking Test </p> <p>The examiner shows the student a picture that can be described the names of the animals and things and where they exist. The examiner asks the student to tell the names of the things and animals and all you see in the picture and where they are.</p> <p>The examiner might say:</p> <p>Look at the picture! Tell the names of animals and things you see in the picture and where they are.</p> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center;">   </div>

6.3: Unit 6 tasks: Over to you:

Think about the session you began planning in Activity 5.3b.

What output activities can participants complete in your session?

Notes:

Unit 7: Putting it all together

How can we organise and sequence activities in a Community of Practice session?

7.1: Before you read: sequencing steps

Discuss these questions with your colleagues:

You are going to read a description of a Community of Practice session. The aim of the session is to support teachers and trainers in developing learners' vocabulary.

1. Look at steps a) to g) of the session below. What do you think is the most appropriate sequence for these steps? Put the steps in order.

- a) Participants read an article *Seven steps to vocabulary learning* about introducing, revising and asking learners to record vocabulary.
- b) Participants watch a video which presents a group of teachers talking about ways they find useful to help learners remember vocabulary effectively.
- c) Participants discuss how they usually revise vocabulary and ask learners to record new vocabulary and take part in a Find Someone Who activity to compare their ideas.
- d) Participants choose three techniques/activities which they have discussed in this session and which they would like to use in your own classroom and plan how to use them in class before the next COP session
- e) The Community of Practice facilitator demonstrates a warmer to get the session started: participants take part in a vocabulary revision activity using key terminology from the previous COP session.
- f) Participants take part in a follow up activity about understanding the meaning of new words from context.
- g) In the previous session, participants planned a warmer/lead-in activity to use in their own classes. Participants discuss their experiences of using the activity they had planned and how successful the activity was.
- h) The facilitator introduces the learning outcomes of the session.

2. What are the sources of **input** in this session? What are the **outputs**?

3. Did you find there is only one **sequence** in which you can order these steps or are there a range of ways they could be organised? You can compare your answers with the sample session plan below.

7.2: Key information:

Read the sample session plan and discuss the questions which follow.

Helping learners with vocabulary: a sample Community of Practice session

Time: three hours

Step 1: Learning outcomes

The facilitator introduces the session and outlines the learning outcomes of the session. In this session: participants will:

- discuss which aspects of new words need to be introduced to learners
- discuss ways to record and review vocabulary
- discuss how to introduce new words in context
- identify steps to effective vocabulary teaching
- identify strategies to help learners remember vocabulary more effectively
- choose techniques/ activities which make vocabulary more memorable to use in your own classroom after the CoP session.

Step 2: Warming up

The Community of Practice facilitator demonstrates a warmer to get the session started: participants take part in a vocabulary revision activity using key terminology from the previous session. After they have taken part, participants discuss these questions:

- Did you enjoy this activity? What did you like about it?
- Could you use this activity in your own class? Why/ why not?

Step 3: Share

In the previous session, participants planned a warmer/ lead-in activity to use in their own classes. Participants discuss their experiences of using the activity they had planned and how successful the activity was. Participants answer these questions:

- a) Did you have the opportunity to use the activity? Why/ why not?
- b) How did you adapt the activity for your class?
- c) How effective was the activity? What went well?
- d) Did you experience any challenges in using the activity? If so, how did you solve them?
- e) Would you recommend this activity to other teachers? Why/ why not?

Step 4: Discuss

Participants discuss how they usually revise vocabulary and ask learners to record new vocabulary and take part in a Find Someone Who activity to compare their ideas.

Step 5: Read

a) The facilitator tells participants they are going to read an article about developing reading skills. Before they read, participants complete a set of pre-reading questions, including discussion of teaching words in context and ordering the possible steps of a pre-reading activity.

b) Participants read the article *Seven steps to vocabulary learning* by **Paul Bress** about introducing, revising and asking learners to record vocabulary. You can find the article here: www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/seven-steps-vocabulary-learning

c) Participants discuss a set of post-reading questions which ask them to express opinions about the techniques and activities the article suggests.

Step 6: Watch

Participants watch a video which presents a group of teachers talking about ways they find useful to help learners remember vocabulary effectively. Participants make notes and discuss the techniques and activities the video suggests. You can find the video at: www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/teacher-talk-building-retaining-vocabulary

Step 7: Think

Participants take part in a follow up activity about understanding the meaning of new words from context. They read a text from a student coursebook they use and decide which words could be new to learners and which words could be guessed from **context**.

