# Transcript

**For Teachers by Teachers: Working in a Community of Practice around F-2 Reading**

Duration 22:21

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Welcome to the final presentation in the For Teachers By Teachers series, the target audience of this work being F-2 teachers with a particular focus on reading. This session, Working as a Community of Practice, has a focus on leveraging the learning that has been occurring in these unprecedented times through supporting communities of practice to develop around the F-2 reader so that we share our learning and collaborate to strengthen reading practice within and across our schools both now, as we work in the remote and flexible learning environment, and looking to the longer-term opportunities that this provides us in moving forward as we transition back to face-to-face learning, to value add to our practice to improve student outcomes. Future communities of practice might take place virtually as we now have the skills to use platforms such as Webex to work as a community of practice in the online environment.

Our learning intention for this session is for participants to understand the community of practice approach and how it can value add to your work to improve student outcomes within your own school and across schools. The vision of Victorian Government's Education State is to build an education system that fosters excellence and improves outcomes for every child and young person in every community regardless of background, circumstance or postcode. We know that the best education systems in the world are highly networked.

These learning networks are known as communities of practice. The success criteria relate to your understanding of what a community of practice is and how the approach would support you and your team to collaborate with others to improve student outcomes as best practice is investigated and shared. The current reality is that we have had a steep learning curve with regard to working in online communities through Webex and other platforms and now we are considering how we can leverage this learning to continue to build relationships and connections where we can authentically collaborate around problems of practice such as those related to the teaching of reading F-2. A community of practice aims to use and exchange information, knowledge and experiences in a learning process that generates new knowledge and common practice. We know that collaboration is a way forward for our schools.

The sharing of effort, knowledge and resources in the pursuit of shared goals plays a central role in the achievement of student learning outcomes and reducing inequality across educational settings. Take a moment to read the quote on your screen. Can you see yourself in this quote? What is it that resonates with you? We know that teachers are passionate about learning and making a difference for their students. As Hattie reminds us, how do we know that we are having enough impact?

We might be now better positioned to interact regularly due to our rapid learning curve. In effect, remote and flexible learning participation has facilitated our technology skills to develop so that we are perhaps better positioned to engage with other passionate people around the teaching of F-2 reading as we strive to improve our practice and learn from each other. Communities of practice provide an environment for adult learning both face to face and online.

The focus for this session is to consider how communities of practice enable adult learning in the online space. Theories of learning support this and two examples of these are Knowles's work on the four principles of andragogy and the Community of Inquiry Model of Garrison, Anderson and Archer. Knowles's work explores andragogy, or adult learning, which is different to the way children learn which is central to pedagogy. Andragogy rests on the notion that we learn differently in adulthood. The first principle of andragogy highlights that adults need to be involved in the design of their own learning.

Secondly, the adult learner's own experiences should underpin any learning activities they undertake. The third principle explores the notion that adults engage more effectively with their learning when it is relevant and can have immediate impact on their lives. And finally, that problem-centred learning should form the basis of the adult learning experience.

The Community of Inquiry Model has been directly explored in the online space. It considers that in an online environment for the learning to be most effective three conditions or presences must exist. These three presences are termed the social presence, which broadly is the assertion that the individual forms part of a community; the teaching presence, which embodies the teaching and learning components; and the cognitive presence, which is how the group engages with what they're learning about.

And it's the interplay of these elements which really supports effective learning taking place. In the coming slides I'm going to explore these three different presences to show how an online community of practice provides for each of these three elements of inquiry whilst supporting the key principles of adult learning. Humans are social beings and people learn through their interactions with each other and the world around them and particularly in an online context, it's very important to create an environment by which the individual can assert themselves socially.

This can occur through the forming of a community and the structured development of relationships, building frameworks for online collaboration, creating a space where there are open lines of communication, and really having that environment where the group is important, but the individual is important within that group as well. Three terms that are particularly important when we consider social presence are community, authenticity and collaboration. Developing an online community requires support mechanisms, requires the opportunity for each person to be able to contribute and have a shared voice, and particularly when we are working in the online space, it's important to think about the frameworks that are being produced for that and what we're seeing in communities of practice is providing a mechanism for support which hasn't otherwise been there, a mechanism for interaction and sharing across schools which we don't have when we aren't able to be face to face.

