



Exploring key characteristics in  
online communities of practice: The  
Malaysian experience

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# Introduction

- Online communities of practice (CoPs) – increasingly popular in teacher professional development (TPD)
- In Malaysia, online CoPs – infancy stage
- eCPDeIT - promotes teacher professional growth via CoP approach

# Community of Practice

- Social theory of learning
- 4 key components:
  - Meaning (learning as experience)
  - Practice (learning as action)
  - Community (learning as belonging)
  - Identity (learning as becoming)

# Communities of Practice

- Communities of Practice (CoPs), “...groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis.” - Wenger et al (2002)
- ...community that acts as a living curriculum ... - Wenger (1998)

# Online CoPs

- Core principles of CoP – found in online CoPs
- Online CoP: online social network of individuals who share and develop an overlapping knowledge base, set of beliefs, values, history and experiences based on a common practice  
(Barab et al., 2004)

# CoP Dimensions

- A CoP defines itself along three dimensions.
- - is about negotiating a joint enterprise (what it is about);
- - functions through mutual engagement that binds members together into a social entity (how it functions);
- CoP's members develop a shared repertoire of communal resources.

## CoP Dimensions

- Mutual engagement: basis for relationships necessary for the functioning of CoP. It involves engagement of members in a commonly negotiated activity
- Joint enterprise: process that maintains and sustains the existence of CoPs. It involves negotiation and accountability.
- Shared repertoire: pool of resources that members share, contribute to and renew

## Matrix of categories

- Rogers (2000) and Li et al. (2009) presented a matrix of categories (identified from Wenger's CoP framework) that characterize the three dimensions
- Each dimension – 3 categories



## Mutual engagement categories

- Means for meaningful engagement: methods of communicating - rapid flow of information and ideas to be exchanged
- Maintaining identities: provide information regarding themselves (professional and personal) to members
- Formation of identities: when one is aligned to or follows closely another member's ideas.

## Joint enterprise categories

- Sustaining mutual relationships: harmonious or conflicting
- Knowing what others know, able to do and how they can contribute to the enterprise: awareness of each others' capabilities
- Mutual accountability: responsible for one's own work, to others and treating information and resources as something to be shared

## Shared repertoire categories

- Shared points of reference: shared stories, jargon, acronyms, specific tools and other artifacts
- Assessing appropriateness of actions, products: assess suitability of idea presented by others in their practice.
- Creating new ideas: may reflect upon a suggested idea and their own practice, and then strategize ways to adopt it.

# Methodology

- Participants: 5 female English language teachers with teaching experience 5 – 18 years
- Data source: blog posts
- Analysis: domain and semantic analyses
  - Domain: traces overall shape and flow (structure) of blogging activity in action
  - Semantic: meaning of blog posts analysed using a form of pattern matching in relation to the categories

## Semantic analysis procedure

- Unit of analysis: message
- Each message coded according to the category
- Categorization checked by two independent researchers
- Number of discussion posts by each participant and number of each category identified in the posts were tabulated

# Results of semantic analysis:

## Mutual engagement

- (1) Means of mutual engagement
- Participant 4 requested for comments and ideas regarding a task she carried out in her classroom, Participant 2 was quick to respond
  - P4: I would like to try this using IT next time but I've no idea on how to make the students draw the illustrations using the computer.
  - P2: ... in your case I don't think the drawing as per illustrated would help much though ... may be what you could do to teach sequence connectors is ...

# Mutual engagement

- (2) Maintaining identities
- Participant 2 revealed her professional identity to the group; i.e., being in a well-ranked school and having achieved an excellence award.
  - P2: Those teachers at other schools...we manage to meet like once a year where all the sbp schools gather ...for Hari Anugerah Kecemerlangan (Excellence Award occasion)...
- (3) Formation of relations: No evidence - of one member following another's ideas

# Joint enterprise

## (1) Sustaining mutual relationships

### ■ features agreements

- Participant 1: Hey there..I think mixing art into English is a GREAT IDEA!!
- Participant 2: Good idea getting students to interview teachers, as long as the teachers don't find them a nuisance! And as for the recipe thing, it is interesting and certainly something the students will enjoy.



# Joint enterprise

- (2) Knowing about what others know, can do and how they can contribute to the enterprise
- Participant 1 acknowledged Participant 2's computer savviness and creativity.
  - Participant 1: I am especially amazed that you know how to use Flash, though it can be time-consuming. I don't know how to ....) Anyway, I also think that expanding the sentences using the adjectives is good. Something I used to do but have forgotten about. GREAT! You're creative and your techno savviness do come in handy.

# Joint enterprise

- Mutual accountability
- Treating information as something to be shared
  - P3: Hey everybody, I want to share this website with all of you. ...perhaps all of you can try this with your students...[www.makebeliefcomix.com](http://www.makebeliefcomix.com) ..
  - P1: Here are the urls of my students' tributes. Just sharing...

# Shared repertoire

- Shared points of reference: similar problems

- P1: ...My questions are ready but I have not had time to give to them yet. We just had March test and I have yet to finish marking. Sigh .... lots of work.

P2 shared the same problem.

- Well, I think the most challenging part in lesson preparation is time factor!! we want to do so much stuff, so many things..we even want to bring 'the world' closer to the kids...its just that we are so bound with so many things to do in school at the same time that we could not put ample time for planning our lessons.

## Shared repertoire

- Assessing the appropriateness of actions and products

P1 found P3's inclusion of Art elements in her lesson not appropriate.

- P1: Unfortunately I have found that it doesn't work too well with my students because they simply take too long or are uncooperative. I have tried it with Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, where I asked them to think what My Hyde might look like. Took too long.

## Shared repertoire

- Creation of new ideas: strategizing ways to adopt moderator E1's suggestion
  - E1: Regarding the personal journal, Do all of you remember this TV program: Dr Doogie Howser? It is about a genius young doctor...
  - P2: ...that sounds pretty interesting...I might try it...get them to 'police' each other...okay I'll think of something to go with it, thanks!

## Results of domain analysis: Rate of participation

Participant/Moderator	Number of discussion posts	Percentage of posts
1	12	24
2	11	22
3	1	2
4	0	0
5	0	0
E1	6	11
E2	12	24
E3	9	17
	TOTAL: 51	TOTAL: 100%

Table 1: Rate of participation of English teachers in the blog discussion

## Results of domain analysis: Extent of CoP representativeness

	No. of posts	Percentage
Total no. of coded postings	24	100
<i>Mutual Engagement</i>		
Means for mutual engagement	1	4.2
Maintaining identities	2	8.3
Relationships form	2	8.3
<i>Joint Enterprise</i>		
Sustaining mutual relationships	3	12.5
Knowing about others' capabilities	1	4.2
Mutual accountability	6	25.0
<i>Shared Repertoire</i>		
Shared points of reference	5	20.9
Assessing appropriateness	2	8.3
New ideas created	2	8.3

Table 2: Number and percentage of posts by English teachers that depict CoP categories

# Factors inhibiting participation

- *Glitches in technology and teachers' lack of technical know-how*
- *Time constraint*
- *Relevance of blogging experience*
- *Lack of rapport*
- *Lack of accountability*
- *Lack of sharing of resources*
- *Fear of offending others or revealing inadequacies*



## Conclusion

- CoP dimensions present but extent of representativeness must be improved
- Issues need to be addressed
- Establishing successful CoPs for TPD in the Malaysian context - possible