Step 8: Design and apply

a) Participants choose ten vocabulary items that they will be introducing to learners in their next lesson and discuss:

- What makes it difficult for learners to use these words effectively?
- What makes it difficult for learners to remember these words effectively?

Participants choose two or three activities they have discussed in this session which they can use in their own classes to help learners with these new words and plan how they will use them in class. They compare ideas with their colleagues and give each other feedback.

b) Participants try out their activity in class and keep a record of what was done and what went well/not so well. They bring these records to the next CoP session in order to share and compare their experiences.

Discuss these questions together:

1. Read the learning outcomes of the session again. Which activities help to achieve each learning outcome?
2. Is every step essential for the session? Which steps could be omitted if you were short of time?
3. At which steps do you think most learning takes place?
4. Many people would say that the last step, Design and Apply, is the most important step of all. Why do you think this is? How can we encourage everybody to take part in the Design and Apply stage?
5. Which activities in this sample session plan do you think would be of most interest to members of your Community of Practice? Are there any stages which would not be of interest to your members?

Notes:

7.3: Unit 7 tasks: Over to you:

In Activity 5.3b, you decided on a topic for your CoP session and some input for your session.

In Activity 6.3, you added some output to this session.

Now use the COP session plan template on the next page to plan your COP session plan.

COP session plan	
Session topic:	
Learning outcomes:	
Delivery: are you delivering your session online or face-to-face and if online, which platform are you using?	
Resources needed:	
Step	Write details of each step here. What does the facilitator do? What do the participants do?
Step 1: Warming up Include an interesting activity to begin your session.	
Step 2: Share Participants will discuss their experiences of trying out a new technique or activity in class following the previous session. If this is Session 1, you will not include a Share step.	
Step 3 In steps 3 to 5, you may want to include discussion stages, a Read activity or a Watch activity dependent on the topic you have selected.	

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Step 4	
Step 5	
Further steps Add any further steps if you need to.	
Step 6: Design and apply Include a stage in which participants plan to use an activity, technique, process, set of criteria or any other idea which they can use in class before the next CoP session and report back on in the next CoP session.	
Any possible problems and solutions	

Unit 8: The role of a facilitator

What the roles and responsibilities of a Community of Practice Facilitator?

8.1: Before you read: What are the differences between a trainer and facilitator?

Discuss these questions with your colleagues:

1. What do you think trainers and facilitators have in common?
2. What are the differences between them?

Complete the table with your ideas. You can find some suggestions in *Appendix 3* of this Guide.

	Facilitator	Trainer
Who are they?		Someone who has done the same job as participants in the past and now helps other people to do their job.
What knowledge and expertise do they need?		Knowledge and expertise which they have learnt through doing the job and additional study. Usually seen as being an expert.
What's their aim?	To encourage discussion of everyday issues at work and to help the group think about problems and solutions for themselves.	To help teachers develop and be able to develop their skills and solve problems on their own.
Is it long term or short term?		Might only be involved for a few days or weeks.
What do we want the participants to be able to do?	To think for themselves and solve their own problems in all aspects of their work.	To think for themselves and solve their own problems in all aspects of their work.
What's the relationship?	The facilitator usually does the same job as the group: may have more experience but learns at the same time. Both people are peers .	
How do we do it?	The facilitator and the group engage with new input together: the facilitator is not expected to have all the answers.	Presenting some new input usually to a group of teachers often through demonstration or presenting ideas, leading to

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	Talking together about how things are done, discussing problems, engaging together with new input and coming up with solutions together.	discussion of how teachers can use those ideas. Often listening to and monitoring participants' discussion and eliciting, commenting and providing feedback following the discussion.
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8.2: Key information:

Read the article and discuss the questions which follow.

A Community of Practice Facilitator: roles and responsibilities

Most training courses are led by an 'expert' whose background might be very different from that of the participants on the course and the trainer's role is often to be very much in charge. Communities of Practice do not need a 'leader' in the same way or someone to be present whose skills and knowledge are very different from the majority of participants. They very much involve activities in which learning is shared and cooperation and collaboration are highlighted.

However, Communities of Practice generally have a facilitator. One important role of the facilitator is to guide the discussion and encourage all participants to contribute and share their ideas. Their role is not to be 'a source of all knowledge'. Facilitators take part in all the activities, contribute their own opinions and encourage others to do the same. Together, the participants pool their skills and awareness and 'construct' new approaches to classroom teaching.