And so in order for that community to be most effective, the individuals need to be acting in an authentic way. And so the notion of authenticity relates to an individual being able to truly act and behave like themselves, so that what's going on inside is the same as what's going on outside, and that can take time to achieve. Achieving that level of transparency and genuineness can take time to achieve, but structures can be put in place in order to support that. And the final one is collaboration, really developing ways that the group can work together, and it's the interplay of community, authenticity and collaboration which really builds that notion of social presence.

And as I mentioned, we've seen communities of practice really start to pull all of those three together to provide support for teachers when they have otherwise felt more isolated. In effective communities of practice, a teaching presence is also created and this is generally focused on the content, the learning experiences that are being explored by the participants. And in relation to adult learning, the effectiveness of these are maximised when they focus on problems of practice, specific issues that are arising in the adult participant's teaching practice, learning practice that they want to work on and develop, and this is how communities of practice can support the adult learner.

This diagram shows that when teachers are bringing their own learning focus areas together and they're thinking about how they're learning to lead in many cases - not always, but in many cases learning how to lead this work - that crossover provides a perfect opportunity for content exploration for bringing those problems of practice from the workplace, from the teacher's practice, support the learning of the group, and this is a real focus of effective communities of practice.

One of the ways that you can explore the teaching presence in communities of practice is for participants to bring their data and ideas to the table, the problems of practice that they are facing, the challenges that they're seeing in their workplace, and explore them together with their fellow participants. And then with the idea of funneling that down into an action, they discuss and share what shared problems they are experiencing, they see similarities between the work, they develop goals together. Similar to the use of your inquiry cycle, where you are thinking about evaluate and diagnose and then prioritise and set goals, it's a very similar process to one that you'd use in a community of practice to that that you'd use in your PLC.

And then we're almost in a develop and plan stage, where you are learning and building new knowledge together, and in a PLC there's always a background of professional learning and the same would go for a community of practice. And as you go through your new learnings together, you'd start to develop a plan, an idea that you can bring together and move forward with. As a result, when you get into your implement and monitor phase, you may have something that you have explored together and developed together.

As I said before, it might be a plan. It could be an artifact of work, it could be a shared resource that you have worked on together that can in future inform your work and you will continue to learn on as a community of practice. So the whole notion of a community of practice is that you come together socially to consider content that's shared practice and this ultimately develops what we would call the cognitive presence. It's where you are interacting and grappling together as professionals on the puzzles of practice that are emerging in your workplace and the notion of planning that I discussed before is that cognitive presence. The cognitive load is with the members and all of the members of the community of practice. Not one person is responsible for the work that is happening. It is a shared responsibility.

And ultimately this leads to having a collective intelligence of the group that collectively you are building your own skills and building the level of knowledge around the work of teaching and learning. And it's the interaction of those three presences, the social, cognitive and teaching, which really help us to develop high levels of collaboration and it's very much an iterative process in you're learning to collaborate together within your social presence, which then leads to that cognitive grappling, which then helps you to continue to build your notion of collaboration amongst each other as well. So building all three is important to the building of effective communities of practice.

And as you can see from the characteristics of high-quality collaboration, it starts to very much bring together the community of inquiry work with developing adult learning and our focus of our work is on student learning. We are aiming to always improve the outcomes for students, but we need to think and learn together as adults in the way that adults do, which is the basis of andragogy.

So the high-quality collaboration education is the focus on pedagogy which is within the notion of one of the four principles of andragogy. We're sharing problems together, designing and experimenting with new ideas. You're thinking about different ways of doing things, where the community of practice can innovate together, and we're leading to changes in teacher beliefs about our own learning as well as the teaching and learning of students. And this does require a strong group cohesion, but not groupthink. So you are interdependent, but you are not all thinking the same way.

So all of those things that form high-quality collaboration really sit extremely well alongside the principles of how adults learn and engaging with communities of practice is bringing about changes in teacher practice and changes in teacher thinking across boundaries and the online space provides a perfect opportunity to be able to do this. Your community of practice will develop over time and that level of collaboration will develop over time. What may start out as simply telling your story and scanning some of your problems of practice together will then lead to assisting each other and providing aid within the work and it will also build into exchanging instructional practices and ideas.

And over time the aim of a community of practice is that you're really doing the work together, you are sharing some joint work, you are undertaking problem solving and planning that will impact positively on the group as a whole. Please take a moment to read the principles that underpin successful communities of practice as noted on your screen. We are all striving for learning excellence as we want the best possible outcomes for our students.

