

CHS 85 Adult Supervision

Notes: Communities of Practice

Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) first developed the idea that learning 'is a process of participation in communities of practice, participation that is at first legitimately peripheral but that increases gradually in engagement and complexity'.

Communities of Practice

- involve a shared practice where members are involved in a set of relationships over time
- have core members with others at the margins
- can be formal in the organization or very fluid and informal; are self organizing systems with many benefits and characteristics of associated life
- develop around things that matter to people with members feeling a sense of joint enterprise and identity
- develop various resources (documents, routines, vocabulary, symbols) that in some way carry accumulated knowledge of the community practice
- involves practice or ways of doing or approaching things that are shared to some significant extent among members
- provide situations for co-participation; the nature of the situation impacts significantly on the process.

QUOTES FROM THE ARTICLE...

Over time, this collective learning results in practices that reflect both the pursuit of our enterprises and the attendant social relations. These practices are thus the property of a kind of community created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise. It makes sense, therefore to call these kinds of communities *Communities of Practice*.

Community of Practice defines itself along three dimensions:

What it is about - its *joint enterprise* as understood and continually negotiated by its members.

How it functions - mutual engagement that binds members together into a social entity.

What capability it has produced - the shared repertoire of communal resources (routines, sensibilities, artifacts, vocabulary, styles, etc) that members have developed over time.

Learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and... the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the socio-cultural practices of a community. "Legitimate peripheral participation" provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artefacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. A person's intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a socio-cultural practice. This social process, includes, indeed it subsumes, the learning of knowledgeable skills. (Lave and Wenger 1991: 29)

This way of approaching learning is something more than simply 'learning by doing' or *experiential learning*. As Mark Tennant (1997: 73) has pointed out, Jean Lave's and Etienne Wenger's concept of situatedness involves people being full participants in the world and in generating meaning. 'For newcomers', Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991: 108-9) comment, 'the purpose is not to learn *from* talk as a substitute for legitimate peripheral participation; it is to learn *to* talk as a key to legitimate peripheral participation'. This orientation has the definite advantage of drawing attention to the need to understand knowledge and learning in context. However, situated learning depends on two claims:

It makes no sense to talk of knowledge that is decontextualized, abstract or general.

New knowledge and learning are properly conceived as being located in communities of practice (Tennant 1997: 77).

Questions can be raised about both of these claims. It may be, with regard to the first claim, for example, that learning can occur that is seemingly unrelated to a particular context or life situation.

Notes and Quotes taken from this article:

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Questions to ponder:

What is your own experience with communities of practice and learning within social interactions?

How does this information fit with the mentor program and the mentoring process?

If we look at our own mentor program through this lens, what is it like to be apart of our community of practioners?

How can we support others in moving from legitimate peripheral participation towards more engaged full participation in generating meaning?

How can we support each others learning "to talk" rather than learning "from talk"?

What is our practice and process for generating and appropriating a shared repertoire of ideas, commitments, and memories as a region?