Facilitators do not usually have a 'special status'. They come from the same background as the other members of the group, are involved in similar types of teaching and training and do not need different qualifications to the people they work with.

The roles and responsibilities of a facilitator often include:

- an organisational role
- a design role
- a facilitative role
- a communicative role
- an evaluative role.

1. Organisational role

Working with the members of the Community of Practice, a facilitator needs to think about all the logistical issues we talked about in Unit 3. This includes organising the timetable of Community of Practice sessions at times which suit everybody best. The facilitator needs to make decisions about which platform to use for online sessions and is usually the person who sets up and manages online meetings on platforms such as Zoom. If the Community of Practice has a face-to-face element, a venue needs to be selected and prepared.

With help from others, the facilitator needs to make sure that all resources are available for everybody, including sharing resources which participants will need before and after each meeting. Although your Community of Practice might be comparatively small, it's also important to keep a record of who the members are and how regularly they attend.

2. Design role

The facilitator is often the key person who chooses a topic for each session, thinks about which activities to include, identifies and selects resources (especially online resources) and plans the output of each session. We hope the ideas presented in Units 4 to 7 will be helpful for these tasks.

Don't forget though that facilitators are not expected to be experts! The questions we ask are just as important as any answers we can provide and discussion within the group, which includes contributions from the facilitator, is what creates knowledge and learning.

The task of designing a session is a time-consuming one and is often best done by a team of CoP members working together or asking each member (or members) to be responsible for one session and creating a series of sessions involving different people.

3. Facilitative role

The facilitator plays a lead role in supporting members during the CoP session. The facilitator is one – but only one – of the CoP members who may organise a warmer activity to begin the session, demonstrate new activities and techniques and manage resources such as reading texts or video. In online Communities of Practice, it is usually the facilitator who hosts online sessions and organises interactive pair and groupwork.

Just as importantly, it is the facilitator who guides discussion through asking appropriate questions, makes sure that everybody has a chance to contribute, acknowledges contributions and manages and monitors participation, especially in interactive pair and group work. The facilitator is welcome to join in discussion herself but her role is to make sure that members all have chance to express, share and comment on each other's opinions.

4. Communicative role

This is one of the most important facilitator roles and without good communication, the Community of Practice will quickly fall apart. Facilitators also communicate with everybody to let them know that the CoP session will take place, ensure that everybody has the right resources, encourage new members to join and also encourage group members to bring along new teachers if possible. They communicate to all members dates and times of the sessions sufficiently in advance and help to solve any IT problems. They keep in touch with all stakeholders including the Principal and Leadership team and keep in touch with Community of Practice facilitators at other colleges. They also keep in touch with any relevant local institutions or international organisations outside the college.

5. Evaluative role

The facilitator also plays a role in deciding how well the Community of Practice is working and how it can be improved. The facilitator can access members' views on how effective the Community of Practice is and discuss these with members. The facilitator can also help the Community to celebrate their achievements and share them with other people and organisations outside the Community.

Text prepared by Andy Keedwell, TREE Facilitator

Discuss these questions together:

1. Which of these roles and responsibilities will be the most important in the context you work in? Are there any duties which will not be important?
2. Which roles and responsibilities will be most enjoyable and satisfying for you if you are working as a facilitator?
3. Which roles and responsibilities will be the most challenging? What problems might there be and how can they be solved?

Notes:

8.3: Unit 8 tasks

8.3a The role of a facilitator: video

Watch this webinar by Ana Garcia Stone who leads on continuing professional development for the British Council in Spain: www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/effective-communities-practice

The section of the video from 7.43 to 15.00 talks specifically about the roles and qualities of a facilitator. Focus on this section, but we hope you enjoy the whole webinar.



8.3b Over to you: directing discussion

Ana says:

Sometimes with CoPs, there's a danger of them becoming 'therapy session'. Teachers don't often have the chance to spend a whole hour with other teachers talking about teaching. Sometimes it slips into sharing problems which are not related to the topic.

Answer these questions with a colleague:

- What do you think Ana means by 'a therapy session'?
- What is the challenge to a CoP being effective if teachers ONLY talk about problems?
- What can a facilitator do to meet this challenge?

Unit 9: Effective facilitating

What makes an effective facilitator?

