








# Communities of Practice, Unplugged - Jeffrey L. Jones

- 1  **Communities of Practice, Unplugged**  
The research and theory behind the idea that community, professional practice, and knowledge construction can work together
- 2  **...there are communities, and then there are....**
  - Community (general definition)
  - The School Community/The Classroom Community
  - Learning Community (Rovai)
  - Community of Inquiry (Garrison)
  - Online Community (Barab, and a cast of thousands...)
  - Situated Learning, and Community of Practice (Lave and Wenger)
- 3  **...the thread...**
  - Lave and Wenger - Situated Learning: Legitimate peripheral participation (1991)
    - Authors: Jean Lave (Cultural Anthropologist) and Etienne Wenger (Computer Scientist/AI)
    - Examination of learning in cultural context: Yucatec midwives, Vai and Gola tailors, US Navy quartermasters, meat-cutters, non-drinking alcoholics in Alcoholics Anonymous
  - Basic principals
    - Social context provides *informal* learning opportunities between members
    - Communities of Practice exist everywhere
    - Community, learning, change is *negotiated* between peers
    - The good stuff happens at the margins
- 4  **...the thread (cont'd)...**
  - Etienne Wenger: Communities of Practice (1998)
    - Based on examination of an office of insurance claims adjusters
    - The theory becomes an entire theoretical construct, combining principals of identity and practice
- 5  **...the thread (cont'd)...**
  - Etienne Wenger, Richard McDermott, William M. Snyder: Cultivating Communities of Practice (2002)
    - "...[Communities of practice] develop on their own...health depends primarily on the voluntary engagement of their members...Cultivation is an apt analogy...create an environment where they can prosper...[but] the process is one of negotiation..."
    - Approach is mainly program design in business contexts, with institutional goals/objectives, F2F
- 6  **Community (defined)**
  1. [Group membership: "...We belong..."]
    - a. A group of people living in the same locality and under the same government.
    - b. The district or locality in which such a group lives.
  2. [Common interests: "...We believe..."]
    - a. A group of people having common interests: *the scientific community; the international business community.*
    - b. A group viewed as forming a distinct segment of society: *the gay community; the community of color.*
  3. [Common identity: "...We are..."]
    - a. Similarity or identity: *a community of interests.*
    - b. Sharing, participation, and fellowship.
- 7  **Community of Practice – 4) "Mutual Engagement"**  
*The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*
  - "...mutual engagement – specifically, the ability of members of the community to interact in such a way that it displays complementary participation and provides for specialization, as an extension of practice rather than ideas or structures..."

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- key words:
  - "...complementary participation..." - all participants participate equally.
  - "...provides for specialization..." – we're not all good at everything, so the many benefit from the knowledge of a few
  - "...as an extension of practice..." - working from our experiences in the field

*Adapted from Etienne Wenger: Communities of Practice (1998)*

## 8 **5) "Joint Enterprise"**

- "...through the reflective process of negotiation, evidence of an indigenous joint enterprise with mutual accountability..."
- key words:
  - "...reflective process of negotiation..." - participants acknowledge the contributions of others – the community is negotiated between equals.
  - "...indigenous..." – growing from within the working experiences of the community
  - "...mutual accountability..." – assessment of quality and value is negotiated through peer consensus

## 9 **6) "Shared Repertoire"**

- "...a shared repertoire of actions resulting from engagement."
- key words:
  - "...shared..." – All contributions and ideas are freely shared between all participants
  - "...repertoire of actions..." – tools, ideas, and resources directly useable in the classroom or workplace
  - "...resulting from engagement..." – growing from the interaction within the community, rather than simply owned/brought/developed by individuals.

## 10 **Mix them together...**

Community....

1. Group Membership: "...We belong ..."
    - Group boundaries, membership
  2. Common Interests: "...We believe..."
    - Commonality and shared interest
  3. Common Identity: "...We are..."
    - Group description
- ...Of Practice
4. Mutual Engagement: "...We talk..."
    - Relationships and interaction *as an extension of practice*
  5. Joint Enterprise/Mutual Accountability: "...We do good work..."
    - Goals, constructed knowledge/assessment of contributions and ideas
  6. Shared Repertoire: "...We know..."
    - Shared knowledge and abilities.

## 11 **Where's the beef? – Research Literature**

- Almost all attention in the research literature to professional development is...
  - ... F2F/School-based, or
  - ...focused on the private sector,
  - ...outside of the United States (Wenger is hugely popular in the UK and Australia)
  - ...unpublished submitted papers,
  - ...qualitative or descriptive research projects, often descriptions of marginal or failed initiatives. Almost none examine the success of "prescriptive" programs.

## 12 **Where's the beef? – Current Practice**

- Applications of the theory online have a lot to overcome...
  - Often no pre-existing community or context
  - Limited opportunity for community-building activities.
  - Motivation, stakeholding, trust, visibility are much more difficult to establish.

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– Membership: when is a member a member? Is there legitimate peripheral participation?

13  **Where's the beef? – The Need**

"One of the core features of professional development concerns the opportunities provided by the professional development activity for teachers to become actively engaged in meaningful discussion, planning, and practice. Opportunities for active learning can take a number of forms, including the opportunity to observe expert teachers and to be observed while teaching; to plan how new curriculum materials and new teaching methods will be used in the classroom; to review student work in the topic areas being covered; and to lead discussions and to engage in written work."

Despite this, the traditional workshop continues to be the most common delivery mechanism for teacher PD.

"What Makes Professional Development Effective? Results from a National Sample of Teachers." American Educational Research Journal, Winter 2001 by M. S. Garet, A.C. Porter, L. Desimone, B. F. Birman, and K.S. Yoon.

14  **Where's the beef? – The Promise**

From the previous, "Situated Learning" and "Communities of Practice" as a mechanism for professional development and teacher improvement have a *lot* of promise...and nearly all of the previous PD characteristics are deliverable (some might argue *improved*) online.

...But it remains a largely undocumented possibility.

15  **Plugging the Community...**

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