We know from your participation in this series that you have an authentic shared purpose, the F-2 reader. This is the work, not an add-on, and we appreciate that we're all part of a wider educational system and we all have much to offer to the growth of our profession. We are wondering, and perhaps you are as well, in regard to the contribution we can make to building a culture of collective responsibility for professional growth. Perhaps participation in a community of practice around F-2 reading might be an avenue well worth pursuing. A community of practice approach generates a culture of learning that includes building the capacity of its members in regards to mindset, knowledge and practice in each of the elements shown on the screen to strengthen collective effort for improvement.

The key foundational elements required for communities of practice to be successful include how we work together. Collective efficacy is built on actively engaging, contributing, collaborating and positively challenging one another within a community of practice. Evidence-based inquiry - participants learn how to use a range of data and evidence to implement and monitor an evidence-based inquiry approach to strengthen and improve student outcomes across all schools involved in the community of practice.

And accountability - staff behaviours, skills and capabilities are made explicit and all individuals within the community of practice hold themselves and others to account for working collaboratively to challenge self and others for all students. It helps us to consider what a community of practice is, has, or is not. It is a way of working together. The current series around F-2 reading has established a common domain interest around the F-2 reader. We have started the discussions in regard to this through this series.

By finishing with a community of practice focus, the intention is that this series provides a springboard for you to continue the work from an informed base. Shared practice benefits us all. Sharing our own narrative helps us to internalise the work and sharing with others helps to validate and provide professional challenge. We're all focused on collective responsibility for learning and translating this to performance. It is the work. We are all learners as this has been brought home to us in this time of rapid learning in the remote and flexible environment. Just look at what we are capable of as we learn by doing.

So why might you engage with a community of practice? What's in it for you? As stated, collaboration holds a promise of transforming professional relationships with profound implications for everyone's learning. Collaboration drives practice excellence, professional learning, student-centred inquiry and deep learning. A culture of collaboration within and across schools provides an environment in which teachers and leaders are committed to their own learning and that of their peers, while building the professional expertise required to support the diverse learning needs of all students. We are asking you to consider and engage in a community of practice around the F-2 reader to enable you to work collaboratively to develop solutions to practice challenges in regard to the teaching and learning of reading.

Regardless of the environment we find ourselves in, we encourage you to continue to consider how working as a community of practice would support you in the teaching and learning of reading. It would be great to pause the recording in a minute so that you can take a couple of minutes to read the quotes from Sharratt and also Hargreaves and Fullan.

As you read, write down the word or words that resonate with you. When you have read and recorded your thinking, press play to continue. For me these are the words that resonated. If I had to choose one, I think it would be "collaboratively", particularly coming out of these times of remote and flexible learning where we've seen a high level of collaboration across all stakeholders and the impact that this has. Perhaps we can take this collaboration further with a community of practice. We'll elaborate more on these in the follow-up workshops and inquire further into what engagement in a community of practice looks like.

As this is the last in the F-2 reading series, we have a call to action. If we work collaboratively with common purpose around the F-2 reader across schools, we will learn from trusted colleagues and be supported to implement evidence-based interventions for reading so that we will be well positioned to develop staff practice to impact on the reading outcomes of our F-2 students. We know that when schools work in isolation, they may become inward looking.

There has been great opportunity in the remote and flexible learning environment. It has disrupted the current thinking and practice in our educational settings and made us reflect and perhaps become more precise and explicit. We are working, thinking and communicating differently and this has impacted on our practice. We are connecting with others in new ways and we encourage you to consider what this might look like in regard to your leadership in the teaching of reading F-2 and how this community of practice approach would support you to engage in targeted professional learning specifically focused on the F-2 reader. By being in a community of practice that is working well, you will become outward looking. You'll have a greater chance of being open to perhaps seeing things within your own school with new eyes. There would need to be commitment to the work and you will build trust within the community of practice to share your current practice with an open to learning mindset.

Look at what we've achieved in the past few weeks and wonder about the change reality in our teaching and learning and how this will positively impact on staff, students and the school community. We have two follow-up workshops planned to support the continuation of this work with the intention that they will facilitate the development of a community of practice or strengthen existing communities of practice around the F-2 reader. Participation in these sessions will enable you to hear the narrative from other schools around the impact of this work on student outcomes. We'd love to hear about your communities of practice work or your wonderings around the possible development of a community of practice as this will help us frame these workshops for point of need. You'll find the details of the sessions on the Bastow website.