9.1: Effective facilitating: self-assessment 1

Do you have the appropriate qualities to be a facilitator? Complete this self-assessment below.

	Yes	Room for improvement?
I am keen and enthusiastic about helping other people.		
If someone needs help, I often volunteer.		
I am prepared to make time in my job to help other people.		
I have a good relationship with other people at my place of work.		
I enjoy preparing and planning so that I can have an effective lesson.		
Skills		
I think that my own teaching is developing week by week.		
I am keen to learn new skills.		
Qualities		
I'm generally positive about what other people do and don't look for opportunities to criticise.		
I am patient when I am working with other people.		
I am quite adaptable and I can listen and think about other people's opinions.		
I'm usually good at building relationships with other people.		
I usually treat other people with respect.		
I am good at respecting other people's privacy.		
I'm usually keen to learn what other people have to say before telling them what I think.		
I am happy for other people to see me as a role model.		
I like other people to feel I can be trusted.		
I usually remember that people are different and have different views and perspectives.		

Source: 'Becoming a Mentor': British Council Ethiopia

Share your answers with a colleague or a colleague if you would like to.

9.2: Key information:

Read the interview with facilitators and discuss the questions which follow.

What makes an effective facilitator?

We interviewed a group of Community of Practice facilitators who work with teachers from primary and secondary schools in remote, rural areas in a country in Europe. This is what they said:

Interviewer: How important do you think qualifications and experience are for your role as a facilitator?

Facilitator: Well, obviously the qualifications and experience you have will help you in your role. But a number of participants have more experience (sometimes a lot more experience) and more advanced qualifications than I have. The important thing is that everybody feels free to share skills and knowledge whatever experience or qualifications they have and my role is to make sure that everybody has chance to do that.

Interviewer: What skills do you need to have to organise Community of Practice sessions?

Facilitator: You do need to be well-organised as you are the person who makes sure that everything fits together. In my Community of Practice, we have two facilitators so we can work together and help each other. We help each other to design the sessions and to decide what will happen in the session. Some of the classroom management skills you need are very similar to the ones that you need in the classroom. You need to think how you can stage and organise the session well, how you can keep things to time and you can organise resources.

Interviewer: How about IT skills? How important are they?

Facilitator: Our meetings used to be face-to-face but after COVID, we went online. We struggled a little at the beginning but after some practice, we're now quite adept as online facilitators. Like everything else, it's a matter of sharing skills, learning from each other and taking everything step by step.

Interviewer: What do you need to concentrate most on as a facilitator? What are the most challenging skills to develop?

Facilitator: Any Community of Practice is only as effective as its members and in order to be effective, it's essential that everybody feels able to express and discuss opinions, give feedback to each other and share ideas. This means that the facilitator need to encourage different participants to contribute and ensure that all the participants are fully involved in the session.

Developing a Community of Practice

In our first sessions, some participants felt quite shy and were reluctant to say anything: I think they expected CoP sessions to be more like the conventional training sessions they had attended where they just sat and took notes. This meant that a handful of participants (sometimes the older teachers, to be honest!) tended to dominate. Our first CoP certainly did not feel like a forum for everybody to express their ideas. We had to work hard to make sure that the CoP participants interact confidently and freely during the session and are able to share ideas effectively.

Interviewer: How did you make sure that everybody had chance to join in?

Facilitator: We had to think hard about the different question types we use to help the participants to engage in discussions. We use a lot of open questions and make sure that everybody is aware we do not have all the answers. We do a lot of nominating when we ask for participants to speak by name and we ask participants to nominate other participants to speak too. We do a lot of pair work and group work in the breakout rooms and we organise the participants in different interaction patterns at different times. It's also very important that everybody respects rules about confidentiality, so that somebody who is describing a problem knows that nobody will repeat that problem to others outside the CoP session. What's said in the room stays in the room.

We all have the opportunity to talk, to share our ideas, just to share experiences and I think it was very important for us as teachers to see that other teachers struggle with the same issues that we do, we are not alone.

Because we all teach English, we also encourage all participants to use English as much as possible because this is good practice and for many of us, the only practice we get in using English. But we are not the language police and sometimes it can be difficult to express complex ideas in English and we use our first language too.

Interviewer: Any other challenges?

