

Conceptualising Professional Communities Among Teachers

A proposed conceptual framework based on a structured review of
literature.

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Presented at Bialystock University June 2018

The purpose of this presentation

There are a lot of projects right now that are focused on building professional communities. The purpose of this paper is to attempt to provide a conceptual framework for interpreting the nature or success of these projects. In this short presentation I present a summary of this emerging framework under five themes.

- identity
- boundaries
- membership
- knowledge sharing
- An international dimension.

Identity within a professional community



- dependent upon a professional/social environment
- dependent on social interactions with others
- constructed over time
- often involves progress towards a more central position
- ‘past communities’ are highly valued when current ones do not provide affirmation
- significant professional communities may not be the workplace community

Community boundaries

Significant communities:

- may be defined by boundaries other than the immediate work place
- can be defined by those who share practice and mutual recognition
- are dependent on ongoing affirmation and the building of self-efficacy
- that are defined other than by workplace boundaries, may enable greater risk-taking
- involve the creation of boundaries that by definition exclude others. This exclusion may be based on perceived values as well as time spent together, proximity etc.

Community membership

Different forms of community membership exist among teachers

- factual membership with no affective dimension
- the workplace and local community
- sought (often more distant or disparate) communities
- communities defined by values or skills
- communities identified through personal history
- communities that provide opportunity and affirmation (often linked to sought communities)

Isolation and individualism

Community membership is not always seen as positive, in these cases teachers may 'close the door', this is the case when the community is perceived

- As being in opposition to the teachers values
- fails to provide affirmation
- limits the teacher's freedom to be creative

However, in these cases teachers often either reached into their past to find or actively sought new alternative communities, often unconnected to the workplace.

Knowledge sharing within communities

A suggested typology:

- Knowledge of strategies – (of lesson plans and other classroom actions)
- Knowledge of practice – (of how lessons are planned, of the values and processes that shape planning)
- Knowledge of purpose – (sharing of moral purpose)
- Knowledge that affirms - (being an expert audience for each other and thus building self-efficacy)

Generated by Dr James Underwood's doctoral research 2017.

An international dimension

In communities that had an international dimension, the following were identified as emerging.

- an international community
- a local community of outward looking teachers



references available on request

Full article to be submitted end July 2018

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