

A photograph showing several hands of different skin tones joined together in a circle, symbolizing unity and community. The hands are resting on a green, grassy surface. A black rectangular box is overlaid on the image, containing white text.

(Re)Connecting the disconnection:

A case study of how Communities of Practice (CoPs) supports teaching practices

Sam Willis, Louise Reynolds and Kylie Gumbleton

Overview

- What is a Community of Practice?
- Why and how they help with being and (re)connection?
- How this informs our teaching practice

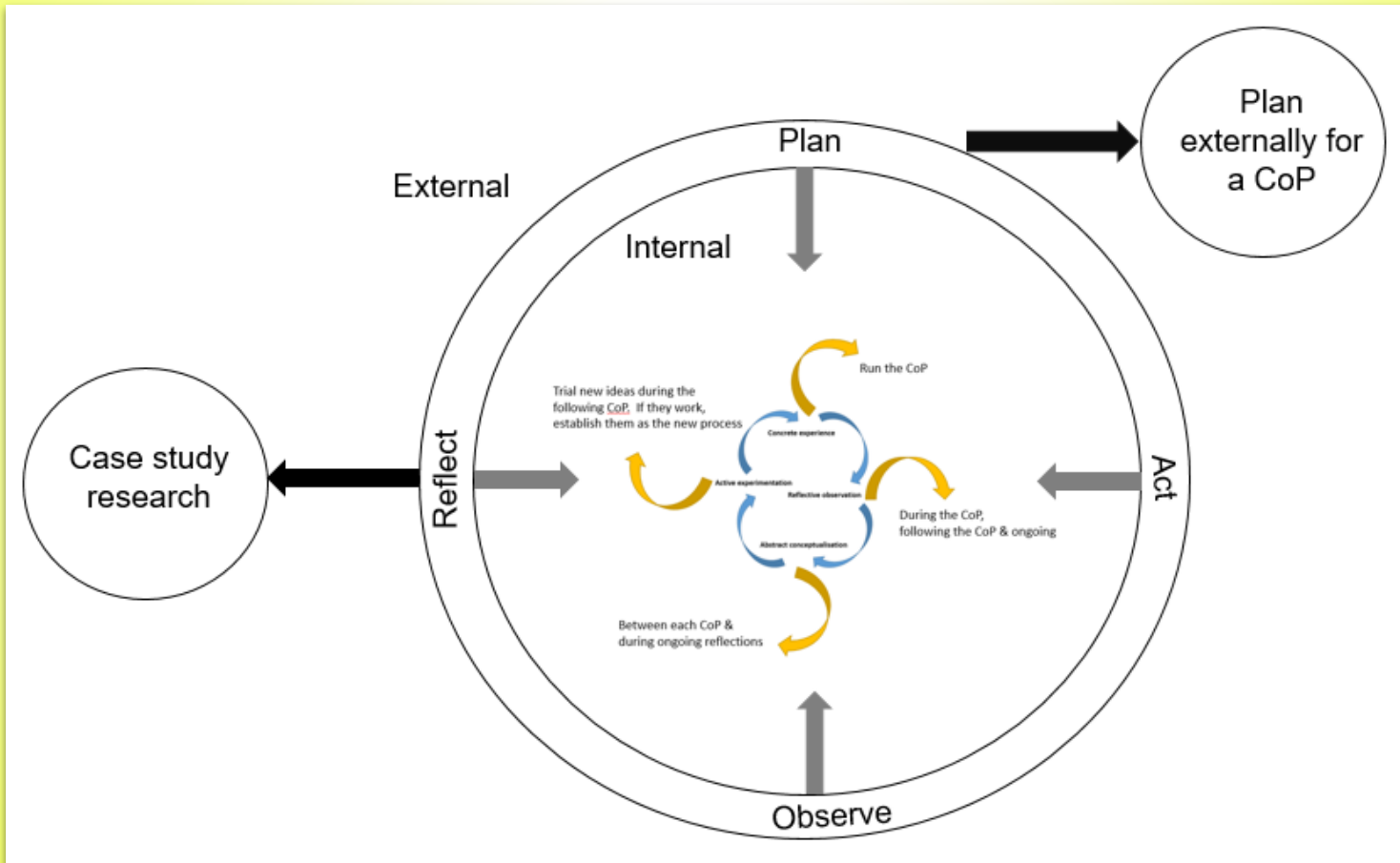
What is a Community of Practice?

- Bring people together through the use of reflection to find ways to do things better (Lave & Wenger, 1991)
- Used in many professions including education, health and business
- Social connections and mental health

Why, how & impact

- Regional campus with multiple sites with online and face to face delivery with nearly 44,000 students
- Large student numbers and high student expectations
- During 2020, teaching delivery was moved fully online
- Virtual Communities of Practice (VCoP) established using Zoom
- Topics related to matters impacting pedagogy & the student/staff experience
- Brought people together to share their thoughts, ideas and understandings
- Regular connectivity

Action research



Case Study 1 - Sam Willis



- A recognised desire to connect with other staff
- Daily complex situated challenges facing staff & students
- A sense of purpose (reconnection)
- The desire to be heard by their peers in a noisy workplace
- The desire to share knowledge, experience and understanding
- Learning from one another
- Role modeling between 'newcomers' and 'oldtimers'
- Opportunities for reflection regardless of experience in academia

Case Study 2 - Kylie Gumbleton



- Relocation, new team, pandemic
- On campus CoP
- One on one phone conversation to 'connect' with the team
- Disconnection and uncertainty within the team
- Virtual CoP - platform to connect in a cross campus and cross disciplinary manner
- Positive impacts and what we have learned



Case Study 3 - Louise Reynolds



- Remote, part-time work, new member of staff
- Metaphorically, I felt as an 'outsider looking in'
- Thoughts of 'what can I contribute?'
- Triggering 'Imposter Syndrome'
- Questions of 'will I be heard?'
- Navigating and negotiation restrictions with looming restructure
- Safe place for reflection on practice

So, what this means is?

- Sharing of challenges and practices regarding the transition to working from home with constant changes to online learning environment
 - Reinforces social connections integral for mental health (Smith-Merry et al 2019)
 - Use of technology facilitated the (re)connection with faculty (Andreatos 2009)
 - These (re)connections during transition and upheaval to share and reflect (Donaldson 2020) mediated as a 'virtual Communities of Practice' (VCoP) or 'digitally enhanced Communities of Practice' (DECoP)

References

Andreatos, A. (2009). On the definition and impact of virtual communities of practice. *International Journal of Virtual Communities and Social Networking*; 1(4), 73-88.

Donaldson, J.P., (2020), "Building a digitally enhanced community of practice", *Information and Learning Science*; 121(5/6), 241-250.

Smith-Merry, J., Goggin, G., Campbell, A., McKenzie, K., Ridout, B., Bayliss, C. (2019), Social Connection and Online Engagement: Insights From Interviews With Users of a Mental Health Online Forum, *JMIR Ment Health*; 6(3):

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511815355>