Facilitator: We are getting steadily better at reflecting about our teaching but this is a gradual process and needs lots of practice. As facilitators, we need to help everybody stay focused, encourage the participants to reflect effectively on what they currently do in the classroom and how they can improve what they do for the future and to share these ideas with others. At the end of every session, we plan an activity to try out with Student Teachers and we always talk about how things went in our next session. Reflecting and applying new ideas isn't easy but that's the core of what we do in our CoP!

Based on conversations with Local Facilitators, English for the Community project, British Council Romania

Discuss these questions together:

1. How effectively do you think members of your Community of Practice will work together?
How can you help them?
2. The facilitators interviewed emphasise questioning techniques and interaction patterns as keys to success. Can you think of any practical examples?
3. Do you think CoP meetings should be in English, in Myanmar or in a mixture of both?

9.3: Unit 9 tasks

Over to you: effective facilitating: self-assessment 2

Think about these questions:

- Which of the facilitation skills mentioned in the interview do you feel most confident that you have?
- Which of the skills might require more effort and self-development from you?
- What can you do to develop skills in these areas?

Notes:

Unit 10: Celebrating success

What makes an effective Community of Practice?

How can we find out if our Community of Practice is effective?

10.1: Effective Communities of Practice

10.1a Good morning, Miss Asha

This short video was designed by Communities of Practice in India. Although the context may be very different from your own, we hope you find it interesting!

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ao4AikxaIeo

10.1b What makes a Community of Practice work well?

Work in a group with your colleagues and think of the factors that make a Community of Practice work effectively.

Think of factors that are important **before**, **during** and **after** a Community of Practice session takes place.

Before	During	After
Selection of a suitable platform for online meetings.	Session begins and finishes on time.	Members encouraged to keep in touch with each other.

You can find some suggestions in *Appendix 4*.

10.2: Key information:

Read the article and discuss the questions which follow.

Celebrating success

What makes an effective Community of Practice?

Before

One foundation for an effective Community of Practice is all the work that goes into organising the Community of Practice before and after each session. A substantial part of this work will involve the role of the facilitator(s) but everybody can be involved. Procedures for session planning, sharing resources and communicating with everybody all need to be completed effectively before the session.

During

Key to the success of the Community of Practice is the involvement and participation of everybody, with the support of the facilitator but the commitment of everybody. The most effective Communities of Practice are those in which everybody has a chance to share ideas openly and honestly, everybody is prepared to listen to each other, respond and provide feedback and everybody is consciously developing their skills of reflection.

After

A significant aspect of an effective Community of Practice is what happens after the session, with members trying out new activities, techniques and processes and returning to the next session with experiences and reflections they can share with everybody. The facilitator can encourage everybody to do this and be an influential role model in doing this themselves.

You can find a detailed description of what makes an effective Community of Practice in *Appendix 4*.

How do we know?

Unit 8.2 talked about the evaluative role of a Community of Practice facilitator. We do not need complex procedures for monitoring and evaluation to help us decide if our Community of Practice is working well but we do need to spend time and effort on identifying what is going well, what can be improved and how we can improve things.

Numbers can help us. This is what we need for '*quantitative evaluation*'. How many members does your Community of Practice have? How many of these members regularly take part in sessions? Does everybody participate in CoP sessions or are the sessions dominated by a small number of people? How many of your members regularly try out new ideas in their own classrooms following the session and report back on challenges and achievements in the

following session? To answer these questions, we need to keep regular records of attendance and participation which we can share with others.

We also need to think about **comments and opinions** about the effectiveness of our Community of Practice as part of our '*qualitative evaluation*'. It's not only the facilitator who can decide on new topics: opinions about the needs, wants and lacks participants feel they have are essential too. We can ask participants for ideas near the beginning of the CoP sessions and regularly throughout the sessions. We call this a '*needs analysis*'. We can ask participants for opinions as to whether the Community of Practice is proving to be helpful, practical, relevant and enjoyable. We can do this through discussion in the sessions themselves and/ or by providing participants with the opportunity to complete polls or questionnaires and keep careful records of what people say. Communities of Practice encourage reflection and it is important for facilitators to reflect too so ways if doing things develop continuously.

If we can, it is also a great idea to ask someone to observe your CoP sessions, keep notes and provide some feedback. If there are two facilitators for your Community of Practice, sometimes one of the facilitators can take on this role or it may be possible to invite an external person to your session to give you some feedback. *Appendix 5* contains a checklist which can be used for observation purposes.

