

Title: **Supporting diverse communities of practice across an HE in FE network**

Presenters: **Mark Stone and Harriet Dismore**
University of Plymouth

Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

The aim is to share community of practice development experiences and challenges, as well as stimulate debate about good practice from elsewhere.

By the end of this session, delegates:

- will have been able to explore a range of community of practice facilitation interventions in practice,
- will understand the particular issue, challenges and opportunities in seeking to support communities of practice across an HE in FE network,
- will have been able to compare community of practice support challenges and opportunities from a range of situations,
- will come away with a personal list of community of practice opportunities to explore.

Session Outline

Key issues to be addressed are:

A workshop trigger paper will discuss ways to support communities of practice across a large HE in FE network and the different benefits this can bring to a variety of stakeholders. It will draw upon the work carried out by the Higher Education Learning Partnerships (HELP) Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) (McDermott et al 2007) to support and facilitate a diverse range of new and emerging communities of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991) across the University of Plymouth Colleges (UPC) partnership. The geographical spread of UPC and the range of organisations with their own unique cultures present significant challenges and opportunities (Witt et al 2008). To address this, support was provided to groups of academic and support staff focusing upon subject areas, themes and processes e.g. blended learning or accrediting prior learning (Wenger 2007). A cross cutting theme has been to support individuals and groups to undertake research and scholarly activity for their own benefit and that of the UPC partnership.

As recognised by Tight (2004), this work shows how individuals may belong to numerous communities of practice that all help guide and influence cultures and professions.

Furthermore, supporting communities of practice can be particularly important for HE in FE lecturers struggling to negotiate 'dual sector' institutions (Bathmaker & Avis 2005). In doing so, we will illustrate how supporting communities of practice can in turn encourage better understanding of learning in higher education, as well as supporting the student experience.

A number of community of practice facilitation interventions made or supported by the CETL will be outlined along with the key lessons learned and challenges clarified. The work undertaken will be related to key community of practice theory including the work of Lave and Wenger.

The trigger paper and workshop will go on to outline groups of questions and issues regarding how we and others take this work further for the benefit of staff and students. The aim is to share community of practice support experiences and challenges, stimulate debate and discover good practice from event participants.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

Indicative timing:

- ✓ 5 mins - introduction to trigger paper and workshop activity
- ✓ 15 mins - participants identify areas of interest / expertise, supported by trigger paper
- ✓ 20 min - interactive review of issues from trigger paper
- ✓ 30 mins - working in groups, facilitated by the presenters, tackling a number of themed community of practice facilitation opportunities / challenges
- ✓ 10 mins - for groups and individuals to record their key areas of feedback, make contacts and identify individual follow up actions
- ✓ 10 mins gathering of feedback, identification of headlines and evaluation

References

Bathmaker, A-M. and Avis, J. (2005) Becoming a lecturer in further education in England: the construction of professional identity and roles of communities of practice, *Journal of Education for Teaching: International Research and Pedagogy*, 31 (1): 47-62.

Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McDermott, A., Witt, N., Stone, M. and Peters, M. (2007) *Knowledge Exchange Network Community Leader Guide [Version 2.0]*. Higher Education Learning Partnerships, University of Plymouth.

Tight, M. (2004) Research into higher education: an a-theoretical community of practice, *Higher Education Research & Development*, 23 (4): 395-411.

Wenger, E. (2007) *Communities of practice*. www.ewenger.com/theory/index.htm (accessed 05/01/ 07).

Witt, N., McDermott, A., Peters, M. and Stone, M. (2008) *Community experience success factors for communities of practice*. Online Educa, 14th International Conference on Technology Supported Learning & Training, Berlin, 03-05/12/08.

Other sources including the following will be referred to within the trigger paper:

Dixon, N., Allen, N., Burgess, T., Kilner, P. & Schweitzer, S., (2005) *Company Command: Unleashing the Power of the Army Profession*, West Point: Center for the Advancement of Leader Development & Organizational Learning.

Stone, M., Witt, N. and McDermott, A. (2006) *What is the UPC Knowledge Exchange Network?* HELP-CETL Information Series No. 2.