

Workforce Development Research Project

Learning Community Principles

What is a Learning Community?

A Learning Community is a group that comes together with a shared goal of transferring knowledge and expertise. There is often a blend of sharing personal experiences and learned knowledge on the topic. Each participant brings a degree of expertise to the group and the sharing is meant to be mutual and collaborative.

Purpose of a Learning Community

The primary purpose is for participants to expand their knowledge through mutual learning, discussion, and engagement with others in the group. Learning communities take a **learner-centered approach** using a **participant-facilitator model** instead of a *faculty-student model*.

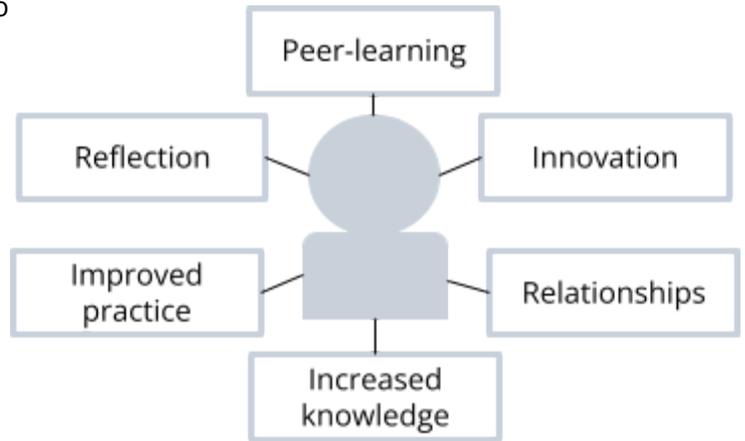
A participant-facilitator model acknowledges participants' pre-existing expertise and uses it to lead the learning experience. It is very important for participants to share common interests and values relating to the topics, as well as embrace differences among the group.

Key Aspects of a Learning Community		Practice Ideas
Accessibility	Easy access to relevant information and resources helps to maintain engagement	Create one place for participants to locate relevant information
Confidentiality	Ensure safety and trust by keep participants identities confidential	Keep participants comments confidential by not recording meetings or dispersing their information (e.g. emails or phone numbers)
Guidelines	Shared expectations ensures trust and safety, ultimately encouraging participation	Create a group agreement with clear expectations of behavior of the group Discuss how to deal with conflict and tension
Participation & Autonomy	Engagement among all participants is essential for a worthwhile learning process across the board	Encourage participant autonomy when making decisions. Use a <i>whole person</i> approach that values identity, prior skills and experiences, and informed opinion. For example, let participants choose topics for meetings, presentations, and discussions
Reflection & Respectful Environment	Regular reflection on learning by discussing learning experiences allows the participants and facilitators to gauge how the group is working	Allow participants to communicate their needs within a respectful environment. Check in with participants individually via email or phone call
Relationships	Building and supporting relationships among the participants and with facilitators increases social connection and peer-sharing among the group	Create a space for participants to interact 1-on-1, such as an online forum or small break out rooms on zoom

Benefits of a Learning Community

There are many benefits of a Learning Community to both the participants and the facilitators:

- Strengthen expertise and continue professional development
- Improves quality of practice through reflection, engagement, and problem solving
- Promotes a sense of belonging by fostering a sense of community through support and mentorship
- Development of new knowledge and skills
- Stimulation of creativity and innovation
- Translation of research into practice



Challenges of a Learning Community

- ❖ Participants may hesitate to join this form of learning given the greater time commitment than other learning opportunities (e.g. workshops and trainings)
- ❖ Equal participation among all group members is important for increased knowledge but it may be difficult to achieve as each member has their own participation style (e.g. raising questions, sharing experience, offering advice, or simply just listening)
- ❖ Meeting with the same group continually may create group-think, reducing the possibility of new ideas and input on the topic
- ❖ Creating group guidelines and choosing meeting times, locations, and platforms all pose minor challenges that must be addressed to support access by a broad membership

Resources

- [Abbott, M., Lee, K., & Rossiter, M. \(2021\). Research mobilization in TESL reading groups: benefits, challenges, supports, and procedures. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 67\(1\), 3-19.](#)
- [Levine, T. \(2019\). Overcome 5 PLC challenges. *The Learning Forward Journal*. 40\(3\).](#)
- [Matsuo, M. & Aihara, M. \(2022\). Effect of a community of practice on knowledge sharing across boundaries: the mediating role of learning goals. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 26\(1\), 1-16.](#)
- [Rausch, D. & Crawford, E. \(2012\). Cohorts, communities of inquiry, and course delivery methods: UTC best practices in learning- the hybrid learning community model. *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, 60\(3\), 175-180.](#)
- [Siano, J. \(2022, September 2\). Benefits of professional learning communities. *Inspired Instruction*.](#)
- [Singh, V. & Holt, L. \(2023\). Learning and best practices for learning in open-source software. *Computers & Education*, 63, 98-108.](#)
- [Wang, M., Sierra, C., & Folger, T. \(2003\). Building a dynamic learning community among adult learners. *Educational Media International* 40\(1-2\), 49-62.](#)

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