Sharing our successes

Monitoring and evaluation is not only about identifying areas which need to be improved but also about highlighting our achievements, celebrating our success and sharing this success with others. We've talked about how an important part of a Community of Practice is production and it is important to share these products within and outside our college. You may want to think about organising a CoP exhibition or a set of demonstrations to help Teacher Educators at your college who may not be involved with your Community of Practice. Make sure that your Leadership Team is fully aware of the great work you are doing. You may want to share your achievements with Communities of Practice from other colleges or with external organisations such as VSO or the British Council.

Activity 10.3 describes a process called 'A Most Significant Change Story' which you may also want to consider. This technique is used by projects to find out if the project has helped beneficiaries of the project. It can also be used by teachers, trainers and facilitators to find out what people have learnt from participating in teaching, training courses or activities such as a Community of Practice.

Communities of Practice are all about progress – everybody needs to be aware of the progress you and your Community of Practice are making and this will lead to yet more progress!

Developing a Community of Practice

Discuss these questions together:

1. Think again about what makes an effective Community of Practice. Do you want to add any more ideas to your list?
2. What records of your Community of Practice do you need to keep? How can you do this effectively?
3. Who can you share your success with? Who needs to know about your achievements?

Notes:

10.3: Unit 10 tasks

10.3 Most significant change stories

All Communities of Practice aim at bringing about significant change: change in how its members think, what they believe and what they do in the classroom. As members take part in the Community of Practice and change takes place, we can ask members to record their stories and share them with others. We can also share these stories with college leadership or external organisations to measure progress and celebrate achievements.

The concept of a **Most Significant Story** was developed by Rick Davies and Jess Dart.

You can find a video of Jess Dart talking about the procedures and benefits of a Most Significant Change Story here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=H32FTygl-Zs

When we think about Most Significant Change, we focus specifically on one or two changes and answer these questions:

- what was your attitude or behaviour before the change?
- why did the change happen?
- what did you learn? How will you be able to apply your learning?
- what effect did it have?
- why did you choose this change in particular?
- how will the change help YOU?

Here are the steps of the Most Significant Story technique.

1. Ask participants to think about the most significant change that occurred in their learning as a result of their involvement in the Community of Practice.
2. Often it's a good idea to ask participants to interview each other.
3. After the interview, participants can **write** their story OR **record** themselves on video (on their phones, for example) OR work together and **write** or **record** their partners' story.
4. Sharing stories and reflecting on other people's stories is an essential part of the process.

Appendix 1: Advantages and limitations of training

Advantages of training	Disadvantages of training
<p>Training can reach large numbers of people who all learn the same thing at the same time.</p> <p>Training gives the participants the chance to engage face-to-face with a more experienced trainer/expert.</p> <p>Training is quick: often it involves the participants meeting for a period anything between a two or three hour workshop and a ten-day course.</p> <p>Training is controllable – it's relatively straightforward for the course designer to make decisions about the content of the course and how the course will be assessed.</p> <p>Training can provide the participants with a set of skills which are easy to identify and describe.</p> <p>Training can give opportunities for the participants to apply ideas through microteaching.</p> <p>Training can bring together large numbers of people from often different backgrounds who can share ideas during the training.</p>	<p>It's difficult/impossible for the participants to control the rate at which training takes place.</p> <p>Experts may be less familiar/unfamiliar with the contexts in which the participants work.</p> <p>Training may have limited impact: it's easy for the participants to forget everything they have learnt within days or weeks of the course taking place, especially if the training involves few interactive hands-on activities. If there is no follow-up, it's very difficult to tell if the training has been successful or not.</p> <p>One size fits all: there can be little scope for adapting the course content to the participants' real needs.</p> <p>Training is less successful in helping the participants to come to their own conclusions, reflect and work more independently.</p> <p>There is often little or no opportunity for the participants to apply the training to their own contexts in a real way (e.g. their classrooms) until the training has been completed. Techniques such as microteaching can often be very 'safe' and artificial.</p> <p>The participants may never have the opportunity to meet their colleagues from the training ever again or may be reluctant or too busy to keep in touch online.</p>

Appendix 2: Organising your Community of Practice: action plan

Key questions	Your ideas
1 Where: channel Which CoP sessions will be face-to-face (if any)? Which sessions will be online? Who will organise the online sessions? How will you check all participants have access to online sessions?	
1 Where: venue Where will face-to-face CoP meetings take place? Where will the venue be? What resources does the venue need? What do you need to do to make sure the venue is available for your use?	
2 How many: members In your location, how many participants can you reasonably expect to join your Community of Practice? Which subject areas will be included in your Community of Practice? Are there any ways you can build relationships with Teacher Educators from other Education Degree Colleges?	
3 When and how often: timetabling What are the best days and times for you to hold your COP sessions? How often will you hold your sessions?	
4 Who: facilitator Who will facilitate your Community of Practice? How will you choose your facilitator? Will you always have the same facilitator or will you rotate the facilitator role?	
5 How: content What topics will your Community of Practice address? What input activities will you include? What output activities will you include? Who will design the content? How will you encourage participants to try out new ideas? How can you prepare any necessary resources?	

Developing a Community of Practice

5 How: communications How will you let teachers in your location know your COP will take place? How can you encourage new members to join?	

Appendix 3: Trainer and facilitator: what's the difference?

	Facilitator	Trainer
Who are they?	Someone who does the same job as participants at the moment and can share skills with others.	Someone who has done the job as participants in the past (if at all) and now helps other people to do the job.
What knowledge and expertise do they need?	Knowledge and expertise which they have learnt through doing the job. Not necessarily an expert.	Knowledge and expertise which they have learnt through doing the job and additional study. Usually seen as being an expert.
What's their aim?	To encourage discussion of everyday issues at work and to help the group think about problems and solutions for themselves.	To help teachers develop and be able to develop their skills and solve problems on their own.
Is it long term or short term?	Help is given over time to support long term development.	Might only be involved for a few days or weeks.
What do we want the participants to be able to do?	To think for themselves and solve their own problems in all aspects of their work.	To think for themselves and solve their own problems in all aspects of their work
What's the relationship?	The facilitator usually does the same job as the group: may have more experience but learns at the same time. Both people are peers .	There's usually a difference – sometimes a difference of age or nationality or culture: they do not do the same job although the person giving the help will have done a similar job in the past. A difference in status .
How do we do it?	The facilitator and the group engage with new input together: the facilitator is not expected to have all the answers.	Presenting some new input usually to a group of teachers often through demonstration or presenting ideas, leading to a discussion of how teachers can use those ideas.

Developing a Community of Practice

	Talking together about how things are done, discussing problems, engaging together with new input and coming up with solutions together.	Often listening to and monitoring participants' discussion and eliciting, commenting and providing feedback following the discussion.
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Appendix 4: What makes an effective Community of Practice?

Before	During	After
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selection of a suitable platform for online meetings. • Selection of a suitable venue for face-to-face meetings. • Materials and any resources needed prepared beforehand. • Facilitator familiar with the aims and stages of the session. • Facilitator able to liaise effectively with other stakeholders e.g. Leadership Team if required. • Technical issues resolved before the session takes place. • Communications to all members on date and time of the session sufficiently in advance. • Promotion of the Community of Practice: new members encouraged to join. • Making other interested external organisations aware that the Community of Practice is taking place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Session begins and finishes on time. • All members have any required resources. • Facilitator introduces aims and organisation of the session. • Facilitator able to guide participants and encourage discussion. • Plenty of time allocated for discussion. • Resources used effectively. • Participants engaged in and contributing to discussions. • Participants encouraged to reflect on experiences and plans. • Participants encouraged and enabled to share ideas effectively. • Participants able to use active listening skills. • Sufficient time for each stage of the session. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members encouraged to keep in touch with each other. • Members try out plans they have made in the session in their own classes. • Members able to report back on trying out new ideas in the next CoP session. • Facilitator able to reflect on the session: What went well? What challenges were there? What changes could be made to the next session? • Facilitator shares successes and any challenges facing the Community of Practice with others, including the Leadership Team and anybody else involved.

Appendix 5: Community of Practice: observation checklist

Standard		1	2	3
1. Relationships	There is a good rapport between the facilitator and participants in the CoP session and between participants.			
2. Atmosphere	There is a positive atmosphere in CoP sessions: participants interact with each other confidently and freely.			
3. Encouraging participants to share	Different CoP participants are encouraged to contribute. Participants share reflections, experiences and ideas.			
4. Pace and timing	Pace and timing of activities are appropriate.			
5. Interaction patterns	There is a variety of interaction patterns which are appropriate for each stage and activity.			
6. Questioning skills	The facilitator and participants ask many questions during the CoP session which help everybody to engage further or deeper with a topic/ discussion point.			
7. Participation levels	Most of the participants actively participate throughout the CoP session.			
8. Focus	Participants stay focused and on task during activities.			
9. Enjoyment	Participants are actively engaged and enjoy the CoP session. All the participants are actively encouraged to take part.			
10. Reflection	All the participants share reflections and plans to apply ideas from the CoP session in their own classrooms. These ideas are appropriate and practical.			

1: Weak

2: Acceptable

3: Excellent

Adapted from monitoring and evaluation tools, British Council India/British Council Romania

References and Further Reading

Note: Around the world, some Community of Practices are known under that name while others are termed Teacher Activity Groups. The ideas presented in this guide also make use of concepts behind and practical development of Teacher Activity Groups.

1. Useful summaries

The following summarise the principles which support the development of Communities of Practice:

Borg, S. (2015) *Contemporary Perspectives on Continuing Professional Development* British Council

www.britishcouncil.in/sites/default/files/contemporary_perspectives_on_cpd.pdf

British Council (2018) *Teacher Activity Groups: Teaching for Success CPD model* British Council

2. Principles of Communities of Practice

Hayes outlines some of the deficiencies in conventional training and how they can be met:

Hayes, D. (2000) *Cascade training and teachers' professional development* *ELT Journal*, Volume 54, Issue 2, April 2000, pp135–145,

<https://academic.oup.com/eltj/article-abstract/54/2/135/413637?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

Lieberman describes how learning communities were developed in an American context:

Lieberman, A (2000). Networks as learning communities: Shaping the future of teacher development. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 51(3), 221–227

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0022487100051003010>

Lave and Wenger presented their ground breaking research in:

Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

The concept is further explained in:

Wenger-Trayner, E and B. (2015) *An Introduction to Communities of Practice: a brief overview of the concept and its uses* Online: BEtreat Workshops

<https://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/>

Learning through a Community of Practice is discussed in:

Murphy, P. (ed.) (1999) *Learners, Learning and Assessment*, London: Paul Chapman

Padwad and Parnham describe principles for Communities of Practice in India:

Padwad, A. and Parnham, J. (2019). 'Teacher networks in the wild: Alternative ways of professional development'. In S Walsh and S Mann (eds), *The Routledge handbook of English language teacher education* (pp. 553–569). Oxford, England: Routledge

The following is a very useful summary:

Smith, M.K. (2021) 'Jean Lave, Etienne Wenger and Communities of Practice'

<https://infed.org/mobi/jean-lave-etienne-wenger-and-communities-of-practice/>

3. Practical examples of Communities of Practice around the world

3a Research on Teacher Activity Groups

Borg, S., Gholkar, R. and Lightfoot, A. (2020) *Professional development through Teacher Activity Groups*. London, British Council.

www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/TAG_review_final_web.pdf

Borg, S., Gholkar, R. and Lightfoot, A. (2021) Online webinar: Teacher Activity Groups: an effective model for professional development?

www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/teacher-activity-groups-effective-model-professional-development

3b Tejas, British Council India/Government of Maharashtra/Tata Trusts

Tejas website (2016 to present)

This site describes how Teacher Activity Groups were developed in south India, with project descriptions, resources and impact reports.

www.britishcouncil.in/programmes/english/primary/tejas

'Good morning, Miss Asha'

A short video outlining Teacher Activity Group activities in Maharashtra

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ao4AikxaIeo

3c Teacher Activity Groups, Nepal

Subedi, D. Teacher Activity Groups (2020) A Way Towards Continuous Professional Development for Teachers. British Council Nepal

www.britishcouncil.org.np/teachers%E2%80%99-activity-group-way-towards-continuous-professional-development-teachers

3d *English for the Community*, British Council Romania/Romanian American Foundation

Borg, S. (2020) Communities of Practice. Online blog.

<http://simon-borg.co.uk/communities-of-practice/>

British Council Romania/Romanian American Foundation website (2018 to present)

This site describes how Teacher Activity Groups were developed in rural Romania, with project descriptions, baseline studies and impact reports.

www.britishcouncil.ro/en/programmes/society/english-community

3e Communities of Practice, British Council Spain

Braddock, P. and Stone, A.G. (2021) Online discussion: Effective Communities of Practice

www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=2928384157407241&ref=watch_permalink

Stone, A.G. (2021) Online webinar: Effective Communities of Practice

www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/effective-communities-practice